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Faculty Perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan in a US Public Doctoral University with Highest Research Activity: A Case Study

Maha Alamoud
University of South Florida, malamoud@mail.usf.edu

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by

Maha Alamoud

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Co-Major Professor: Jennifer Wolgemuth, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Liliana Rodriguez-Campos, Ph.D.
Jeffery Kromery, Ph.D.
Amber Dumford, Ph.D.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Salah Alamoud and Monerah Almuhaimeed, who instilled in me strong morals, values, and the love of learning. Thank you for believing in me and supporting me along the way.

To my husband, the love of my life, Fahad Alhatlani, who never wavered in his support throughout this journey. Thank you for listening to me and encouraging me to follow my dreams. Without your never-ending love and support, none of this would have been possible.

To my two beautiful children, Shouq and Faisal, who are just about the best children a mom could hope for: happy, loving, and fun to be with. Thank you for being my motivation. I hope that you receive a “quality” education that I have always dreamed of.

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Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to explore faculty members' perceptions of the QEP in a public doctoral university with highest research activity. Particularly, the study explored how faculty members perceive the role of the QEP in student learning and institutional effectiveness, the relevance of the QEP activities in student learning and institutional effectiveness, and how faculty members' involvement with the accreditation process associated with their perceptions of the QEP. The study design was a qualitative single case study and data were collected from the Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire (QEPQ), face-to-face interviews, and documents. Findings revealed that faculty members perceived the QEP as an ambitious and important, necessity-driven process that is focused on globalization. Faculty members' perceptions of the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness included: (a) emphasizing the university identity, (b) increased reputation, (c) promoting international research collaboration, (d) bureaucracy, (e) cost-effectiveness, and (f) need for institutional conversation. In regards to their perceptions of the QEP's role in student learning, faculty members believed that the QEP enhanced the curriculum and helped globally oriented students to compete in the workplace. The study findings also indicated that the QEP activities were relevant to student global experiences such as study abroad program and second language learning programs. Faculty members indicated that the QEP is more relevant to their focus on teaching and learning and that their involvement with the accreditation process contributed to a better awareness of the QEP. The findings from this study have implications for higher education quality practice and research.

Chapter One

Introduction

Quality in higher education is a highly contested concept and has various meanings to different educational stakeholders including administrators, faculty, and students (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002; Tam, 2001). The notion of quality has gained importance and popularity and become the center of discussions due to the interest politicians, policymakers, and the public have in higher education (Gaston, 2013; Tam, 2001). The focus on quality in higher education emerged substantially in the 1990s as a result of continuous changes in the higher education arena (Harvey & Askling, 2003). Gaston (2013) argued that these changes focused on shifting the role and cost in current quality mechanisms and creating alternative systems for achieving quality. In order to respond to these changes, higher education institutions employed several mechanisms to ensure quality and effectiveness. Examples of these mechanisms included external examiner systems, total quality management, and accreditation (Harvey & Askling, 2003; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002).

Higher education accreditation gained popularity due to the financial crisis in the United States (US), which put higher education institutions under the risk of potential organizational decline if they did not maintain a quality service to their stakeholders (Calma, 2014). In part, higher education institutions seek accreditation in order to receive federal funding that covers students' aid (McGrane, 2013). The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) pointed out that accreditation plays four major roles in higher education: (a) assuring higher education quality, (b) getting access to federal and state funding, (c) acquiring public confidence,

and (d) easing students' mobility (Eaton, 2012). The CHEA identified four types of US accreditation organizations: regional accreditors, national faith-related accreditors, national career-related accreditors, and programmatic accreditors (Eaton, 2012).

Among the several higher education quality assurance mechanisms, regional accreditation has gained the most popularity due to its dual purposes of quality assurance and quality improvement (Baker, 2002; Dodd, 2004; Eaton, 2012). The United States Department of Education (USDE) recognized six regional accreditation agencies that accredit higher education institutions at all degree levels. These accreditation agencies are: Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE), North Central Association Higher Learning Commission (NCAHLC), Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS COC), and Western Association of Schools and Colleges College and University Commission (WASC).

Regional accreditation focuses primarily on student learning outcomes as an indicator of institutional quality (Schray, 2006). Provezis (2010) indicated that regional accreditation became an important driver for institutions to adopt an institutional assessment culture in regard to student learning outcomes. In spring 2009, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) conducted a series of focus groups involving provosts and chief academic officers from all regionally accredited higher education institutions. One of the study's major findings suggested that Provosts and Chief Academic Officers from all regional accreditation bodies agreed that learning outcomes assessment is mainly driven by accreditation and that assessment efforts were guided by regional accreditation efforts (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Provezis, 2010).

In every academic year, more than 1,200 regionally accredited institutions engage in assessment activities that focus on student learning as a response to regional accreditation requirements (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Whatever the complicated nature of these assessment activities (Martinez, 2015), their main intention is to improve student learning experiences (Crawley, Malmqvist, Östlund, Brodeur, & Edström, 2014). The results of these assessment activities intend to inform program enhancement in specific areas (Bernhardt, 2013). It is important to note that these enhancements should align with the institutional mission and the desirable programs' outcomes (Crawley, Malmqvist, Östlund, Brodeur, & Edström, 2014).

The focus of regional accreditation organizations has shifted from quality assurance to quality improvement (Grayson, 2014; Tincher-Ladner & King, 2014). In 2004, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) introduced core requirement twelve, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) (SACS, 2001, p.10). The QEP requires institutions to develop a focused document that:

> "(1) includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, 4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement."

The QEP's focus reflects the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges' (SACSCOC) commitment to improving the overall quality of higher education institutions by supporting student learning and accomplishing their institutional missions

(Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2003). Accredited higher education institutions develop their QEP not only to address how they meet accreditation standards, but also to address how student learning will be enhanced (Grayson, 2014). Achieving this enhancement starts from the academic community identification of student learning issues that emerge from the institutional assessment (Loughman, Hickson, Sheeks, & Hortman, 2008). Institutions then develop a focused course of action that addresses the identified issues in a way that best fits the institutional missions and contexts (Silva, 2009). It is important to note that this major shift to enhancement shapes most of the contemporary accountability mechanisms in US higher education (Eaton, 2012).

Higher education institutions whose QEPs were most successful involved the wider academic community in the plan, development, and implementation (Provezis, 2010; Smith, 2012). This involvement can be in the form of exploring faculty perspectives regarding improvement plans pertaining to students learning, which is the focus of the QEP (Provezis, 2010; Tincher-Ladner & King, 2014). Additionally, since student learning has become the major concern of the QEP, it is apparent that faculty perceptions regarding the QEP are valuable as faculty members are responsible for delivering the curriculum and assessing student learning (Tincher-Ladner & King, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

In late 2005, accredited higher education institutions in the Southern states began to develop a 10-year quality enhancement plan (QEP) for reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) (Blue, Mitcham, Smith, Raymond, & Greenberg, 2010; Silva, 2009). Institutions choose their QEP's focus based on the emerging student learning outcomes issues that resulted from institutional assessment activities (Provezis, 2010). Since

faculty members play a substantial role in student learning (Roth, 2014), it is imperative to have their perspectives on contemporary, relatively new enhancement processes, such as the QEP, that focus mainly on student learning. Baker (2002) stressed that institutional activities related to educational quality and enhancement become most effective by having active faculty engagement, which involves exploring their perspectives, identifying emergent themes, and using these themes to improve practice.

Among other regional accreditation requirements, the QEP's major focus is enhancing educational programs' outcomes with regard to student learning. Although the QEP's focus is consistent with faculty goals regarding student success, no research has explored how faculty members perceive the QEP process. Ford, Covino, Robinson, and Seaman (2014) argued that faculty involvement is an important component in developing QEPs. However, faculty perceptions of the QEP process are missing in the current literature. The lack of such knowledge can potentially result in failure in identifying the overall impact of the QEP on student learning and institutional effectiveness from the view of influential educational stakeholders (e.g., faculty). Given that the QEP is a relatively new process in higher education accreditation, it is imperative to critically investigate this process through the perspectives of faculty members.

The purpose of this case study was to explore faculty perceptions of the QEP process' role in institutional improvement and student learning outcomes and the perceived relevance of the QEP activities to student learning improvement. Additionally, the study explored how faculty involvement in accreditation activities associated with their perceptions of the QEP process.

Purpose of Study

Given the lack of knowledge regarding how key educational stakeholders (e.g., faculty) perceive accreditation related processes such as the QEP process (Provezis, 2010), it is

imperative to conduct a study that explores the QEP implementation from the perspective of significant educational stakeholders (e.g., administrators, faculty, and students). This qualitative case study explored faculty perceptions of the QEP process implemented as part of reaffirmation by SACS accreditation. Baker (2002) stressed that having faculty perspectives on accreditation processes and enhancement activities could contribute to the overall effectiveness of these activities. To this end, the current study looked at how faculty members in a US public doctoral university perceived the QEP process. Additionally, the study explored the overall benefit of the QEP process as perceived by faculty members as well as the influence of this process on student learning outcomes, which is focus of the QEP.

Saunder (2007) indicated that research is needed to explore internal stakeholders' (e.g., faculty, administrators, and quality representative) perceptions on accountability practices such as the QEP process. Institutions' representatives who experienced successful QEP implementation cited faculty involvement as a key factor of this success (Ford, Covino, Robinson, & Seaman, 2014). Connell and Klem (2000) stated that the successfulness of any change or improvement initiative depends, to a higher degree, on how significant stakeholders (e.g., faculty) perceive the initiative's plausibility, possibility, relevance, and meaningfulness.

Faculty with different degrees of involvement in accreditation processes often hold different views, values, and assumption regarding these processes (Calma, 2014). This study also explored how the degree of faculty involvement in accreditation process associated with their perception of the QEP process. This study was accomplished by using a qualitative case study design. A case study design was selected due to its appropriateness for answering "how" questions regarding contemporary phenomena (Yin, 2014). The study took place in the University of South Florida (USF). It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to the

success of the QEP process by providing accreditation agencies broader insight into faculty understanding of the QEP. Additionally, this study will contribute to the literature by providing a better understanding of what roles the QEP play in higher education as viewed by faculty members.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do faculty members in a public doctoral university perceive the QEP process?
    a. How is the QEP process described in institutional documents?
    b. How do faculty members' perceptions of the QEP process compare to how the process is described in QEP documents?
2. How do faculty members perceive the QEP's role in institutional improvement?
    a. How is the QEP's role in institutional improvement described in institutional documents?
    b. How do faculty members' perceptions of the QEP's role in institutional improvement compare to how the process is described in QEP documents?
3. How do faculty members perceive the QEP's role in student learning outcomes?
    a. How is the QEP's role in student learning outcomes described in institutional documents?
    b. How do faculty members' perceptions of the QEP's role in student learning outcomes compare to how the process is described in QEP documents?
4. How do faculty members perceive the relevance of QEP activities on student learning improvement?
5. How does faculty member involvement in the accreditation process associate with their

perceptions of QEP process?

Theoretical Framework

In order to explore how faculty perceive the QEP process, it is important to understand the underlying theory associated with how the QEP process should work, the relationship between faculty members and the success of the QEP, and the connection between the QEP and student learning outcomes. The "theory of change approach" by Weiss (1995) serves as the theoretical framework of this study. Weiss (1995) stated that improvement initiatives such as the QEP should be grounded in explicit or implicit theories of change that explain how and why they should work. Connell and Kubisch (1998) build on Weiss's work and described three stages by which improvement or change organizational initiatives should be carried out. These stages were:

- Articulating a theory of change that derives the improvement initiative.
- Defining the activities by which the intended outcomes will be accomplished.
- Analyzing the results and the impact of the improvement initiative.

An early foundation of change theory is illustrated by the work of Albert Bandura (1977). Bandura (1977) stated that the process of change is mediated by stakeholders' perceptions, which could anticipate its success. A clear vision of how faculty members perceive the QEP in a given institution is important for the change initiative to be successful. Similarly, Connell and Kubisch (1998) stated that improvement initiatives are more likely to be successful if influential stakeholders (e.g., faculty) confirm that the initiative is plausible, doable, testable, and meaningful.

Connell and Klem (2000) defined plausible as the extent to which stakeholders believe in the initiative process, the logic behind it, the accuracy of the model by which it operates, and

possibility to achieve the desired outcomes. In this study, a "plausible" component was addressed by asking how faculty generally perceive the QEP process during the reaffirmation process. Doable refers to the extent to which the political, human, and economic resources are sufficient to implement the improvement or change initiative (Connell & Klem, 2000). The "doable" component was addressed by interview questions that asked faculty members about the sufficiency of financial resources allocated to implement the QEP. Testable refers to the extent to which stakeholders believe that the activities adopted in a single improvement or change initiative are relevant for accomplishing the initiative's stated goals (Connell & Klem, 2000). The "testable" component in this study is addressed by exploring faculty perceptions of the relevance of QEP activities in improving student learning. The last component is "meaningful" which refers to the extent to which stakeholders perceive that the outcomes of a certain improvement initiative are important and that the effort given to this initiative is worthwhile (Connell & Klem, 2000). The "meaningful" component in this study was addressed by exploring faculty perceptions of the role of QEP in improving student learning outcomes. Figure1 represents the conceptual framework of this study.

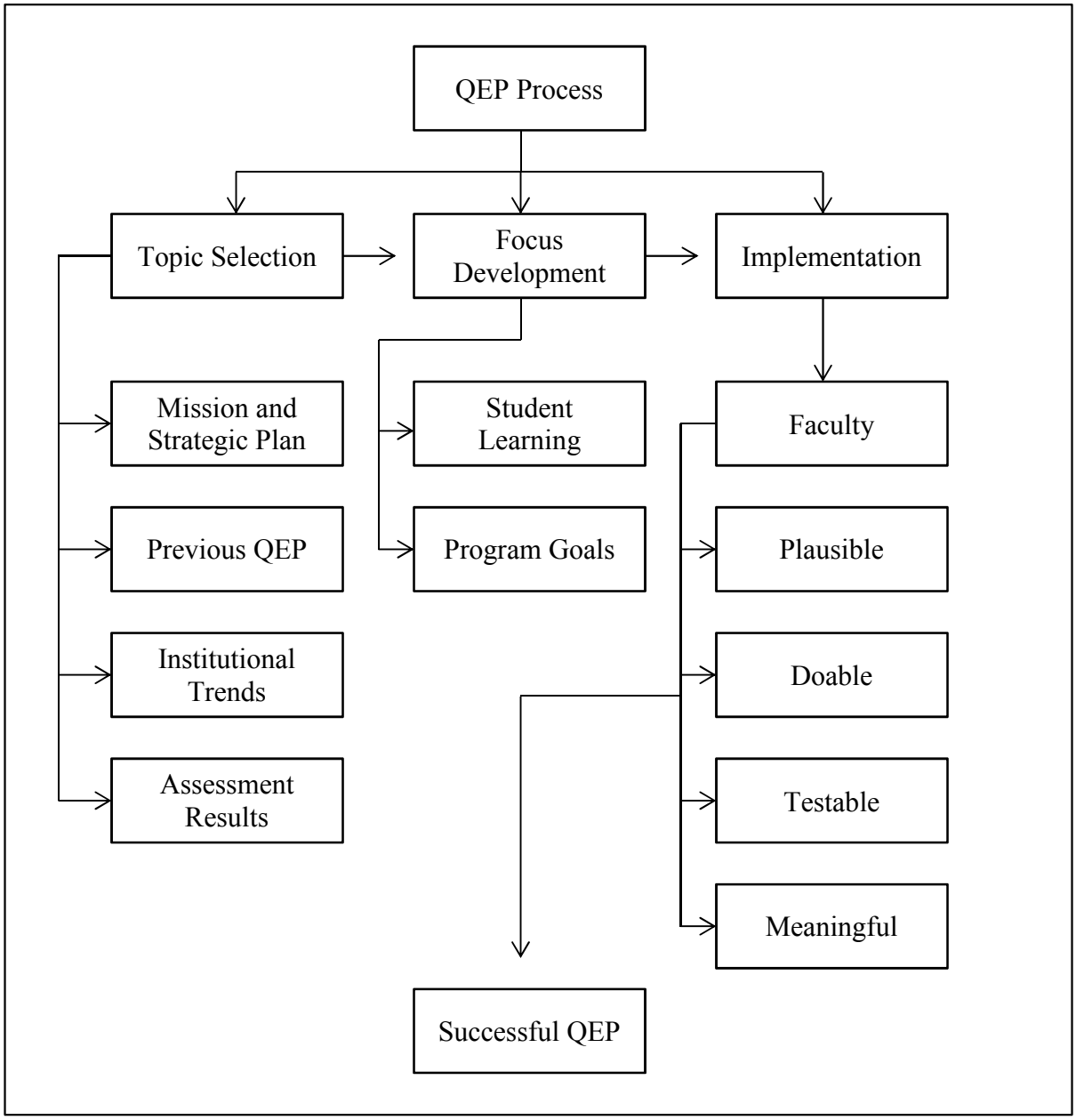

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study

The utilization of the theory of change approach to explore the QEP process from the perspective of major stakeholders (e.g., faculty) is intended to fulfill the following purposes (Connell & Kubisch, 1998):

- To strengthen the planning and the implementation of the QEP process.
- To identify the gap between the QEP process expectations and faculty perceptions.

- To make the QEP most meaningful to faculty and students.
- To make the activities adopted in the QEP relevant to their purposes.

The aim of this study was to derive, from significant stakeholders' perspectives, the most valuable and useful lessons that can contribute to the success of the QEP processes and other institutional change initiatives.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Core requirement twelve (the QEP) is a key process that shapes contemporary regional accreditation efforts in higher education institutions accredited by SACS (Balog & Search, 2006; Loughman, Hickson, Sheeks, & Hortman, 2008). Higher education institutions spend a great deal of time and effort in developing their QEPs, in part because QEP implementation is mandatory for reaccreditation (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011). Determining the success of the QEP in promoting improved student learning also needs an ongoing, critical, reflection process (Campbell, 2013). Because of their involvement in the direct implantation of the QEP and closeness to students, faculty, more than anyone in higher education systems, would best guide this reflection process (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011).

This study is important for higher education practitioners whose institutions are going through accreditation and enhancement processes. Several studies have explored the impact of accreditation on program quality (Saunders, 2007). However, only a few studies have explored faculty perceptions of accreditation purposes and processes in higher education systems (Provezis, 2010; Tsevelragchaa, 2012). It is apparent that faculty members' perspectives in accreditation are essential as they are intimately involved in the implementation of educational policies (Tully, 2015). In his effort to understand how regional accreditation processes and polices impact student learning outcomes assessment, Provezis (2010) suggested that future

research is needed regarding how institutions and faculty members respond to accreditation process, particularly with regard to program improvement.

The objectives of implementing the QEP (e.g., improving student learning) cannot be accomplished without taking faculty perceptions into consideration (Anitsal, Anitsal, Barger, Fidan, & Allen, 2010; Tincher-Ladner & King, 2014). As such, faculty members' perspectives regarding enhancement plans that target student learning are worth exploration (Tully, 2015). Additionally, because faculty perceptions of institutional activities influence the way they behave in their institutions, it is imperative that these perceptions are thoroughly and critically explored (Saks & Johns, 2011). To date, there are no studies that address faculty perceptions toward the QEP process in public doctoral universities institutions.

Findings from this study should inform research and practice. Particularly, this study may be useful to those seeking ways to improve accountability and quality mechanisms as suggested by faculty (Tsevelragchaa, 2012). Higher education institutions utilize accreditation processes such as the QEP to plan and implement internal institutional and program improvement (Roth, 2014). Therefore, obtaining faculty perceptions is important for determining the effectiveness of accreditation activities (e.g., QEP) in practice (Baker, 2002). The different perceptions faculty members have regarding the QEP process can provide institutions and accrediting agencies (e.g., SACS) with important insights into how to further improve the process and make it more relevant to student learning (Martinez, 2015; Roth, 2014).

Additionally, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on a relatively new accreditation process that takes place in the US higher education. This knowledge may be useful for the other six regional accreditation bodies that have not implemented the QEP in their accreditation process. Although several studies focus on activities related to the accreditation

process (Hall, 2012; McGrane, 2013; Provezis, 2010), no single study explored the overall benefit of the QEP and its impact on student learning and assessment activities from faculty perspectives, as this study accomplished.

Definition of Terms

The following terms used throughout this study are defined to facilitate common understanding for readers:

Accountability: a formal policy that requires higher education institutions to provide consistent, reliable information regarding academic quality and student learning in order to obtain the public confidence (Eaton, 2012).

Accreditation: "a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and programs for quality assurance ans quality improvement." (Eaton, 2012, p.1).

Faculty perceptions: the results from a process or set of processes by which faculty members give meanings to institutional activities and initiatives within their institutions (Saks & Johns, 2011).

Doctoral university with highest research activity: Carnegie classification of institutions of higher education for public or private higher education institutions that offer 4 or more doctoral degrees.

Institutional effectiveness: the extent to which an institution achieves its mission and goals.

QEP process: "the organizational procedures established by an institution to develop and select the focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan. This includes the selection of the QEP Committee members, approaches used to engage the broader academic community and the method used to select the scope and framework o f the focus o f the QEP. " (Cruise, 2007, p. 31)

QEP: a focused course of action adopted by an institution that focuses on improving student learning outcomes and/or supporting an environment of student learning (SACS Handbook for institutions seeking reaffirmation, 2011).

Regional accreditation: a process by which public and private, mainly non-profit and degree granting higher education institutions are reviewed for quality assurance and quality improvement (Eaton, 2012).

SACS reaffirmation process: a process by which accredited higher education institutions in the Southern states are reviewed for demonstrating compliance with SACSCOC and preparing an acceptable QEP (SACS Handbook for institutions seeking reaffirmation, 2011).

SACS: the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the regional accreditation body that services colleges and universities in the Southern states.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter served as an introductory section for the study conducted. It provided information regarding the problem being studied, purpose of the study, research questions, rational of the study, and definitions of terms. The second chapter reviews the relevant literature regarding the topic under investigation. This includes accountability, accreditation, enhancement in higher education, faculty relationships with accreditation processes, and the theory of change. The third chapter describes the methodology by which this study was carried out. This includes the research approach and rationale, the research design, the research methods, the data collection procedure, the data analysis techniques, role of the researcher, validity and reliability in the design, study limitations and delimitations, and ethical considerations.

The forth chapter describes the study's findings. It starts with a summary of faculty response to the Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire (QEPQ) followed by the study findings. The results of face-to-face interviews and document review are presented by research question and organized around the themes that emerged through the data analysis process. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the study's findings. It provided a discussion of study findings, limitations, and conclusions. The discussion of results is organized by research questions and followed by study limitations and overall study conclusions. Following the conclusions, study implications and recommendations for future research are provided. Lastly, chapter five is ended with closing thoughts about the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents trends in the literature on accreditation related activities that aim to improve institutional effectiveness in higher education. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a background of knowledge to exploring faculty perceptions on a specific accreditation component (e.g., QEP). The literature reviewed excluded accreditation related activities and processes outside the scope of higher education. This literature review used the concept mapping technique to identify concrete and specific literature rather than abstract and general literature (Maxwell, 2006). Figure 2 represents the concept mapping of this literature review. Examples of the key terms include, but are not limited to, 'higher education accreditation,' 'faculty perceptions,' 'faculty attitudes,' 'faculty perspectives,' 'QEP,' 'SACS,' 'regional accreditation,' and 'applications of the theory of change approach.' This chapter is organized into five subsections consisting of: accountability in higher education, quality enhancement in higher education, higher education accreditation, faculty and accreditation, and the theory of change.

Accountability in Higher Education

Over the last decade, colleges and universities in US have given much time and effort to respond to accountability demands regardless of their status, mission statements, and goals (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011). In fact, what makes US higher education among the top educational systems around the world is the great attention it gives to accountability (Carey & Schneider, 2010). Accountability requires higher education institutions to best serve society by carefully

implementing institutional goals. Additionally, accountability requires institutions adopt effective processes for guiding institutional successes (Carey & Schneider, 2010).

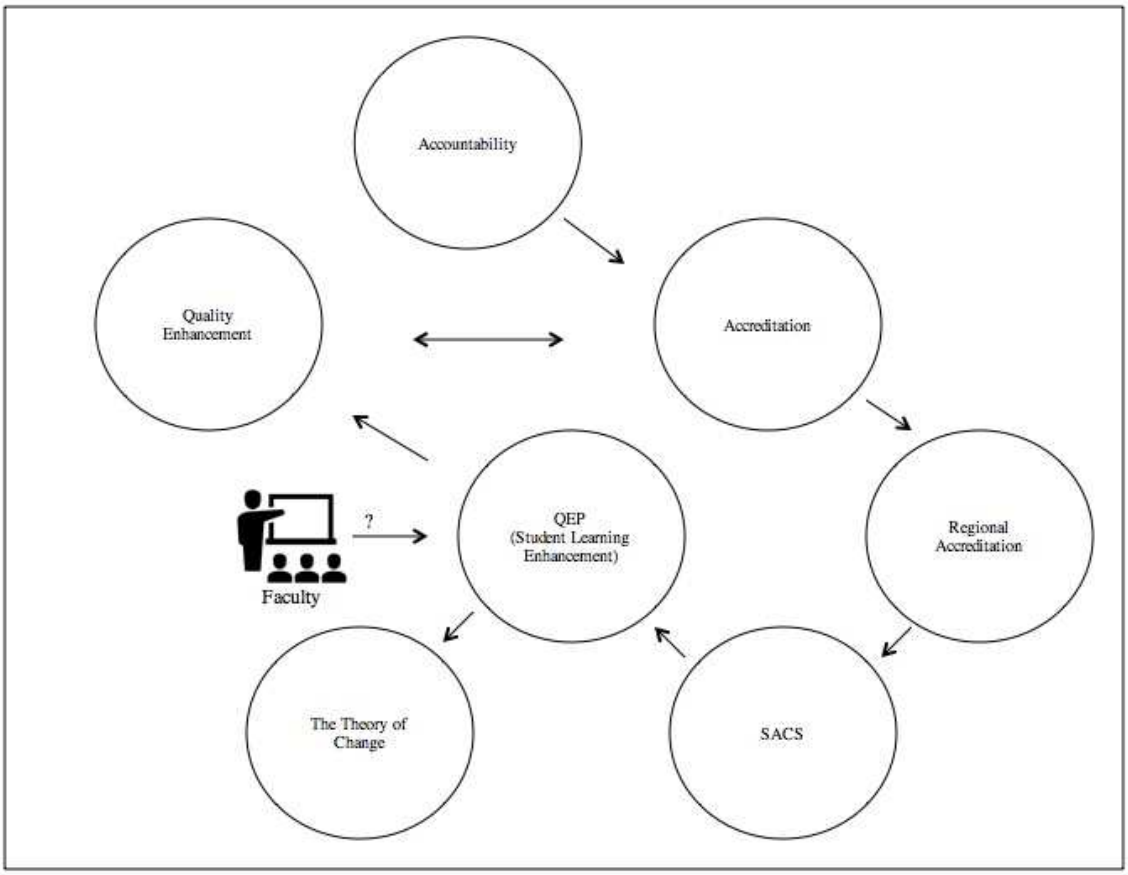

Figure 2. The concept mapping of the literature review

The notion of higher education accountability is quite complex. It reflects how colleges and universities should operate in order to give all students the opportunity to obtain an affordable, high-quality education that they need for contributing to the work place (Carey & Schneider, 2010). It also involves creating evidence of student learning that will show how much students in a given higher education institution learn (Steedle, 2012). Ewell (2008) stated that assessing students learning outcomes is one of the major concerns of higher education

accountability. He noted that the assessment effort in US higher education is guided by two paradigms: assessment for continuous improvement and assessment for accountability.

Accountability in US higher education has been frequently connected to improvement initiatives (Eaton, 2012). The federal government links the notion of accountability in higher education to accreditation processes and institutional performance (Katsinas, Kinkead, & Kennamer, 2009). Ewell (2008) indicated that accreditation processes guided most student learning outcomes assessments in higher education institutions. While accountability structures operate differently across the US states (Martinez, 2015), they all share the same focus on continuous quality improvement, institutional effectiveness, and student learning (Eaton, 2012).

The use of student outcomes assessment was one of the first initiatives implemented to respond to public calls for greater accountability. Dowd and Tong (2007) questioned the effectiveness of accountability policies that place a great emphasis on quantitative indicators of students learning. They suggested that institutions should create a unique culture of evidence that includes performance indicators, test scores, and other evidence of student learning in order to benchmark student performance over time and against peer institutions. Dowd and Tong (2007) concluded that academic and institutional researchers should challenge the accountability policies through the empirical work of institutional research in order to determine what works best within their specific institutional context. Similarly, Grant and Salinas (2008) discussed the ambiguity of accountability mechanisms related to assessing student learning. They suggested that accountability requirements should take into consideration contemporary assessment theories pertaining to each discipline within higher education in order to promote student learning. Academic leaders continue to encourage improved student learning measures that could satisfy accountability demands within the specific disciplines in higher education (Bok, 2015).

The focus on quantitative indicators of accountability (e.g., graduation rate) has shifted to include an evidence-based accountability approach that focuses on student learning. This approach involves tracking students' employment in the workplace in order to determine how much they had learned (Carey & Schneider, 2010). Ewell (2008) argued that the logic of this approach is simple and accurate. He stated that comprehensive information regarding student learning experiences can help students and parents to make informed decisions regarding the institutions they attend and also can help the institution to continuously improve. Even though this comprehensive approach is seen as promising in terms of holding higher education institutions accountable (Carey & Schneider, 2010; Ewell, 2008), Lowry (2009) believed that most accountability policies and processes are still dominated by test-based evidence that is mostly quantitative in nature.

The notion of accountability continues to change. By the 1990s, academic policymakers began to adopt performance-based accountability initiatives in performance reporting, budgeting, and funding of higher education institution (Letizia, 2014). These initiatives were seen as manifestations to show greater accountability within higher education institutions performance (Gorbunov, 2013; Letizia, 2014). However, the actual implementation of these initiatives did not work as promised. For example, Jung Cheol (2010) conducted a study to analyze institutional changes in performance after the adaptation of reporting, budgeting, and funding performance-based accountability initiatives. The data were collected from 1997 to 2007 and included performance indicators such as graduation rates and federal research funding levels. Findings from Jung Cheol's study (2010) indicated no significant improvement in institutional performance after the adaptation of performance-based accountability initiatives. Additionally, results from Jung Cheol's study (2010) suggested more institutional flexibility when

implementing accountability mechanisms, as institutional policymakers are more likely to recognize factors that contribute to institutional performance.

The various accountability models implemented in higher education did not only influence institutional polices, structures, and practices, but also transformed the careers of faculty members and administrators. For example, Gappa, Austin and Trice (2007) pointed out that today's faculty members are facing challenges in responding to accountability standards and requirements. In fact, the great attention institutional leaders pay to accountability place faculty members under pressure by being responsible for guiding their institutions to meet the numerous accountability demands (Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005). To this end, faculty members are required to obtain new skills and abilities and discover new methods of teaching that improve student learning (Bok, 2015; Cook‐Sather, 2009). However, institutional leaders may not necessarily support the improved teaching methods, especially if they were not cost effective (Bok, 2015; Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007).

Accountability measures of faculty productivity face several challenges regarding their appropriateness to judge the labor of the faculty (Gappa, Austin & Trice, 2007). For instance, Martínez-Alemán (2007) argued that current accountability measures of faculty productivity do not pay attention to the faculty-student relationship, which is a genuine indicator of faculty performance. He suggested using a clear and explicit model (e.g., gift giving model) for assessing faculty productivity in which the faculty-student relationship can be captured and assessed. Similarly, Townsend and Rosser (2007) believed that the majority of accountability measures of faculty productivity showed limitations in their use as a "management tool" due to the lack of comprehensive information regarding faculty activity. Townsend and Rosser (2007) concluded that current accountability measures of faculty productivity are more likely to define

teaching workload rather than productivity.

Quality Enhancement in Higher Education

Improvement approaches to quality have always been connected to academic practices (Heath, Parra, Sarmiento, Andersen, Owen & Goenka, 2012; Land & Gordon 2013). In the late 1980s, the quality focus in the US higher education shifted to quality enhancement and improvement in order to respond to public and federal pressures (Dew & Nearing, 2004; Eaton, 2012). Lomas (2004) referred to quality enhancement in higher education as an approach to quality improvement, which requires implementing transformational change for the benefit of institutions and internal stakeholders (e.g., students). Large public universities have adopted several approaches to institutional enhancement in order to improve academic programs and institutional effectiveness (Dew & Nearing, 2004; Land & Gordon, 2013). For instance, Pennsylvania State University implemented a number of improvement initiatives that resulted in successful reform (Dew & Nearing, 2004). Other higher education institutions, such as Purdue University, The University of California- Berkeley, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, launched successful enhancement initiatives that led to improved institutional performance (Anderson, Daim, & Lavoie, 2007; Dew & Nearing, 2004; Maughan, 2001).

The notion of quality enhancement in higher education involves implementing different approaches to institutions' improved performance. For instance, Land and Gordon (2013) argued that enhancement initiatives in higher education should employ evidence-based improvement activities that support institutional growth. Higher education institutions that follow evidence-based innovations in their enhancement effort rely heavily on their assessment results (Land & Gordon, 2013). Other institutions place improvement effort on identifying best educational practices whose effectiveness were evident (Heath, Parra, Sarmiento, Andersen, Owen &

Goenka, 2012). For instance, California State University established a major institutional improvement project called Quality Improvement Planning Committee (QIPC) (Dew & Nearing, 2004). The QIPC is an annual meeting initiated in 1999 and held in different cities around California state every academic year. The purpose of QIPC annual meeting is to share effective practices and introduce improvement mechanisms among the participating campuses in order to transform successful higher education practices.

Not all enhancement initiatives in higher education produce successful practices. Higher education institutions face significant challenges in implementing enhancement initiatives that may result in program failure. For instance, Volkwein (2010) argued that higher education institutions face significant challenges in implementing improvement initiatives that put them in a risk of reducing institutional enrollments and decreasing institutions' revenues. Dew and Nearing (2004) stressed that the early effort of enhancement initiatives failed to resolve the conflict between the enhancement initiatives, the institutional processes, and the external pressures of quality and accountability. However, Volkwein (2010) believed that there should be an effective way to bridge the gap between improvement initiatives and external pressures. Volkwein (2010) suggested adopting the Inspirational foundation for institutional improvement as opposed to the Pragmatic foundation for balancing the external pressures and improvement initiatives. The Inspirational foundation works under the assumption that higher education stakeholders such as faculty and administrators work best when they carry out the desire to change and improve. On the contrary, the Pragmatic foundation for improvement guides most improvement initiatives in the light of external pressures of accountability (Volkwein, 2010). Ultimately, higher education institutions are encouraged to embrace enhancement initiatives in their strategic planning and internal institutional activities (Bok, 2015; Martinez, 2015).

Higher Education Accreditation

An overview of accreditation in the United States. Institutional and specialized accreditation processes are the most common forms of quality and improvement systems in US higher education (Eaton, 2012). Institutional accreditation refers to the process by which higher education institutions are evaluated as a whole in terms of the institutional overall quality and improvement (Head & Johnson, 2011; Prados, Peterson, & Lattuca, 2005). Unlike institutional accreditation, specialized accreditation, also known as programmatic, looks at aspects of specific academic programs within higher education institutions (Eaton, 2012). Specialized accreditation covers a wide variety of programs in various academic fields including business, law, education, and engineering (Eaton 2009; Eaton 2012).

There are two general types of institutional accreditation in the U.S. higher education: national and regional accreditation (Eaton, 2012; Martinez, 2015). National accreditation operates across US and typically oversees the quality of for-profit institutions (Eaton, 2012; Powell, 2013). Regional accreditation typically accredits public and non-profit institutions (Ewell, 2011). Powell (2013) indicated that the fact that national accreditation agencies accredit non-traditional institutions (e.g., faith- based and private career institutions) they are less familiar to the public and hence less recognized. The main difference between regional and national accreditation systems is that national accreditation agencies rely on job placement and retention as quality indicators whereas regional accreditation systems rely on learning outcomes such as graduation rate (Powell, 2013). The following section includes background information pertaining to regional accreditation.

Regional accreditation. Regional accreditation is a process by which public and private, mainly non-profit and degree granting higher education institutions are reviewed for quality

assurance and quality improvement (Eaton, 2012). The regional accreditation status is granted to institutions as a whole, including all their programs and departments. However, such status does not guarantee the quality of individual programs or students' success after graduation (Martinez, 2015; Powell, 2013). In 1885, the New England Association was founded to be the first regional accreditation agency in the US. Two years later, The Middle States Association was founded followed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1895 (Ewell, 2009). By 1924, the United States Department of Education (USDE) recognized six regional accreditation agencies that accredit higher education institutions at all degree levels (e.g., institutions granting associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master's degree, specialist degree, and/ or doctorate degrees) (2014). Table 1 represents regional accrediting commissions, the states they serve, mission statements and core values

Table 1

Regional Accrediting Commissions, States Served, Mission Statements, and Core Values

Regional Accrediting Association	**States Served**	**Mission Statement**	**Core Values**
Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)	Delaware, DC, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and "other geographic areas in which the Commission conducts accrediting activities" (*MSCHE, n.d.*).	To instill public confidence in institutional mission, goals, performance, and resources through its rigorous accreditation standards and their enforcement.	Voluntary membership, Self-regulation and peer-review, A continuous and seamless relationship with member institutions, Respect for the unique mission, Student learning and effective teaching, Transparency about the accreditation processes, Commitment to the principles of cooperation, flexibility, and openness, Responsiveness to the needs of the higher education community, Consideration of societal and institutional needs, Responsiveness to a diverse, dynamic, global higher education community

Table 1 (Continued)

Regional Accrediting Association	States Served	Mission Statement	Core Values
New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE)	Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, and "institu- tions in several other countries accredited by CIHE" (*NEASC-CIHE, 2013*).	To assess and promote the quality of education through the accreditation of its members.	
North Central Association Higher Learning Commission (NCA HLC)	Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming (*NCA HLC, 2012*).	To assess the capacity of an institution to assure its own quality and expects it to produce evidence that it does so.	Mission and Integrity, Preparing for the Future, Student Learning and Effective Teaching, Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge, Engagement and Service
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)	Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington (*NWCCU, n.d.*).	To assure educational quality, enhance institutional effectiveness, and foster continuous improvement of colleges and universities in the Northwest region through analytical institutional self-assessment and critical peer	

Table 1 (Continued)

Regional Accrediting Association	States Served	Mission Statement	Core Values
		review based upon evaluation criteria that are objectively and equitably applied to institutions with diverse missions, characteristics, and cultures.	
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS COC)	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, "Latin America and other international sites" (*SACS COC, 2013 para. 1*).	To assure the educational quality and improve the effectiveness of its member institutions.	Integrity Continuous Quality Improvement Peer Review/Self-regulation Accountability Student Learning Transparency
Western Association of Schools and Colleges College and University Commission (WASC)	California, Hawaii, Guam, America Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (*WASC, 2013*).	To foster excellence in elementary, secondary, adult and postsecondary institutions, and supplementary education programs.	

The general purpose that guides regional accreditation in US higher education is to ensure that higher education institutions maintain high quality educational programs consistent with the overall institutional mission statement and goals (Powell, 2013; Provezis, 2010). The regional accreditation systems emerged due to the absence of a national system that oversees colleges and universities in US as opposed to the other educational systems around the world (Ewell, 2011; Powell, 2013). Brittingham (2008) stated that regional accreditation systems in US differ from quality assurance systems around the world in the following three ways:

1. It is operated as a nongovernmental, self-regulatory, and peer review system.
2. It is completely voluntary.
3. It depends on institutions' effort to assess themselves in regard to predetermined quality standards.

Eaton (2012) stated that regional accreditation can benefit accredited institutions. Before the Higher Education Act of 1965, Blauch (1959) provided five ways by which higher education institutions can benefit from regional accreditation:

1. Regional accreditation can improve the overall quality of higher education.
2. Regional accreditation can improve educational programs by providing standards and criteria for achieving effective and successful programs.
3. Regional accreditation insures students' mobility between accredited higher education institutions.
4. Regional accreditation insures qualified faculty and students in the institutional environment.
5. Regionally accredited higher education institutions are more likely to gain pubic confidence.

After the Higher Education Act of 1965, the federal government started to require higher education institutions to be regionally accredited in order to access federal and state funds (Eaton, 2012; Thelin, 2011). During the 1960s and 1970s, regional accreditation experienced high power and authority in shaping US higher education due to the founding of new colleges and universities (Ewell, 2011). This power has recently decreased to include only higher education institutions seeking federal financial support (Eaton, 2012; Katsinas, Kinkead, & Kennamer, 2009).

Although the six regional accreditors in US differ significantly based on size, culture, standards, and the processes required (Ewell, 2011; Gaston, 2014), they share a common focus. The focus of regional accreditation in US higher education was on assuring that higher education institutions meet specific standards of quality (Volkwein, 2010). This focus has shifted from traditional quality assurance (e.g. maximizing the quality of the input in order to predict the quality of the output) to quality improvement in regard to student learning and overall institutional effectiveness (Volkwein, 2010; Westerheijden, Stensaker, & Rosa, 2007). The purpose of this shift in focus was to integrate external accreditation processes into internal institutional and program improvements (Gaston, 2014).

By 2003, the six regional accrediting organizations experienced major changes in their review processes (Ewell, 2011; Volkwein, 2010). Westerheijden, Stensaker, and Rosa (2007) summarized these major changes in four points:

> The first such change was to visibly separate accreditation's "compliance" role from its traditional emphasis on institutional consultation and improvement... A second change, less fully enacted to date, was to adopt a wider array of quality review techniques than the traditional multi-day comprehensive site visit conducted by largely untrained peer

> reviewers. A third change, stimulated substantially by USDOE, was to place far greater emphasis on examining the teaching-learning process and its outcomes. A final change, again far from fully enacted, was a growing trend toward public disclosure of the results of institutional accreditation. (p.131)

Despite its costly and extensive process, Katsinas, Kinkead, and Kennamer (2009) argued that regional accreditation brings value to higher education institutions seeking accreditation. For instance Burris (2008) conducted a qualitative study to determine the impact of accreditation in student performance. The study analyzed data from historical record of accreditation processes including teacher certification requirements, accreditation committee and visiting team responsibilities, and self-study materials. Findings from Burris' study (2008) indicated improved student learning outcomes influenced by the regional accreditation process.

Additionally, Hollingsworth (2010) investigated community college administrators' perceptions of the regional accreditation process. His quantitative study involved 150 administrators in multiple, regionally accredited, higher education institutions. Findings from the administrators' perceptions survey showed consistencies in agreement regarding the importance of accreditation process, the value of communication with regional accreditation agencies, and the centrality of self- study as a major component of regional accreditation process. Finally, Lee (2012) found that the accreditation process had a positive effect on institutional assessment culture. His findings were drawn from more than 1,100 survey responses by faculty and administrators from 221 accredited higher education institutions by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The study findings suggested that accredited higher education institutions should anticipate at least 48 months after the end of accreditation process to see positive change

in institutional assessment culture. The following section provides an overview of the SACS accrediting agency, which is the focus of the proposed study.

SACS accreditation. Originated in 1895, SACS is the regional accreditation body that serves the Southern states in the US (SACS, 2012). These states are Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. SACS also serves Latin America and other international sites approved by the commission. Higher education institutions seeking SACS accreditation should demonstrate continuous improvement in specific areas determined by the Commission on Colleges (COC). According to SACS mission statement, accreditation efforts are geared towards improving institutional performance as well as enhancing student learning. In 1998, SACS accreditation began to include student learning outcomes as one significant component of institutional effectiveness. SACS recognizes institutional governing officials, faculty, staff, students, and the Southern community as the main stakeholders of the accreditation process (Isaacs, 2010).

SACS accrediting agency serves a higher number of public institutions than private ones (SACS Handbook, 2011). Among other regional accreditation agencies, SACS places student learning as the main driver of accreditation effort (Provezis, 2010). Wergin (2005) described the model for SACS accreditation, which focuses on student learning experiences, as a promising model and that implementing such models within higher education institutions can be a catalyst for institutional effectiveness. Moska, Ellis, and Keon (2008) suggested that the reliance on students' grades as an indicator of learning outcomes is not sufficient for showing their acquired knowledge. Rather, comprehensive performance information that is program specific would be helpful to include in accreditation reports (Moska, Ellis, & Keon, 2008).

Even though SACS does not clearly state that faculty members should be part of institutional assessment efforts (SACSCOC, 2007), it does expect faculty involvement in quality and effectiveness processes related to student learning (Provezis, 2010). Murray (2002) indicated that higher education institutions could engage faculty members in SACS accreditation and institutional effectiveness processes by enabling them to design effective faculty development programs that insure student learning improvement. Murray's (2002) promising perspective of faculty and accreditation was, unfortunately, not the common case in higher education. Faculty members in certain SACS accredited institution expressed fear of losing their academic freedom while responding to accreditation requirements (Moska, Ellis, & Keon, 2008).

SACS accreditation processes can encourage higher education institutions to adopt a culture of evidence (Delaney, 2009). This involves identifying meaningful measures of effectiveness to respond to external demands (e.g., regional accreditation) and to improve institutional performance (Morest, 2009). Additionally, Delaney (2009) argued that the evidence-based process required by SACS accreditation has given institutional researchers new roles that, either directly or indirectly, influence institutional decision-making. An effective contribution to decision making requires creativity in designing reports, transforming data into meaningful information, and drawing relevant recommendations (Delaney, 2009). Banta, Pike, and Hansen, (2009) discussed a successful institutional research process in which student engagement data were used to respond to accreditation requirements as well as to internal strategic planning and program assessment. Their approach was guided by: "(1) collaborating on the analysis and communication of results, (2) triangulating data, (3) using data to learn more about students, (4) using data to demonstrate goal achievement, and (5) enhancing the first-year experience." (Banta, Pike, & Hansen, 2009, p.32).

The literature on higher education institutions' response to SACS accreditation requirements shows a considerable amount of pressure and concerns by institutional leaders. Because SACS accreditation serves a higher number of public institutions than private ones (SACSCOC, 2012), institutions strive to obtain accreditation for financial reasons (Calma, 2014). As mentioned earlier, certain SACS accredited higher education institutions take the advantage of external accountability and accreditation pressures and use it towards internal institutional improvement (Banta, Pike, & Hansen, 2009; Morest, 2009). Others fail to see the value of accreditation and perceive it as limiting the flexibility and freedom of institutional policies (Bardo, 2009; Moska, Ellis, & Keon, 2008). In conclusion, despite the substantial change in SACS accreditation processes that aim to improve overall institutional performance by focusing on student learning outcomes, few higher education institutions value this change and perform the improvement component only for reaccreditation by SACS (Dew & Nearing, 2004).

The QEP. One of the substantial characteristics that distinguish SACS accreditation from other regional accrediting organizations is that it includes the QEP as a requirement for reaffirmation. The QEP in a given institution serves as institutional improvement initiative by which emergent issues from assessment efforts in regard to student learning are to be addressed (SACS Handbook, 2011). An off-site review committee visits each accredited institution to evaluate the institution's QEP and look at concerns raised from the QEP process (Gaston, 2013).

The QEP aims to improve student learning by designing a course of action (SACS Handbook, 2011). The unique aspect of the QEP is that it gives faculty more control over program accountability and development. Tincher-Ladner (2009) emphasized the importance of engaging all stakeholders while determining the QEP focus. He found stakeholders' full involvement with the QEP process to be crucial as it maximizes their buy-in of the determined

QEP to improve student learning. However, institutional leaders do not always provide opportunities for discussing and sharing ideas regarding how to achieve effective stakeholder engagement. Akin (2009) discussed the challenge of achieving a successful QEP that fully engages students when little support is given to encourage student engagement. He asserted that discussions related to the QEP and student learning improvement should not take place solely at the administrative level where little is presumably known about student learning.

Higher education institutions accredited by SACS respond differently to their QEP experience. Some take the advantage of the QEP requirement and use it towards institutional improvement, while others perceive it as a "must do" requirement to obtain financial resources. For instance, Bryan (2014) described the QEP project in her university as being able to provide a concrete framework that guides institutional improvement. She mentioned that the QEP requirement provided the opportunity to adopt an on-going project that addressed the needs of her particular institution and that this project would continue to benefit student learning. Similarly, Anitsal, Anitsal, Barge, Fidan, and Allen (2010) supported the QEP initiative in enhancing on-line courses. They concluded that the QEP initiative has helped on-line education in determining areas where students need to improve. The implementation of the QEP resulted in improved student creativity, critical thinking, real-world problem solving, and teamwork skills in on-line courses (Anitsal, et al., 2010). However, given that the SACS accrediting organization mostly serves non-profit higher education institutions that, obviously, lack the profit motive, the primary driver of their response to accreditation requirements (e.g., QEP) is obtaining government funding for student financial aid(Graca, 2009).

Faculty and Accreditation

Faculty members often lack enthusiasm in quality assurance and accountability initiatives as these initiatives are implemented outside the focus of teaching and learning (Land & Gordon, 2013). Kidney, Cummings, and Boehm (2014) indicated that faculty members fail to recognize the value of implementing an external perspective in an internal practice and perceive that program changes based on accreditation recommendations are mostly pointless. Additionally, Romero (2008) indicated that specialized accreditation (e.g., AACSB) requires faculty to precisely follow predetermined standards that prevent them from implementing program change. He insisted that faculty should receive help in understanding the value of accreditation to their specific programs.

Shim (2012) conducted a study to investigate the value of national accreditation as perceived by faculty and administrative staff. Specifically, the study focused on the perceived value faculty and administrative staff placed on accreditation of teacher and educator training programs in relation to status and prestige, benefits and costs, and the outcomes of teacher and educator training programs. Results from survey responses of faculty and administrative staff acknowledged the value of accreditation in status, prestige, benefits, and outcomes of teacher and educator training programs even though the majority of study's participants describes the accreditation process as "costly" compared to its benefit. Hyson, Tomlinson, and Morris (2009) surveyed faculty members regarding factors that facilitate program improvement efforts. Results from the online survey indicated that accreditation has been an influential factor in shaping quality improvement effort in early childhood teacher education.

Ewell (2008) indicated that only a few faculty members in US higher education perceive the involvement in accreditation and assessment as genuinely worthwhile and concluded that

accreditation did not add substantial value to higher education. Eschenfelder, Bryan, and Lee, (2010) conducted a study that explored faculty perceptions of the impact of a quality initiative on student learning in Economics. Results of the study indicated that faculty members had a wide range of views regarding the quality assurance initiative. For instance, certain faculty members believed that quality assurance initiatives related to student learning are a "fad" mostly driven by accreditation. Others believed that the implementation of quality assurance initiatives could be more meaningful if they were faculty driven. The study did differentiate between perceptions of involved and uninvolved faculty members in the quality assurance initiative. Involved faculty members tended to believe more in the value of the initiatives in improving student learning. The question then arises, how does higher education promote faculty motivation to participate in and support quality assurance initiatives?

Faculty buy-in and engagement in accreditation related processes affect the way they behave in these processes (Eschenfelder, Bryan, & Lee, 2010). Therefore, encouraging faculty motivation, participation, and engagement can contribute to the effectiveness of enhancement initiatives (Romero, 2008). Sujitparapitaya (2014) argued that faculty understanding of the importance of enhancement initiatives related to student learning outcomes is a key to successful improvement efforts. In order to gain insight into faculty buy-in and motivational behavior in accreditation related processes, Sujitparapitaya (2014) used the modified Commitment and Necessary Effort model to examine key factors of faculty motivated behavior. Findings of Sujitparapitaya's study revealed that task assessment (e.g., ability, permission) and personal values (e.g., utility, interest, and importance) were the primary motivational components of faculty commitment.

Several external factors impact faculty members' commitment to participate in

accreditation related processes. For instance, Bazler and colleagues (2014) pointed out that the lack institutional support influences faculty commitment to engage in accreditation. They argue that even though institutional leaders may help faculty members understand the theory behind the accreditation process, they do not necessarily specify how to incorporate the process into educational curriculum. Additionally, Bazler and colleagues (2014) insisted on the need for a formal survey that reflects whether or not faculty members observe an improved program performance resulted from an accreditation effort. Schmadeka (2012) added accrediting bodies to the influential factors of the lack of faculty members' commitment to participate in accreditation related processes. He argued the ambiguity of assessment-related activities and the lack of clear guidance regarding how to respond to SACS accreditation requirements:

> The need for a greater understanding about SACS expectations, especially regarding assessment, led UHD to seek the help of an assessment consultant. During the first weeks of 2009, the UHD upper-level academic administrators finalized a plan of action. The faculty senate met to both chastise these upper-level administrators for their failure to avoid the criticism from SACS and to express the willingness and availability of the faculty to do whatever was necessary to help bring the situation to a satisfactory conclusion. (p. 6).

In addition to the previous external factors affecting faculty commitment to actively engage in accreditation effort, literature on faculty internal attitudes towards accreditation revealed influential internal factors related to faculty themselves. Bucalos (2014) stated that faculty members avoid participating in accreditation process as they perceive the process as "administrative work" that is outside their responsibilities of teaching, research, and service. Ferrara (2007) added that faculty members express fears in making commitment to an excessive,

time consuming, costly process such as the accreditation, which will potentially limit their productivity in their particular disciplines. It is worthwhile to note that the review of literature yielded only three empirical investigations (Provezis, 2010; Tsevelragchaa, 2012; Tully, 2015) of faculty perceptions and attitudes towards accreditation related processes, even though these perceptions are critical in making the accreditation process most effective.

The discussion of factors related to faculty members' lack of commitment to the accreditation process does not diminish their critical role in incorporating the accreditation process into institutional improvement. Bucalos (2014) believed that faculty members could see the bigger picture of how changes in policy and programs affects student learning and program effectiveness. Souza (2014) added that faculty members, among other educational stakeholders, could make the most meaningful use of assessment data obtained from accreditation process. In addition, Welsh and Metcalf (2003) argued that one of the significant reasons that institutional improvement activities fail is that they do not succeed in attracting faculty support. However, Welsh and Metcalf (2003) acknowledged the challenge of gaining faculty support in designing and implementing institutional improvement activities.

Additionally, Hollingsworth (2010) concluded, after surveying 150 administrators from regionally accredited higher education institutions, that faculty members have positively contributed to accreditation committees by providing valuable insight into what might work and what might not in terms of improving student learning. The significant contribution faculty members add to the accreditation process may come from the fact that faculty have a vested interest in the success of their particular institutions (Hollingsworth, 2010).

The Theory of Change

The theory of change approach to improvement initiatives suggests that in order for any

improvement initiative within an organization to be successful, significant stakeholders (e.g., faculty) should perceive it as plausible, doable, testable, and meaningful (Connell & Kubisch, 1998; Weiss, 1995). Additionally, the theory of change can be used to understand whether or not a specific improvement initiative has achieved its intended outcomes (Weiss, 1995). Herron (2012) used the theory of change to evaluate whether the Act Six Leadership and Scholarship Initiative, a leadership development and college retention and success program, has a genuine impact on its participants. The study revealed that the Act Six Leadership and Scholarship Initiative had a significant impact on participants' persistence and graduation. Herron (2012) invited other improvement initiatives in higher education to be evaluated based on the theory of change in order to determine their effectiveness.

While Herron (2012) used the theory of change as an evaluation tool to determine the effectiveness of an improvement initiative, Gagliardi (2011) utilized it to examine teachers' perceptions regarding program implementation. The theoretical framework of Gagliardi's study (2011) was grounded in the theory of change by Weiss (1995) which examined teachers' perceptions regarding implementing new program that intended to support seventh grade students. Findings from Gagliardi's study (2011) revealed two major conclusions. First, seventh grader teachers perceived two dominant roles that affect the program implementation. These roles were facilitator and motivator. Second, seventh grader teachers perceived that positive classroom environment and meaningful professional development appeared to promote successful implementation of the program. The approach of the proposed study is similar to Gagliardi's study (2011) in that it utilizes the theory of change concept to examine perceptions. Similarly, this study will explore faculty perceptions regarding the QEP, a focused plan intended to enhance student learning outcomes.

The QEP process can work best only if it effectively engages all stakeholders such as administrators, policy makers, faculty, and students (Katsinas, Kinkead, & Kennamer, 2009; Newton, 2010). One effective way for identifying strategies to engage stakeholders is to explore their perspectives and use them to develop and improve the QEP process (Provezis, 2010; Tully, 2015). The reviewed literature on faculty and accreditation indicates a gap in how faculty members perceive the QEP, as a process within SACS reaccreditation. The majority of the studies addressed the impact of implementing the QEP on institutional effectiveness in specific institutional contexts (e.g. Bryan, 2014, Loughman, Hickson, Sheeks, & Hortman, 2008, & Tincher-Ladner, 2009). Other studies identified influential factors related to the organizational structure of the QEP process (Batten, 2010; Cruise, 2007). Since limited literature addresses faculty perceptions of the QEP process given that faculty are influential stakeholders to student learning, this study intends to fill this gap.

Chapter Three

Methods

The purpose of this case study was to explore faculty perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) process in a public, doctoral university with highest research activity. Specifically, it explored how faculty, as influential members in the educational process, perceive the role of the QEP process in institutional and student learning improvements as well as the perceived relevance of QEP activities to student learning. Additionally, this study looked at how faculty involvement in accreditation process associates with their perception of the QEP process. In this chapter, I address (a) the research approach and rationale, (b) the research design, (c) the research methods, (d) the data collection procedure, (e) the data analysis techniques, (f) role of the researcher, (g) validity of the design, (h) reliability of the design, (i) study limitation and delimitations, and (j) ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The overall purpose of this study was to discover faculty perceptions of the QEP process. The qualitative approach has been commonly used to explore educational processes and practices especially in the field of higher education (Merriam, 2002; Yin 2014). This research followed a qualitative approach using a case study methodology. Qualitative research focuses on meaning and sense making individuals give to different events, processes, and practices in the field of education (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). A qualitative approach, as opposed to quantitative approach, is appropriate in this study as it seeks uncover meanings and provide understandings

of complex educational phenomena (e.g., accreditation) (Merriam, 2002), particularly with attention to their situational contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Because this study intends to contribute to a general understanding of a contemporary phenomenon in higher education, a qualitative case study approach was utilized. Merriam (2002) argued that qualitative case studies provide an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single phenomenon. Yin (2014) asserted that the advantage of qualitative case study research is that it allows the use of a variety of methods to create an understanding of a contemporary phenomenon in its natural context. This 'case' in this study was bounded by faculty members in a public doctoral university with highest research activity that is accredited by SACS. The selected institution has implemented the QEP as part of its reaffirmation process. Therefore, the data collection involved faculty questionnaires, interviews, and the institution's QEP documents to explore how faculty members perceive the QEP in this particular context. It is noteworthy to mention that qualitative case study approach can improve the studied phenomenon by suggesting to the study's readers what to do and what not to do in a similar situation (Merriam, 2002).

The current study utilized a case study design to explore faculty perceptions of the QEP process in a public, doctoral university with highest research activity where the researcher has no influence over the QEP process. A single case study was conducted to answer the research questions. The single case study design explores unique experiences and provides an in-depth analysis of the context where the study is conducted (Kratochwill & Levin, 2014; Yin, 2014). It also provides a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in a specific field where the phenomenon has not been studied before (Yin, 2014). This study employed a single case study design because of the lack of research on the QEP in public, doctoral universities with highest research activity accredited by SACS during the reaffirmation process.

Yin (2014) identified five rationales for choosing a single-case design. These rationales are discussed under the specific circumstances where the case is selected. These circumstances are:

- Critical case,
- Unusual case,
- Common case,
- Revelatory case, and
- Longitudinal case.

Since this study explored faculty perceptions of the QEP process in a public, SACS accredited, doctoral university with highest research activity, the circumstances of the case are described as "common." The use of a single case study design in this study can provide insights into the implementation of the QEP and how faculty in public, doctoral universities with highest research activity perceive this implementation.

Qualitative case study research invokes a variety of epistemological orientations regarding the meanings of human experiences (Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). For example, Stake (1995) suggested that qualitative case study research should embrace the constructivist viewpoint, as he believes that knowledge is constructed rather than explored. Unlike Stake, Yin (2014) seemed to invoke a post-positivist conception of human experience and its underlying meanings in case study research.

This case study approach is grounded in a postpositivist viewpoint. The postpositivist viewpoint suggests that objective reality exists but is imperfectly apprehended because human's behavior and attitudes towards social phenomena are difficult to accurately measure (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The epistemological assumption underlying the postpositivist viewpoint is that

knowledge of an existing reality can be approximated but total objectivity is unattainable especially when dealing with human nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The developed theoretical framework was used to guide the investigation of this study (Yin, 2014). The post-positivist approach of case study suggests that replications should be achieved through the use of the same methods applied in this study (e.g., interviews, documents, and questionnaires). This will allow the generalization to similar cases (e.g., other public doctoral universities).

Research setting. A list of higher education institutions accredited by SACS is available in SACSCOS website for public use. This study took place at the University of South Florida (USF). USF is a large, public, doctorate-granting research university located on the west coast of Florida. According to Carnegie classification of institutions of higher education, USF is classified as a doctoral university with highest research activity. SACS classified USF as a 4-year institution because it grants 4 or more doctoral degrees. USF was accredited by SACS since 1965 and reaffirmed in 2015. I chose this location because it is convenient to access important documents, collect relevant data, and conduct interviews.

Context of the case. The first USF QEP was implemented in 2005 as a response to the Commission's Core Requirement 2.12. The Core Requirement 2.12 requires that higher education institutions develop an acceptable QEP that demonstrates a 10-year focused course of action that addresses one or more issues related to student learning improvement (SACSCOS, 2012). Discussions about issues related to enhancing students learning at USF began in November 2002 (University of South Florida, 2005). On February 3, 2003, the USF QEP committee introduced two major focuses of the QEP: integration of research opportunities and improvement of the university's general education curriculum. After the QEP focus selection,

USF introduced the 2005 QEP that had the title INSPIRE (Infusing and Nurturing the Skills and Practice of Inquiry and Research in Education) (University of South Florida, 2005).

The full implementation of the 2005 QEP began in 2005. The success of the 2005 QEP was measured by the extent to which the stated goals were implemented and the extent to which student learning improvement was demonstrated. At the end of 2010, the QEP committee prepared a progress report that evaluated and monitored the 2005 QEP five-year implementation period. By Spring 2014, the QEP team developed and submitted an impact report to SACS. This report demonstrated results of the 2005 QEP full implementation. The USF was reaccredited as a result of the QEP impact report submission.

The revision of USF's 2005 QEP, mission, and strategic plan created recognition of the importance of global engagement (University of South Florida, 2015). Entitled the Global Citizens Project (GCP), USF's QEP was designed to help students succeed in a global society. The USF's 2015 QEP introduced three programmatic goals targeting students' global competencies enhancement. These goals are "(a) to provide students with an introduction to global competencies through the globalization of general education and capstone course offerings, (b) to provide students with opportunities to practice and apply global competencies through the globalization of degree programs, and (c) to provide students with opportunities to reinforce global competencies through the creation of a Global Citizen Awards program." (University of South Florida, 2015, p.1).

The first QEP programmatic goal will be achieved by infusing the GCP's learning outcomes into general education curriculum. The second goal will be achieved by encouraging academic programs to infuse the GCP's learning outcomes into their courses. This process called Global Course Certification (GCC). In GCC process, the QEP team offered professional

development specialists to help faculty redesign their courses in order to fit into the GCP framework. The QEP team also introduced Global Faculty Fellows (GFF). GFF are faculty members who work with the QEP team and participated in GCC. The purpose of introducing GFF is to encourage faculty members to certify their courses and to hear about the QEP from a faculty perspective. After a successful completion of GCC, faculty will be given incentives to use towards globally engaged academic activates. By the end of 2015-2016 school year, 14 general education courses were certified by the QEP as meeting the GCP guidelines (University of South Florida, 2016).

The third programmatic goal will be achieved by encouraging students to fulfill the requirements of the Global Citizen Award (GCA). Receiving the GCA requires students to attend 8 on-campus global/cultural events, 2 different globally/culturally engaged activities, and a reflection essay integrating the global/cultural experiences (University of South Florida, 2015). Faculty members can help their students receive the GCA by certifying their courses for GCP. In addition to the new global opportunities offered, the QEP team took into account existing global resources at USF in order to incorporate global learning into student learning experiences. These global resources include the Global Discovery Database, the online USF Global Discovery Hub, and study abroad programs (University of South Florida, 2015).

In 2015-2016 school year, 42 students completed the GCA requirements and awarded study abroad scholarships. Additionally, the QEP team recruited 179 students to purse the GCA. Regarding the GCC, 15 faculty members were funded and participated in GFF cohorts. Those faculty members came from different departments including Anthropology, Chemistry, Teaching and Learning, and Communication Sciences and Disorders. Other professional development workshops were developed to reach more faculty members and introduce them to the GCC

process. The goal of theses workshops is to support faculty members interested in certifying courses for the GCP (University of South Florida, 2016).

Participants. Participants in this study were faculty members employed at USF. The participation in this study was completely voluntary. This method of selection is identified as "purposeful sampling." In purposeful sampling, participants are identified based on their characteristics and qualities to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Maxwell (2012) argued that in a single case study design, the choice of case and sampling within the selected case requires a sampling decision that aligns well with the research questions proposed. The selection of faculty among other stakeholders (e.g., administrators, staff, or students) was driven by the fact that their concerns and focus are directly connected to the QEP's objectives and that their perceptions can provide insights into the QEP implementation (McGrane, 2013). Faculty members were invited to participate by sending email invitations to the Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire (QEPQ) (see Appendix A). The QEPQ identified faculty who were eligible to participate in this study. Faculty members were included in the study based on the following selection criteria: (a) work full-time, (b) have a minimum of five years of experience at USF, (c) have a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation-related activities, and (d) have a moderate to high level of knowledge regarding the QEP process.

Research Methods

In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of how faculty members in a public, doctoral university with highest research activity perceive the QEP process, this study employed a variety of methods for data collection (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Maxwell, 2012; Yin, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) argued that employing a variety of methods in qualitative research adds more value to the research richness, depth, rigor, and validity. After reviewing data

collection strategies that have been used in studies with similar contexts to this study (Cruise, 2007; Hall, John, & Robert, 2012; Tsevelragchaa, 2012), I decided to use the following data collection methods for addressing the research questions proposed: questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and documents. The strengths and weaknesses of these methods are discussed in the following section.

Questionnaire. Jones, Murphy, Edwards and James, (2008) argued that questionnaires are among the most commonly used methods in educational research. The strengths of administering questionnaires in research are cost effectiveness, easy administration, and the ability to reach larger numbers of targeted participants (Jones, Murphy, Edwards, & James, 2008). Jones, Murphy, Edwards and James, (2008) said that one of the limitations of using questionnaires in educational research that involve perceptions is that participants cannot express their thoughts and opinions in an in-depth manner. In order to overcome this limitation, questionnaire should combine with other methods to gain the desirable depth of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

This study used the modified Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire (QEPQ) (see Appendix A), which was developed and validated by Cruise (2007). The QEPQ is a web-based questionnaire administered to obtain both factual and opinioned data regarding the QEP process in accredited higher education institutions. Cruise (2007) developed and administered the QEPQ in his study for two purposes:

1. To identify participants who are eligible in the study.
2. To provide relevant data for the purpose of triangulation.

The main purpose of administering the QEPQ in this study was to identify eligible faculty members to participate in this study. Faculty members should meet the selection criteria in order

to be part of this study. This study recruited faculty members who: (a) work full-time, (b) have a minimum of five years of experience at USF, (c) have a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation-related activities, and (d) have a moderate to high level of knowledge regarding the QEP process. The QEPQ obtained faculty demographic and professional information. Additionally, the QEPQ was used to contact participants for collecting additional data. Given the limitation of relying on questionnaires to obtain information regarding perceptions and opinions (Jones, Murphy, Edwards & James, 2008) the QEPQ was not the primary method of obtaining data regarding faculty opinions and perspectives of the QEP.

The QEPQ was administered online. Therefore, I conducted a pilot launch of the QEPQ in order to ensure its successfulness at collecting the data. In order to conduct a pilot launch of the QEPQ, two faculty members from the Measurement and Evaluation department at USF were asked to complete the online questionnaire and give their feedback. The purpose of piloting the QEPQ was to make sure that the language used is understood and clear, respondents interpret items the same way, responses choices are appropriate, and range options are consistent and proper. I met the two faculty members after their completion of the QEPQ and we discussed whether certain questions created confusions and hesitations. I also asked for verbal feedback regarding the questionnaire and obtained feedback regarding the questionnaire's items. I, then, made improvements to the QEPQ based on the two faulty members' feedback. The two faculty members and I confirmed that completing the QEPQ took about 10 minutes.

Face-to-face interviews. Jones, Murphy, Edwards and James, (2008) and Yin (2014) argued that using interviews as a source of evidence in case study research has the following strengths:

1. It directly targets the focus of research questions.

2. It effectively provides personal views and perceptions regarding the topic investigated.
3. It provides explanations of reported views, attitudes, meanings, and perceptions.

In this study, face-to-face interviews were conducted in the data collection process. Merriam (2002) and Yin (2014) describe interviews as commonly used data collection tool in case study research. They agreed that the main purpose of conducting interviews in case study research is to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, which is the focus of this study. There are three main types of interviews in qualitative research: unstructured, semi-structured, and structured (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I developed a semi-structured Faculty Members' Interview Protocol (see Appendix D). This interview format enables researchers to ask series of previously prepared questions and then probe more deeply to clarify the points being made and obtain additional information regarding the issue being investigated (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Additionally, the semi-structured interview format allows researchers to generate conversations and obtain detailed responses regarding individual perspectives, and keep the conversation on topic (Merriam, 2009).

After developing the first draft of the Faculty Members' Interview Protocol, I asked one faculty member and two representatives from the QEP team, who were doctoral students from the College of Education, to review the questions and provide feedback regarding language, length, clarity, relevance, and potential biases. Based on the feedback provided, I created an updated version of the Faculty Members' Interview Protocol. The changes made included minimizing the number of questions and changing the QEP term to Global Citizen Project (GCP), which is the focus of USF QEP. After updating the initial draft of the Faculty Members' Interview Protocol, I piloted the interview with one faculty member who was informed that the

interview was conducted for piloting purposes and the responses will not be used for this study. After reviewing the pilot interview, I only changed the questions' order and created the final version of the Faculty Members' Interview Protocol (Appendix D).

Faculty members had to meet the criteria to be interviewed. The QEPQ was used to identify participants as it has an item that asks faculty members if they are interested in being interviewed. Faculty eligible to be interviewed were those who: (a) work full-time, (b) have a minimum of five years of experience at USF, (c) have a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation related activities, and (d) have a moderate to high level of knowledge regarding the QEP process. Eligible faculty members for this study were invited via email to participate (Appendix B). Upon the agreement to participate, faculty members were given detailed information regarding the study. The interview time and place were decided based on faculty members' availabilities and preferences. Table 2 shows the relationship of the research questions to the interview questions. A reminder email was sent the week before the interview to confirm the interview's date and time (Appendix G). Yin (2014) defined a semi-structured interview in case study research as "shorter case study interview" where the researcher conducts an hour long focused interview with the possibility to ask more open-ended questions when appropriate. In this particular method, I made sure to give more attention to the questions included in the interview protocol so that they did not lead participants' perceptions (Yin, 2014), as they were the main material to be understood in this study.

Table 2

Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research questions		Interview questions
1.	How do faculty members in a US public, doctoral university with highest research activity perceive the QEP process?	5-14
2.	How do faculty members perceive the QEP's role in institutional improvement?	5, 9 – 12, 14 - 16
3.	How do faculty members perceive the QEP's role in student learning outcomes?	5, 9 – 12, 14, 17, 18
4.	How do faculty members perceive the relevance of QEP activities in student learning improvement?	21 - 24
5.	How does faculty member involvement in accreditation process associate with their perception of QEP process?	1- 14

Regarding the number of interviews, I initially planned to conduct 12-15 interviews. The number of interviews was decided based on experts' voices on sampling and cases in qualitative research (Baker, Edwards, & Doidge, 2012). Baker, Edwards and Doidge (2012) argued that the amount of qualitative data does not depend on the number of interviews. Rather, it depends, to a higher degree, on the depth of the interview and how well the qualitative researcher uncovers participants' thoughts and perspectives. Additionally, a small number of participants can offer researchers insights into research projects that target participants from a specific group (e.g., faculty). Participants who shared common characteristics (e.g., roles, responsibilities, experience, etc.) are unlikely to express an extremely varied perceptions and concerns with the issue being investigated (Baker, Edwards, & Doidge, 2012; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) conducted a study involving women from two West

African countries to determine how many interviews were enough to reach saturation. After conducting a total of sixty in-depth interviews, they found that saturation was achieved within the first twelve interviews. Similarly, a relatively small sample size is advised when researchers face time constrains to complete the research project. Given the experts' discussions in sampling and cases in qualitative research and the fact that interviews are not the only source of data for this study, this study involved conducting a total of 13 faculty members' interviews, which were sufficient for reaching data saturation.

Documents. In case study research, documents are commonly used as a validating source of information. They are useful when the researcher cannot directly observe the process to be investigated (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013). Yin (2014) insisted that documents play a critical role in case study data collection due to the valuable details they add to the case being studied. Documents as a source of evidence in case study research have the following advantages (Yin, 2014):

1. They can offer detailed information of a given process or event.
2. They can be reviewed repeatedly as they are stable in nature.
3. They can cover a variety of events and settings in their historical representation.
4. They are valid tools due to their independency of the case study conducted.

Yin (2014) also identified weaknesses of using documents in case study research. These weaknesses are: difficult to obtain, difficult to access, bias in selection, and bias in reporting. In this case study, I collected a variety of relevant documents to the QEP process at USF. These documents included the current QEP developed by the institution's committee, the 2005 QEP of the selected institution, the 2012 Edition of the Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement by SACS, and the Quality Enhancement Plan Guidelines form. The

purpose of reviewing these documents was to corroborate and augments evidence from faculty members face-to- face interviews. The documents were available online for public use and did not need permission to access. The purpose of these documents was to compare faculty perceptions with how the QEP was outlined and described. Table 3 lists the documents used in this case study, their dissemination method, and their underlying role.

Table 3

Documents Relevant to the Study

Data Source	Dissemination Method	Role of Document
The 2012 Edition of the Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement	SACSCOC website	The document includes the most recent version of standards institutions must comply to gain or maintain accreditation by SACS.
Quality Enhancement Plan Guidelines	SACSCOC website	The document assists QEP committee members in focusing and developing their QEP.
Quality Enhancement Plan (Inspire)	USF website	The document describes the work of the QEP in 2005 and includes a five-year course of action for implementation.
Quality Enhancement Plan (Global Citizens Project)	USF website	The document describes the work of the QEP in 2015 and includes a five-year course of action for implementation.
Quality Enhancement Plan 2015-2016 Annual Report	USF website	The document outlined the QEP work completed in 2015-2015 for meeting the 2020 QEP performance targets.

Data Collection Procedures

Merriam (2005) asserted that data collection in case study research requires a systematic procedure that ensures sufficient evidence for the topic investigated. Yin (2014) offered four principles of data collection in case study. These principles are:

1. Use multiple sources of evidence.
2. Create a case study database.
3. Maintain a chain of evidence.
4. Exercise case then using data from electronic sources.

The data collection procedure of this study followed Yin's approach of data collection (2014). In order to address the first principle, I obtained data from multiple sources to attain rich information regarding faculty perceptions of the QEP process in a public, SACS accredited, doctoral university with highest research activity. These sources were: the QEPQ, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and the institutional documents. The second principle was addressed by building a case study database. The case study database contained the full array of the data collected from multiple sources. The data included in the database will be organized by the themes emerged from the different sources of evidence (to be discussed in data analysis section). The third principle was addressed by maintaining an organized record contains the full array of data collected for this study. This enabled me to confirm the case study conclusions that emerged from tracing the data included in the record (Yin, 2014). Finally, in order to address the fourth principle, I used criteria for limiting the number of documents to be included in this case study to be QEP specific documents and eliminating other documents that involved SACS accreditation as a whole process. Yin (2014) asserted that the amount of electronic information available

online can be overwhelming to researchers when conducting a focused case study. Therefore, researchers should decide upon the limits by which the case study is focused (Yin, 2014).

In this study, the data collection procedure started by locating relevant documents regarding the QEP at USF (see table 3). The included documents were specifically related to the QEP process at USF. Therefore, I excluded documents related to SACS accreditation and the institution's review committee of the accreditation process. The documents were available online through the institution official website and SACSCOC website. These documents were used for corroborating and augmenting evidence from other sources of data for this case study (Yin, 2014). Additionally, the documents collected were critical in the sense that they give the researcher a clear understanding of how the QEP process was described and how faculty members' perceptions compare to the QEP's documents description.

After collecting the relevant documents, I contacted the Office of Graduate Studies to help me distribute the QEPQ (Appendix A) to all faculty members at USF. I also sent individual invitation emails (see appendix I) to Global Faculty Fellows (GFF) that included the selection criteria by which I recruited eligible participants for this study. The GFF are faculty members who work with USF QEP and participate in a faculty learning community dedicated to the courses' global enhancement. The GFF list was available online through USF website and contained 39 faculty members. Participants were notified that their identities and responses will be kept confidential. In order to address any technical difficulties resulting from the QEPQ online questionnaire, I provided my contact information in the QEPQ invitation email (Appendix B).

The participants were given two weeks after receiving the invitation email. After two weeks, a reminder email was sent to remind participants who have not completed the QEPQ.

Because participants were asked to provide their email addresses in the QEPQ if they are interested in being interviewed, the next step involved reviewing the QEPQ in order to identify eligible participants to for face-to-face interviews. Faculty eligible to be interviewed were: (a) work full time, (b) have a minimum of five years of experience at USF, (c) have a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation related activities, and (d) have a moderate to high level of knowledge regarding the QEP process.

Eligible faculty members were contacted via email (Appendix E) to schedule interviews' time and place. A total of 13 faculty members were interviewed. After contacting participants, confirmation emails were sent to the participants. The confirmation emails (Appendix G) included the interview time, place, and the Interview Consent Form (see Appendix F). The interview time and place were decided based on faculty members' preferences. The interviews took approximately one to two hours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Lastly, a thank-you email was sent to all participants who contributed to the data for this study. Table 4 shows the timeline of data collection activities.

Table 4:

Timeline of Data Collection Activities

Month	Activity
April	Pilot of the QEPQ was conducted Pilot of the interview was conducted Documents relevant to the study were gathered.
May	IRB application was sent and approved May 27, 2016.
September	Recruitment request was sent to the Office of Graduate Studies List of prospective participants was developed (Global Faculty Fellows list).

Table 4 (continued)

Month	Activity
October - November	The QEPQ (see Appendix A) was sent to prospective participants. Reminder email was sent to prospective participants to complete the QEPQ. October 20 was the deadline for completing the QEPQ Eligible faculty members were contacted to schedule face-to-face interviews. Eligible faculty members were emailed a confirmation letter of the time and place of the scheduled interview along with the interview consent form (see Appendix F). Face-to-face interviews were conducted.
December	Follow up questions, were sent to participants. An email regarding any additional information participant may add to the interview was send to participants. Thank-you emails (Appendix H) were sent to faculty participated in the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

The purpose of this section is to provide information regarding the data analysis procedures employed to report the findings of this study. Because both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this study, data analysis included both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques. Data obtained from the QEPQ were quantitative in nature. Therefore, I used quantitative data analysis techniques. In order to organize and summarize the data obtained from the QEPQ, I employed descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Descriptive statistics were obtained by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The descriptive statistics included frequency distributions and percentages. This statistical software is seen to provide broad range of statistics including

measures of central tendency and dispersion, which identified trends of the data obtained from the QEPQ (George, 2003).

Regarding the qualitative data analysis, I followed Yin's (2014) guidance for analyzing case study data. Yin (2014) suggested several data manipulation techniques to be used as a starting point for analyzing the data. These manipulations are:

1. Searching for patterns, insights, or concepts that seem promising
2. Putting information into different arrays
3. Making a matrix of categories and placing the evidence within each categories
4. Tabulating the frequency of different events
5. Putting information in chronological order or using some other temporal scheme

Another way to analyze case study data is to write memos or notes addressing what have been observed in the data collected (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) asserted that these notes could help case study researchers obtain a preliminary interpretation of their data.

In addition to the preliminary data manipulations, Yin (2014) suggested four general strategies that guide the analysis in case study research. These strategies are:

1. Relying on theoretical propositions
2. Working your data form the "ground up"
3. Developing a case description
4. Examining plausible rival explanations

Yin (2014) recommended choosing a single, sometimes multiple, strategy for data analysis before collecting the data in order to make sure that the data collected are possible to be analyzed. After reviewing the strategies suggested by Yin (2014), I decided to adopt "working your data from the ground up" as the general strategy that guided the analysis of this study. This

particular strategy involves induction (Yin, 2014). I made the choice of the second general strategy for the following reasons. First, since this study intended to explore faculty perceptions of the QEP process, I would be looking at patterns of faculty perceptions that emerge from the data in regard to the questions proposed. It is apparent that this intention is best accomplished by the use of inductive strategy. Second, since I had an interest in obtaining a rich understanding of the topic being investigated in this study, the use of inductive strategy promised to yield relevant concepts and valuable interpretations (Yin, 2014). Lastly, Yin (2014) stated that using an inductive strategy is promising when the case study includes quantitative data. Accordingly, this case study included a quantitative component that described the individual characteristics of the research participants. This quantitative component helped me explore, explain, or describe the QEP process at USF.

Because this study explored faculty perceptions about the QEP in particular study settings, I carefully read the data (e.g., documents and interviews' transcripts) in order to obtain trends, themes, patterns, and ideas that uncover the research questions through the lens of the theory of change (Merriam, 2002). Specifically, the data analysis process started with coding the data obtained from the interviews' transcripts. After coding the data, I looked at patterns and themes that emerged from the coding process through the theory of change that described how the QEP process should work. I then compare the emergent themes from faculty responses with the QEP's description in the institutional documents. The themes that emerged from the data provided an insight into the QEP process as perceived by faculty members at USF (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

I played a primary role in data collection and data analysis. That is, I looked at any relevant material to the research questions and included it in the database (Merriam, 2002). Additionally, I personally conducted the interviews, transcribed the data, and analyzed them. Besides collecting the data, I kept a researcher journal that included personal reflections, reactions, and insights into the data collected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Because this case study invoked a post-positivist viewpoint, I was an objective viewer of the data collected and worked to maintain a position of objectivity (e.g., avoid bias) in all research activities (Yin, 2014).

Validity of the Design

Construct validity. According to Yin (2014), construct validity is an important issue that should be taken into consideration while judging the quality of case study research. It refers to the extent to which a study investigates what it intends to investigate (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008). Case study researchers apply a variety of methods to enhance construct validity in their designs. Examples of these methods include using multiple sources of data, create a case study database, maintain a chain of evidence, and exercise care when using data from electronic sources (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008; Yin, 2015). In order to address construct validity for this study, I relied on multiple sources of data such as the QEPQ, the interviews, and the institutional documents. The use of multiple sources of evidence is seen to contribute to the rigor and overall quality of case study research as opposed to a single source of evidence (Yin, 2014). I also included both general themes and negative cases from faculty members' interviews in order to ensure the study's credibility.

Internal validity. Internal validity in case study research refers to the logical representation of the study framework (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008). Yin (2014) proposed

three strategies for enhancing internal validity in case study research. These strategies are formulating clear research framework, pattern matching, and theory triangulation. In this study, I formulated a clear theoretical framework that demonstrated how the QEP should work under the lens of the theory of change (see figure 1). The use of this theoretical framework helps explain the relationship between faculty perceptions of the QEP and the success of the QEP, and thereby enhance the internal validity.

External validity. Gibbert, Ruigrok, and Wicki (2008) used the term "generalizability" to explain external validity in case study research. However, Yin (2014) said that case study research does not correspond with statistical generalizability, which infers conclusions about a population. This does not mean that case study research cannot make generalization to theory in similar situations where the study is conducted. Yin (2014) identified two strategies for testing external validity in case study research. These strategies are using rival theories within single cases and using replication logic in multiple-case studies. Because this case study was exploratory in nature and the literature lacks similar studies, I relied on analytical generalizations for addressing the external validity concern. For instance, the conclusion of this study would help to identify other cases of the QEP implementation in which the results can be compared (Yin, 2014).

Reliability of the Design

In case study research, reliability evaluates the extent to which a later investigation that follows the same case study procedure can be conducted (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008). One way to achieve reliability in case study research is through careful and detailed documentation of the study procedures (Yin, 2014). Taking Yin's advice, I used case study protocol consistent for each study participant. This protocol is demonstrated by having the same data collection

procedure for each participant (e.g., questionnaire, interview protocol). Additionally, I developed a case study database for interviews transcripts and notes, which ensured that the data for this study were carefully documented (Yin, 2014). Finally, I wrote a detailed methods chapter that clearly described my entire research process with justifications of all the choices I made.

Study Limitations and Delimitations

One limitation of this study was that the researcher is not personally involved with the QEP process at USF. This limitation was addressed by reviewing the important documents and materials regarding the QEP (see table 3) and also talking with the QEP director and team members. Another limitation was that a single researcher collected, analyzed, and interpreted the results for this study, which involved a potential risk of personal bias. However, acknowledging this bias forced me to challenge my own biases and realize the impact of these biases on the study findings (Maxwell, 2012). Additionally, the fact that this case study was conducted in a specific setting would limit the ability to generalize the results to different settings. Nevertheless, the study results can be used as a foundation to compare with other institutional settings.

Interviews have also potential limitations especially with novice interviewers. Questions in interview protocols can be poorly articulated which cause biased responses and participants to focus on what the interviewer wants them to say (Yin, 2014). In order to minimize this concern, 3 individuals reviewed the interview protocol in order to make sure that the questions are clear, relevant, and not leading participants to respond either positively or negatively regarding their perceptions the QEP process. Additionally, I piloted the interview in order to identify my own preconceptions and biases that might be present in the current interview protocol (see Appendix C and D). Piloting interviews can modify interview questions to be broad enough for participants to share their thoughts and experiences (Kim, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

Because this study involved human participants (e.g., faculty), I addressed multiple ethical considerations. First of all, the study was formally approved by USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) (IRB#: Pro00026258) on May 27, 2016 (Appendix L). The approval process involved informed consent form for the QEPQ (Appendix K) and the semi-structured interview (Appendix J). The IRB reviewed the study objectives, design, and procedures and devoted extra attention to some aspect of this case study (Yin, 2014). I made sure to adopt the guidance suggested by the IRB in this study. Additionally, I obtained informed consent from all participants who may be part of the study (Appendix F). I obtained this informed consent upon conducting the QEPQ and the interviews (See Appendix J and K). The informed consent intended to alter the participants to the nature of this study and asked for their voluntary participation. Finally, I protected the privacy and confidentiality of all faculty members who agreed to participate in the study by being the only interviewed and transcriber and disguising any identifying information in the results.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this case study was to explore faculty perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) in a US public, doctoral university with highest research activity (USF). Additionally, the study explored faculty perceptions of (a) the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness, (b) the QEP's role in student learning, (c) the relevance of the QEP activities to student learning and institutional effectiveness, and (d) the association between faculty involvement with the accreditation process and their perceptions of the QEP.

This chapter starts with a summary of faculty responses to the Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire (QEPQ). Then, findings from a review of institutional documents and face-to-face interview are presented. The purpose of the institutional documents was to corroborate and augment evidences from the QEPQ and faculty members' interview transcripts. The results of face-to-face interview and institutional documents are presented by research question and organized around the themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Both general themes and negative cases are presented in order to provide additional insight into the QEP process at USF and to ensure the study's credibility (Flick, 2013). Findings from the QEPQ were triangulated with face-to-face interviews and documents to enhance the validity of the data. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary of findings.

Summary of the QEPQ Data

The primary purpose of the QEPQ was to identify faculty members eligible to participate in face-to-face interview and to collect preliminary data about faculty perceptions of the QEP for

triangulation. With the help of the Office of Graduate Studies, the QEPQ was distributed to all faculty members at USF. Fifty-three faculty members completed the QEPQ. Of the 53 faculty members who participated in the QEPQ, 52 were full-time faculty members and 50 had a minimum of five years of experience at the University of South Florida (USF).

After looking at the faculty individual responses to the QEPQ, 15 faculty members were identified as eligible participants for this study. The inclusion criteria were: (a) work full-time, (b) have a minimum of five years of experience at USF, (c) have a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation related activities, and (d) have a moderate to high level of knowledge regarding the QEP process. Of the 15 faculty members who met the inclusion criteria, 13 faculty members volunteered to participate in a face-to-face interview.

Table 5 presents the demographic characteristics and employment information for the QEPQ respondents. As indicated in the table, a total of 53 faculty members completed the QEPQ where 28 of them were males and 25 were females. About 87% of respondents indicated that they worked at USF 5 years or more. Faculty members were also asked to indicate their employment status and category. Only one faculty member reported that he was employed part-time at USF. Twenty faculty members were full professors, 16 were associate professors, and 11 were assistant professors.

Table 5

Demographic Characteristics of the QEPQ Respondents

Characteristic	*N*	%
Gender		
Male	28	53
Female	25	47
Total	53	100
Age group		
25 – 34	1	1

Table 5 (continued)

Characteristic	*N*	%
35 – 44	9	17
45 – 54	13	25
55 – 64	17	32
65 and over	13	24
Total	53	100
Ethnic background		
Asian	3	5
Black / African American	2	4
Hispanic	2	4
White / Caucasian	46	87
Total	53	100
Years of experience		
0 – 4	3	6
5 – 10	14	26
11 – 15	7	13
16 – 20	12	22
21 and over	17	32
Total	53	100
Employment category		
Assistant professor	11	21
Associate professor	16	30
Professor	20	38
Professor emeritus	1	2
Total	53	100
Employment status		
Full-time	52	98
Part-time	1	2
Total	53	100
College		
Arts	3	6
Arts and Sciences	22	41
Behavioral and Community Sciences	8	15
Business	3	6
Education	10	19
Engineering	3	6
Honors College	1	2
Marine Science	2	4
Total	53	100

In addition to the demographic questions, the QEPQ also included Likert-type questions that asked faculty members to indicate their level of involvement in: department level development and planning, USF accreditation process, and the QEP process (See table 6). About 60% of faculty members indicated that they were moderately to highly involved in department level ongoing planning and improvement. However, only 27% of respondents had moderate to high involvement in the accreditation process. Data from the QEPQ showed that the vast majority of respondents had little to no involvement in developing the QEP or selecting the QEP final focus.

Table 6

Faculty Level of Involvement in Department Level Planning and Development, USF Accreditation Process, QEP Process, and QEP Focus Development

Institutional process	Level of involvement							
	No involvement		Little involvement		Moderate involvement		High involvement	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Department level curriculum development and planning process	4	7.5	15	28.3	20	37.7	14	26.4
USF accreditation process	18	34	20	37.7	12	22.6	3	5.7
USF QEP process	32	60.4	15	28.3	6	11.3	__	__
QEP focus development process	40	75.5	10	19	3	5.7	__	__

The last part of the QEPQ contained opinion-based questions regarding the level of faculty interest towards the QEP and the QEP's relevance to institutional effectiveness and student learning. About 40% of faculty members expressed moderate to high interest towards the idea, content, methods, and activities used in the QEP process. However, over 70% of faculty members indicated little to no knowledge about the QEP's focus, ideas, content, and activities. Finally, more than half of faculty members reported that the QEP has moderate to high relevance to institutional effectiveness and student learning. Table 7 represents faculty opinion-based responses regarding their level of: knowledge about the QEP, interest in the QEP, and their perceived QEP's relevance to student learning and institutional effectiveness.

Table 7

Faculty Members' Knowledge about the QEP, Interest in the QEP, and QEP' Relevance to Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness

	Not at all		Little		Moderate		High	
Faculty opinion-based responses	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Level of knowledge about the QEP	16	30.2	22	41.5	9	17	6	11.3
Level of interest in the QEP	13	24.5	20	37.7	13	24.5	7	13.2
QEP's relevance to student learning	8	15	18	34	17	32	10	19
QEP's relevance to institutional effectiveness	9	17	17	32	17	32	10	19

The QEPQ responses provided a preliminary insight into the QEP process from faculty members' perspectives. Faculty members' responses indicated the following:

1. Faculty members were more involved in department level planning and improvement initiatives as opposed to institutional level improvement process such as the accreditation process.
2. Faculty members possessed little knowledge about the QEP process.
3. Few faculty members expressed moderate interest in accreditation-related activities.
4. About half of faculty members perceived the relevance of the QEP process in student learning and institutional effectiveness.

Research Question 1: Faculty Perceptions of the QEP Process

The first research question was designed to explore faculty perceptions of the QEP process. Specifically, it explored how faculty members perceive the QEP and how their perceptions compared to the QEP description in institutional documents. Faculty members were asked questions related to how they describe the QEP, their involvement with the QEP process, and how they perceive the process as a whole. Thirteen faculty members agreed to provide additional insight into the QEP process at USF. The demographic characteristics of faculty members who participated in face-to-face interviews are provided in Table 8.

Table 8

Demographic Characteristics of Interviewed Faculty Members

Pseudonym	Sex	Ethnicity	Employment Category	Age Group	Years of Experience	College
Bill	Male	White	Professor	55 – 64	21 and over	Arts and Sciences
Julia	Female	White	Assistant Professor	55 – 64	5 – 10	Education

Table 8 (continued)

Pseudonym	Sex	Ethnicity	Employment Category	Age Group	Years of Experience	College
Miller	Male	White	Associate Professor	45 – 55	5 – 10	Education
Jennifer	Female	White	Assistant Professor	45 – 55	5 – 10	Arts and Sciences
Scott	Male	White	Professor	45 – 55	11 - 15	Business
Elizabeth	Female	White	Associate Professor	55 – 64	16 – 20	Education
Kevin	Male	White	Professor	45 – 54	11 – 15	Arts and Sciences
Heather	Female	Hispanic	Associate Professor	35 – 44	5 – 10	Education
Leslie	Female	White	Associate Professor	35 – 44	5 - 10	Arts and Sciences
Donald	Male	White	Associate Professor	45 – 54	11 - 15	Arts and Sciences
Sarah	Female	White	Associate Professor	45 – 54	11 – 15	Arts and Sciences
John	Male	Other	Associate Professor	45 – 54	11 – 15	Business

Table 8 (continued)

Pseudonym	Sex	Ethnicity	Employment Category	Age Group	Years of Experience	College
Stephen	Male	White	Associate Professor	35 – 44	5 - 10	Arts and Sciences

The institutional documents showed USF QEP was defined as a carefully designed course of action that addresses students' ability to "engage constructively with diverse people, places, events, challenges, and opportunities." (University of South Florida, 2015, p. 36). Figure 3 demonstrates the conceptual framework of USF QEP according to the institutional documents.

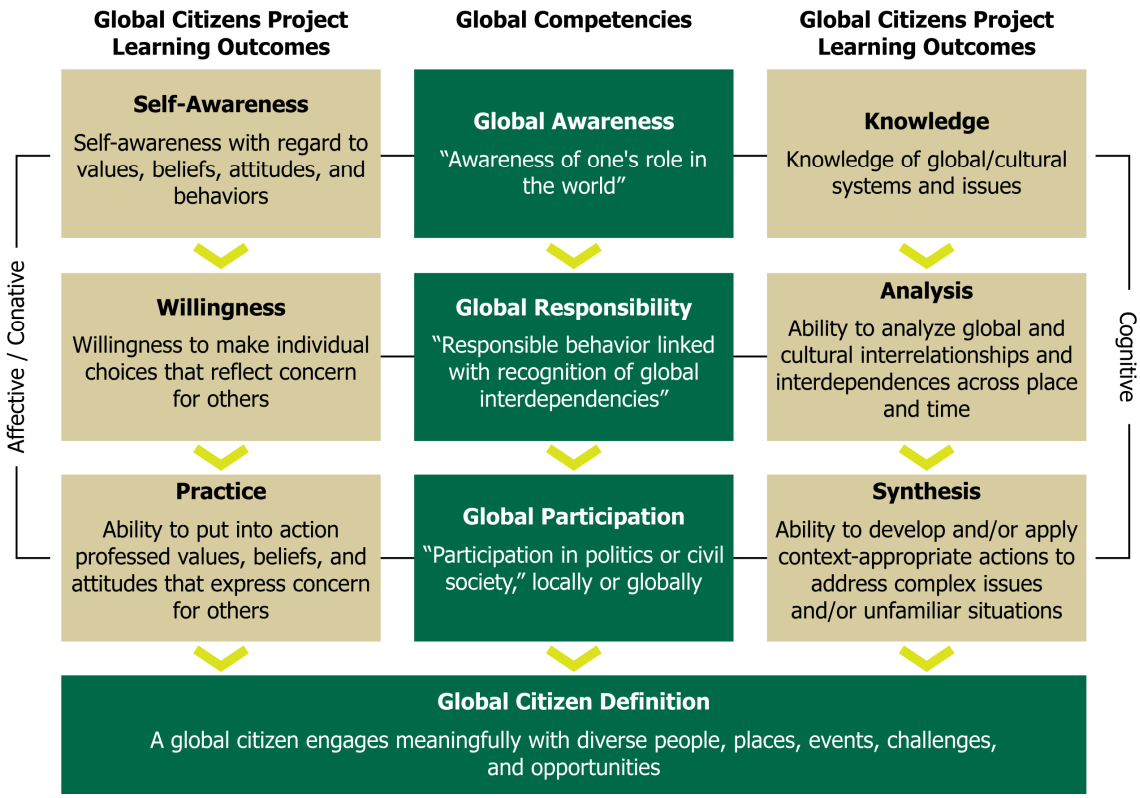

Figure 3. Conceptual framework of USF QEP. Adopted from University of South Florida, (2015), retrieved December 15, 2016, from http://www.usf.edu/gcp/being-a-global-citizen/index.aspx. Copyright 2017 by University of South Florida.

The majority of faculty members described the QEP as an institutional process aimed at improving students' global competencies through the curriculum. Leslie, for example, described the QEP as:

> *A theme that was chosen at the university level to integrate curriculum from different parts of the university and have this overarching theme that can connect different fields and also improve the delivery of the courses to the students and improve the involvement of faculty and trying to update courses and involve more global aspect. And rethink some of the objectives of their teaching and align the objectives to correspond with this theme so no matter what courses you are teaching, English or biology or history, you can think about global perspective of the class and how you can tie them into what you are teaching and that gives you sort of coherent experience to students across the board.*

The analysis of the faculty members' perceptions of the QEP yielded the following themes:

1. The QEP is about globalization
2. The QEP is an important, necessity-driven process
3. The QEP is an ambitious process

The QEP is about globalization. For most faculty members, the QEP was about preparing students to live in a global society and be able to interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds. Describing the QEP process at USF, Donald said, "It is an attempt of the university to globalize the curriculum and to make our students aware of you know, sort of outside the world. That there is always a global element outside that influences whatever we study." John also added that the globally oriented approach of the QEP is "about having our students being aware of the interconnectedness of the economies and generally being aware that their professional careers will be affected by things that happen outside the local areas." The USF QEP also described the QEP in terms of three global components: global awareness, global responsibility, and global participation (See figure 3).

While almost all faculty members who participated in face-to-face interviews were familiar with the QEP focus of globalization, six of them stressed that other faculty members in

their department are not aware of the global focus of the QEP or may not be interested to understand what it is and why it exists. Responding to how other faculty members perceive the QEP, Scott said:

> *I don't think a lot of faculty really truly understands it. At least here in the school of business, I don't know if there is anybody in the business who are really on it. I know that the associate dean gave us a report about it and then I gave this report to my collogues, but people chose to work on things that they are better at*.

Sarah also said:

> *I don't think that faculty are aware of the QEP. Other than, when we went through SACS, the director told us if anyone asks you what the QEP is you say it is the global citizen project. So that is the extent what faculty members know. I know about the award and I know about the global course enhancement. But I don't really know what other initiatives are under that.*

In order to increase faculty awareness of the QEP, five faculty members suggested including brief presentation of the QEP in department meetings at the beginning of fall and spring semesters where the percentage of faculty attendance is high.

The QEP is an important, necessity driven process. The majority of faculty members were enthusiastic about the QEP focus and thought that it could guide the institution to becoming a globally competent university. Twelve of the 13 participating faculty members realized that the QEP is a worthwhile effort that is strategically aligned with the institution's mission statement and goals. Additionally, 12 faculty members articulated appreciation to the concept of the QEP and thought that it encourages the institution to pursue innovative practice. For example, Bill shared:

> *Generally speaking, the QEP itself, I think the concept of it is actually good. Making a university as an institution reflective of what it is doing and how to do it better. This is something that every academic institution in the country needs to do. They need to figure out who they are and what they mean and what is it that they are providing. What the services are that they are rendering and why somebody seeks to go there. And so the QEP process facilitates that to a certain degree. You have to think about what it is that you are all about what core values are and then identify things that you can improve by*

focusing on extensively for a decade that is going to push you forward. So from that perspective, it is great.

Regarding the focus of the QEP, eight faculty members commented that it was an appropriate choice that is not only driven by desire, but also by necessity. For example, Elizabeth shared, "I was thrilled that we adopted global engagement as our QEP. It's critical for the future." The eight faculty members reported that the idea of having a globally oriented mindset is important because there are students who have never left their hometowns and never traveled outside the country. Scott stated:

As US people, in general, don't get outside their backyard, we got people never been out of the county much or less out of the state or out the country. And if you look at the great majority, the population, most of them, do not have passports they have not internationally traveled.

Two faculty members also stressed the difficulty of promoting this focus for students with local mindsets. For example, Sarah said:

So for students who never thought this way before, and now you have to sell why this is important to them and how this will be beneficial to them. So that is probably a hard sell. Even though we have pretty diverse students' body, I know there are people who never left their hometown. You know, these kinds of people. So if you have never left your hometown, students still live at home and come to school. So they've never been in other state or place. Then you are going to tell these students, okay you have to have global mindset to be competitive and they have no experience in the first hand. So when you have students who were coming from this sort of background, they don't see an appreciation or a need for having a global experience I think it is a hard sell.

However, the two faculty members believed that the QEP could be a worthwhile effort that contributes to how faculty members and students think and act globally.

While most faculty members perceived the value of the QEP in turning the university into a global community, three faculty members did not ascribe thinking globally and acting globally to the QEP. Those faculty members reported that the QEP was not the driving force of being global in their instructional practices. For example, Julia said, "I just don't see personally that the QEP for me being this driving force to cover global issues in my classes." Four faculty

members stated that the majority of courses across the university have global components in certain disciplines such as business, humanities, and social sciences. For those disciplines, faculty pointed out that globalization is an essential concept that shapes the curriculum and that the QEP might have given the courses more rationale rather than major curricular change.

The QEP is an ambitious process. Five of the 13 faculty members described the QEP process as an ambitious long-term approach for devising pedagogical strategies aimed at improving student learning experiences. They perceived that the goals of the QEP are to improve learning experiences for undergraduate students, as opposed to graduate students. For example Miller said:

> *One negative consequence is that the QEP mainly focused on undergraduate education. So other graduate programs won't benefit. So it is hard to negotiate and balance the different initiatives. And the struggle of USF is trying to do it all without the kind of history or resources like Harvard or duke.*

Julia thought that the reason for limiting the QEP to undergraduate level is "because undergraduate students tend to use the QEP activities more. They are more mobile. They don't have full-time job" Additionally, three faculty members indicated that it is possible that the QEP is influential to students, faculty, and even the institution's identity. However, they stressed the difficulty of seeing tangible evidence QEP's outcomes. For example, Donald said:

> *I want to stress that there is an element that is a little typical in USF in many respects, that is this part; the idea is a good one. You did a great intention I think. But it is really hard to see the impact on students.*

Two faculty members pointed out that this ambitious process might cause inefficient improvement effort especially when the institution does not have the capacity to implement it. One faculty member stated that in order for any improvement initiative to be meaningful and successful, institutions should put sufficient resources behind it. One area that faculty raised concerns about was the lack of faculty and financial resources to function globally. Specifically,

two faculty members noted that some departments do not have diverse faculty bodies, which might hinder global conversations and partnerships. For example, Stephen said, "I guess one problem with globalization in our department is that we are not a diverse group. Our discipline tends to be a very traditional discipline. It is a male-dominant, it is very white. It is very traditional in that sense." Julia added:

> *Actually it is so interesting because one of our team in strategic planning, one of our objectives is to hire people that are more global with international experiences and we got some push back from faculty because, you know, it is part of a job security.*

Since this is the second year of the QEP implementation, eight of the 13 faculty members believed that the institution is still in the growing phase and that more time is needed to actually see tangible outcomes. Three faculty members also stressed that the QEP's ambitious goals are hard to see and might take years to actually see the impact on students. However, they realized that the QEP could be the first step toward a culturally responsive environment for students. Leslie shared, "I think the QEP's intended outcomes need some time. From my perspective, just teaching two classes a semester, it is really hard to see the wider effect of it." Donald added, "I am sure it will have an impact, I am sure that it is important and effective. It just needs time to actually see the impact."

Research Question 2: Faculty Perceptions of the QEP's Role in Institutional Effectiveness

The 13 faculty members asserted that the entire institution has been through ongoing changes and improvement initiatives. These changes, according to four faculty members, were driven by both external and internal demands. Regional accreditation, programmatic accreditation, students' needs, and partnerships with school districts and organizations were the most common sources that induced changes at institutional and departmental levels. Describing the institutional changes, Julia said:

> *I came to USF in 2007. So it has been 9 years, or in the 9th year. USF has changed since I came. Everything changed since then. So the orientation of the program, the philosophy behind it has changed. Courses of course have changed. And the delivery of courses, also our partnerships with school districts have evolved. And also keep in mind that the standards have changed, Florida standards have changes and we have to be responsive for these changes.*

Additionally, five faculty members stressed some adverse changes that were responses to budgetary issues. Examples of these adverse changes included the relatively limited faculty resources and students' financial aids (e.g., assistantships). While exploring how faculty members perceived the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness, the following themes emerged:

1. Emphasizing the university identity
2. Increased reputation
3. Promoting international research collaboration
4. Bureaucracy
5. Cost-effectiveness
6. Need for institutional conversation

Emphasizing the university identity. Review of USF 2015 QEP indicated that one of the important objectives of USF's strategic plan is to "expand USF's international identity through design and implementation of a comprehensive, powerful branding campaign" (University of South Florida, 2015, p. 8). When asked about the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness, five faculty members stated that the QEP had given the institution a unique identity that helps differentiate it from other universities around the world. This identity, according to faculty members, involved the commitment to embrace globalization, internationalization, cultural awareness, and diversity across the institution. The five faculty members also stressed the importance of a clear, consistent, memorable, and understandable

identity that conveys to the world the institutions' unique mission and values. When asked about the QEP's positive consequences, Sarah said:

> *I guess I do notice, may be it is just me noticing the global thing a little more, I think, the QEP probable gives the university a global identity, a global identity that reflects the university's values, USF is a diverse institution so all parts of the university should participate somehow in embracing this identity… Of course identity is strongest when everyone participates.*

Two faculty members pointed out that the commitment to USF's global identity requires that the QEP's message and objectives be effectively communicated. That is, the entire university community should engage meaningfully in the QEP's development effort. While the majority of faculty were satisfied with how the QEP was communicated in their departments, two faculty members were critical about how the QEP was communicated to their particular departments. For example, Bill said:

> *I guess my concern with the current one [the QEP] is just that I did not, there was not a lot of opportunities to involve in the conversation at the development stage. It is sort of came out as a fully born thing with very little consultation. … But it was not the same level attention paid at least as far as I could tell. To how individual faculty can get engaged with it. Part of that I felt … because of what I teach. And the things I teach are not friendly to that. … and that's not really what you want the QEP to do. So because, you know, it is an effort and there has to be something for every unit to participate somehow. And these things were not made really clear.*

Increased reputation. Three faculty members believed that the QEP increased the institution's reputation of being global in practice. Those faculty members stated that this global reputation could attract more students and professionals with global backgrounds. It may also help the institution presentation to the public since multiple faculty members confirmed that the institutional leadership officials are speaking the message and including the global aspect in their official speeches. Elaborating on how the QEP increased the institution's reputation, Sarah said**:**

> *I saw USF advertisement in the airplane and it really emphasizes the big globe logo that we use. And I feel it did talk about something global and the fact that it is in an airline magazine, you know, here you are, you are traveling and USF this global university is*

there. So I feel they presenting themselves to the public very well. They are telling the story.

Promoting international research collaboration. The four faculty members who went through the Global Course Certification (GCC) process (described in Context of the Study, chapter 3) and engaged in QEP's faculty cohort stated that the QEP opened up opportunities to embrace global research collaboration across disciplines. Although those faculty members indicated that they value their independent research work within their particular departments, they stressed the importance of global research collaboration not only within their institution, but also between other institutions whose focuses are global. The institutional documents indicated that USF has newly created "online USF Global Discovery Hub" that facilitates international research opportunities for faculty (University of South Florida, 2015).

Additionally, two faculty members reported that they considered research collaboration with their colleagues after they shared their courses' objectives in the QEP's faculty cohort. Four faculty members described the QEP's faculty cohort as a series of workshops where faculty members share their course syllabi and receive feedback from the QEP professional development specialists regarding how to modify and present their courses in order to fit into the QEP's global focus. Adding to the expected global research collaboration, Kevin said, "the institution can become a leader in producing global research that can have a real impact on global security."

Bureaucracy. One criticism that seven faculty members reported regarding the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness was that it involved so much bureaucracy. Starting from the course certification process, four faculty members reported that it took them a whole year to actually have their courses certified and to receive the incentives. While faculty members whose courses were global in nature commented that the certification process went smoothly, other faculty members were overwhelmed by the number of workshops (five workshops each lasted an

hour and a half) and the length of the certification application. Describing her experience with the certification process, Jennifer said:

> *I think it is the bureaucracy that makes the process very exhausting. So it is very long process… with the QEP, it is exciting but again it is sort of the bureaucracy-crashing coming up. I went to these workshops the people were pretty nice people they were helpful but I should not go through these 5 workshops to have a class called … certified as a global class. That's the issue. We don't have to do the workshops but they teach you how to get your syllabus approved. So we have to design the syllabus. So a lot of my colleagues who teach global courses found it challenging in my department.*

The seven faculty members realized that this is how USF functions and that the QEP process has no power to change the institutions' bureaucratic orientation. However, two faculty members expressed concerns about the appropriateness of implementing innovative work in a bureaucratic educational system.

Cost-effectiveness. Eight faculty members stressed the need for the QEP activities to be both reasonable and cost effective in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Elaborating on the cost-effectiveness aspect, four faculty members indicated that the QEP team did a great job offering professional development opportunities and appropriate incentives for faculty who had globally certified courses. These professional development workshops, according to four faculty members and the institutional documents, included "Getting Started", "Let's Certify", and "Building a Global Citizen Assignment." (University of South Florida, 2016). The four faculty members also appreciated having the QEP's team in place to provide guidance and support, which was both efficient and helpful.

While the majority of faculty members were not aware of the QEP's resources, five of them realized that the institution is at a time of tightly constrained financial resources. Four faculty members who were heavily involved with USF strategic plan raised concerns about the doability of implementing the QEP in the current financial situation. Julia, for example, stated:

We don't have the capacity to go global. We do raise issues that are important globally. We have a lot of people who are diverse. We have diversity as one of our orientation processes. We want to have people … who care about equity, who care about diversity and see its value. So in that sense, the orientation is there, the capacity is not. So you have to put the effort and you have to put the resources.

Need for institutional conversation. The institutional conversation was a common theme that eight faculty members highlighted when they asked about the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness. That is, the eight faculty members emphasized the importance of open conversations at the institutional level. These open conversations should engage the entire university community in the QEP's planning and implementation. Heather stressed the need for institutional conversation in the following excerpt:

It is only the surface level that becomes perfunctory. Rather which is not my understanding of what quality involves or enhancement or even a plan. I think those words can lose what they mean individually or collectively. If it is something that you need to demonstrate like give us a file so we can store it for accreditation purposes. Of course it has some sort of evidence, which is good. But sometimes conversations can do better that put things in a box. So it is not really negative about the QEP or the process. It is how people handle it, the message associated with it, how it is ruled out, and how it is communicated. A lot of it deals with a leadership around it.

The level of involvement in designing the QEP varied between faculty members. Two faculty members were heavily involved in the designing phase because of their leadership roles in their departments. Describing her involvement with the QEP development, Sarah said:

So I was involved in brainstorming session, there were quite a lot of people, like maybe 50 or 60 people, staff and faculty. So it was good. It was across campus all departments participated. So that was really my first exposure and I think because I was the associate director I went because of that role.

Bill, however, was critical about the QEP's approach to engaging faculty in open conversations. He shared:

The communication has been not satisfactory. And so you know really a more proactive effort to engage with faculty and really offer stuff. It sort of put out there, this is what we are doing and we would like you to think about the ways to be involved. And really that's

part of the job of the QEP committee to really think creatively about ways people can be involved. Make it easy. Make it simple for them to participate.

Research Question 3: Faculty Perceptions of the QEP's Role in Student Learning

The 13 faculty members reported that they place students' success as a priority in their instructional practices. Therefore, they reported that the QEP could play a key role in improving student learning. The USF QEP indicated that the QEP put a great emphasis on student success in a global environment. Through USF continuing commitment to student success, the following four goals are to be achieved (a) well-educated and highly skilled global citizens, (b) high-impact research and innovation to change and innovation, (c) a highly effective, major economic engine, creating partnerships to build a strong and sustainable future, and (d) sound financial management to establish a strong and sustainable economic base (University of South Florida, 2015). While the 13 faculty members identified potential benefits of the QEP to student learning, no single faculty member perceived the QEP as a hindrance to students' success. The following common themes emerged from faculty perceptions of the QEP's role in student learning:

1. Globally oriented students
2. Curriculum enhancement
3. Competitiveness in the workplace
4. Students' active participation

Globally oriented students. The majority of faculty members agreed that the QEP would eventually help students to acquire global mindsets by adding global components across curriculum and co-curriculum. The two faculty members who applied major QEP-driven changes believed that these changes have helped infuse global perspectives and behaviors into students. For instance, Donald said:

> *The overall idea is great, to move students from narrow-minded to open-minded thinking. Especially in the US where people think nothing is outside…I think it also reflects much more sort of reality that things are not only national, but there are other things in the world that influence whatever world we are in… so in that matter it is great.*

The institutional documents indicated that the QEP is designed to help students succeed in a global society by enhancing their global competencies (University of South Florida, 2015). In addition to enhancing students' global competencies, USF QEP is committed to preparing students to "recognize and articulate those competencies and the connections among their experiences." (University of South Florida, 2015, p.51).

Two faculty members expressed concerns regarding the QEP's implementation. That is, they believed that the implementation so far has been limited to certain courses, which may not necessarily enhance students' global competencies. They also reported that globally oriented courses do not make students behave and act globally. Rather, exposing students to real-life global experiences such as study abroad programs is the only way for them to acquire global mindsets. Therefore, those faculty members suggested that the relevant activities to students' global experiences such as study abroad programs be more encouraging to students and more supported financially. It is worth mentioning that most faculty members believed that the institution is still in the growing phase of the QEP implementation and that tangible outcomes need more time to be evident. When asked about her belief regarding the effectiveness of the QEP, Leslie said:

> *It is hard to say how effective it is, my courses, the first to be submitted, have not been approved yet. So we can then encourage our students to get the award. So our faculty in our department seem interested. People will start recognize it more. Right now we are still in the growing phase. And people are trying to figure out what it is.*

Curriculum enhancement. Four faculty members reported that the QEP had a key role in shaping the larger curriculum for the whole university. Additionally, faculty members who

went through the QEP's course certification process reported that the process had given them the opportunity to rethink their courses and redesign their objectives and align the courses' objectives to correspond with a common institutional theme. Regarding her opinion of the QEP's role in curriculum enhancement, Leslie shared:

> *I think it is important for us to make some small changes in the way that we articulate it and the way when design and present the objectives in our syllabus. Because I know that I had to make changes to mine to make it fit with the language and the goals of the QEP and it was a good exercise for me because I had to rethink my course and what I was and the outcomes that wanted at the end of the class and how I want them and how to plan new activities. So I think even if you are a faculty member who feels that you already teaching global curriculum like … or if your are teaching about another part of the world it may seem obvious but there are some small changes and some rethinking that faculty can do to better fit into this project and better support it. … . The small changes I made really enhanced the course because even with the workshop I took it is pretty rare for faculty to have these opportunities to really have someone to look at your syllabus and give you suggestions and look at it critically and see what can be improved. Because usually we just have them and we work with them and there is not a lot of opportunities for professional development*

Among the 13 faculty members who participated in this study, two faculty members disagreed with that the QEP is targeting only specific core courses where most of them had already global elements. They suggested that the QEP's theme should be integrated across the curriculum and co-curriculum and it should be connected to every single undergraduate course in order to have a broader global impact. This curriculum integration, according to the two faculty members, can help students to behave more globally while they are exposed to global activities in their coursework. Additionally, the two faculty members whose courses were global in nature did not see substantial curricular change driven by the QEP. For example, Sarah said, "I honestly, the class I teach has not been changed that much. I just changed one assignment. The syllabus I had was very easy to convert." They, however, commented that the QEP has helped them to make their global course objectives more explicit and to include more assignments and activities that align with the QEP goals. Elaborating in this idea, Leslie shared:

> *I think that it is been effective in… for me personally, in making some small changes to my classes and try to be more explicit about it. And I think for students, I've seen that they are very excited about it and some came and talked to me and asked how to apply for the award and study abroad. So that was encouraging to me.*

Competitiveness in the workplace. Three faculty members indicated that careers in most disciplines are global in nature. For example, Bill said: "…our discipline (Bill was referring to geoscience) particularly is global enterprise now. And students coming out of here may find that their first job is somewhere else in a country where they have to deal with different culture and different people." Additionally, most faculty members pointed out that the QEP could help students to acquire global competencies that would make them competitive in the workplace. That is, three faculty members believed that students with global experiences can be more competitive and can have more opportunities as employers often appreciate global experiences. For instance, John said:

> *Global experience has been a great learning experience. So many students have told us that this was the first time they left the country. For many students it was getting out the comfort zone, they never thought they would make that lead and they found it pretty exciting. Many students had a distinct career placement, at least initially in our college. So in most of the metrics that matters to us, it has been, the study abroad activity has been a huge benefit.*

According to the institutional documents, students with international backgrounds compose 12% of the university's total student population (University of South Florida, 2015). Although the 13 faculty members realized the positive impact of globally oriented mindset on students' professional success, six faculty members expressed concerns regarding the limited number of students with global mindsets who might be interested in acquiring global competencies. Specifically, those faculty members stressed that the majority of students in undergraduate education are domestic and some of them might not see the value of acting global in local workplaces. For example, Sarah pointed out that being globally competitive in the

workplace might not necessarily entice students who never left their hometown and plan to work locally for the rest of their lives. Those students, according to Sarah and Scott, represent a fairly high percentage of the total students' body at the undergraduate level.

Students' active participation. Nine faculty members pointed out that students' active participation in the institutional global activities is essential for these activities to be meaningful. Specifically, those faculty members indicated that students' active participation is the only way for the QEP's effort to be worthwhile and to achieve its intended outcomes. While most faculty members had limited knowledge regarding the percentages of students' participation in the QEP activities, the institutional documents indicated that students' participation in globally related activities still remains below the institutional goals (University of South Florida, 2015). According to the 2015 USF QEP, the number of students participated in the QEP global activities increased by 17% in the 2013 -2014 academic year.

Three faculty members indicated that participation was heavily associated with student's awareness of the existing global opportunities and the benefits to their learning experiences. Reflecting on students' participation in the QEP activities, Scott indicated that low participation rate is typical in any innovative effort in its developmental phase and that the QEP team can definitely increase participation by employing effective marketing strategies. Sarah added "motivation" as a key role in increasing student's participation in the QEP activities. She mentioned the "Global Citizen Award" as a way to motivate students to participate in the QEP's global activities. Describing the QEP's effort and her students' responses to the "Global Citizen Award" in class discussion, Sarah said:

> *So this semester my research students are going to do some research for the Global Citizens Award. So we just had … come. So she talked about how they can get the award. The students were very interested. They, a lot of them haven't heard about the GCP award before. So they are trying to research and figure out how they can get the award.*

The QEP team are also trying to figure out how they can spread the award, how can they get more students interested. How can we get students who express interest or taking the first steps and signed that they are interested and get them progressing so they can actually complete the award. So they are just getting started they brainstorming some questions and focus groups where done.

Research Question 4: Faculty Perceptions of the QEP Activities Relevance to Student Learning Improvement

The QEP promised to promote global activities in order to accomplish the institution's new mission. USF new mission indicated a "commitment to the graduation of globally oriented citizens; faculty and student researchers dedicated to applied research that promotes globally relevant solutions." (University of South Florida, 2015, p. 7). The global activities, according to the 2015 USF QEP, are designed to provide students with opportunities to reinforce their global competencies and to encourage their participation in global experiences. USF provides award and incentives to recognize students pursuing globally engaging activities such as research projects and community services. Examples of the activities that target students' global experiences included: study abroad programs, foreign language study, adventures in global topics series, and globally engaged research and community service projects. While the majority of faculty members were not aware of all the QEP activities, eight of them mentioned study abroad program as the most relevant activity to the university's global theme. The following themes emerged from faculty responses to questions related to the QEP activities and their relevance to student learning:

1. Appropriateness to student learning
2. Study abroad
3. Bilingualism

Appropriateness to student learning. Eleven out of the 13 faculty members accepted that globally related activities are applicable for the courses they teach and also most of the courses across the university. Jennifer mentioned that most courses in her department have global components somewhere, which makes the QEP's global activities applicable and meaningful to student learning. John stated that there are a lot of places where it makes sense to include global activities in courses' requirements that nurture students' global competencies. Heather also added that "It is our responsibility as professors and instructors to decide what kinds of global activities can suite our courses and then bring it to the next level."

Bill, however, disagreed with the idea that the QEP is appropriate to apply to all courses. Elaborating on that, he said that it is not easy to bring global topics and plan globally engaging activities when you teach fundamental courses. He added, if faculty members try to force global content and activities to inappropriate course materials then that will confuse the QEP process. Additionally, Miller and Heather stated that while faculty are trying to introduce their students to the world and inform them about the global opportunities, there is a critical pressure on them to prepare students not to go anywhere and stay locally because this will look good on the university as students need to contribute to the state. So to Bill, Miller, and Heather, the QEP activities are not always appropriate to shoehorn into all courses.

Study abroad. When asked about activities relevance to students learning, study abroad program was frequently mentioned as the most relevant and meaningful activity to students' global experiences. According to the 2015 USF QEP, study abroad programs provide "the main source of cultural exchange fostering global awareness and intercultural competencies." (University of South Florida, 2015, p. 22). Eight faculty members commented that they value the global experiences that are resulted from study abroad programs and three of them have

personally exposed to this valuable experience. They also believed that this activity could be a life-changing experience that would shape students' future identities. Faculty members also emphasized the need to effectively promote study abroad programs to students across disciplines. For example, Donald shared: "students may never think about leaving their comfort zone if the institution was not pushing study abroad programs and promoting them."

Three faculty members enthusiastically shared their personal experiences with study abroad programs when they were pursuing their academic degrees. For example, Julia shared that her successful study abroad experience with her previous institution led to her employment at USF. She added that since her previous institution had an international focus, they put both effort and resources to promote what the institution called "international scholarships program." This program, according to Julia, hired people with global perspectives who had experiences in interaction with international schools and this program eventually produced students with internationalized educational experiences.

Leslie believed that sharing successful stories about global experiences is encouraging for students to engage in global activities. She clarified:

> *I always tell my students that this is something that I did when I was in my 20s and has affected my career path. If you bring your own enthusiasm for doing this international experiences, and they have a point of reference, I think that can be encouraging and very helpful. So … for me personally, this is what I try to be more of a spokesperson for the global citizens project and try to encourage students to get involved at different levels.*

Finally, Sarah proudly shared her student's study abroad experience she encouraged:

> *… She went on a trip and she said I only did that because you sent the email and I applied. So because I sent the email she took the trip. It was …study abroad in London and she ended up getting an internship in London afterwards. And then I think she actually got a job in London. Now she is back and because she did study abroad it opens her eyes and opportunities like I could get internships. So now she is a student with a valued experience, a global experience. So I think it shows you that you can go and do many things there are so many opportunities for you. If you change your mindset from I will live here for the rest of my life to I can get an internship outside, why not? Think*

about how attracted is this to employers in New York City for example. Everyone appreciate the global experience.

Bilingualism. Eight faculty members perceived relevance in learning a foreign language to enhance students' global competencies. They realized the importance of second language acquisition and emphasized the need for encouraging faculty and students to take the advantage of the existing opportunities pertaining the foreign language learning. USF encourages students to learn a foreign language in order to be eligible for the Global Citizens Award (GCA) (University of South Florida, 2015). Specifically, eligibility for the GCA requires that students complete six credit hours of foreign language study at the intermediate level or higher. Stressing the value of language learning, Donald said:

Learning new languages can open up opportunities. … Within the US you can find much greater diversity and lots of different languages spoken and opportunities to learn… of course one important aspect of globalization is the ability to learn another language, which in itself I think transformative… You know when you travel somewhere and you don't speak the language I think you missed 80% of what you would otherwise.

'Study foreign languages' was mentioned only once in the 2015 USF QEP document as a requirement for the GCA eligibility. Since the QEP should target the entire university community, three faculty members emphasized the need for the QEP team to promote second language learning to faculty in order to enhance their globally engaging projects. For example, Bill stated:

Even language experience is important, the institution should pay attention to that. And that is what I found when I work with folks from China, Spain, and Italy. We are horrible when it comes to language … the thing is, having a second language is remarkably useful.

Additionally, in order to encourage faculty to learn a second language for improving their global experiences, Sarah hoped that the QEP would consider the following suggestion:

This is more of a language thing, the previous university where I was, they offered free Spanish classes for faculty and then if you went to Spanish classes for so long you get a trip to Costa Rica and when you continue you get a trip to Spain. They [the QEP team]

could do something. I know they have limited resources but they could do some kind of programs so if you went through these workshops. So If you go with faculty cohort to wherever that would be an amazing learning experience. They got a lot of money to do that. And give faculty an opportunity to learn about countries and cultures. And so it enhances their knowledge they can bring that to the classroom somewhere.

Research Question 5: The Association Between Faculty Involvement in the Accreditation Process and their Perceptions of the QEP

When asked about their experiences with the accreditation process, most faculty members expressed positive views about accreditation and its role in institutional effectiveness. They, however, asserted that the accreditation work is not the favorite part of their work. Three faculty members made it clear that the accreditation activities are often done at the surface level, which can be perfunctory. Additionally, six faculty members confirmed that the majority of their colleagues are minimally involved in the accreditation-related work and heavily involved in department level improvement initiatives that target programs and curriculum. When asked about why their colleagues do not express interest in accreditation work, most of them indicated that accreditation related tasks are not faculty members' strengths and they are not where faculty see themselves contributing positively. The following themes emerged from the relationship between faculty involvement in the accreditation process and their perceptions of the QEP:

1. Better awareness
2. More relevance
3. Planning versus enhancement
4. Quality versus quantity

Better awareness. Eight faculty members shared that their involvement with the accreditation process created a better awareness of the QEP process compared to their colleagues who are not engaged in quality related work. They also believed that the involvement with the

accreditation process has made them more attentive to the accreditation regulatory requirements when adopting new curricular changes. Miller, for example, shared that the accreditation process, in many different ways, influences department's efforts to enhance, change, and develop new curriculum. He, however, stressed that the department has to respond to "four different circles of accreditation and they do not always match." These four circles of accreditation, according to Miller, were one regional accreditation and three different specialized accreditation agencies.

Six faculty members mentioned that their colleagues are not inclined to engage in the accreditation process and most of them described this engagement as "extra unnecessary pressure." Based on faculty members' responses to the QEPQ, three out of the thirteen faculty members who participated in the study were heavily involved in the accreditation process. The remaining ten faculty members described themselves as moderately involved in USF accreditation process. The ten faculty members who were moderately involved in USF accreditation process said that this involvement was not their favorite thing to do. Specifically, their involvement with the accreditation process was driven by need, not the desire. They believed that they could do better in areas that are outside the accreditation work. For example, Julia said, "I do not think this is my strength. I am better at doing and designing work. I am better at interaction with my students and how I teach, I do good research…"

Three faculty members stressed the need for better communication with faculty members to make them informed about the QEP and other improvement initiatives. While Bill insisted "it is the institution's responsibility to think about creative ways to engage faculty members in the QEP.", Elizabeth pointed out that, "I think the information is available. People need to attend the sessions. However, some do not, but they feel they are not involved. Involvement requires that you seek out information."

More relevance. Ten out of the 13 faculty members did differentiate between the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation before and after it added the QEP component as part of the reaffirmation process. For those 10 faculty members, the QEP is more relevant to the curricular improvement as opposed to the accreditation requirements in general. Elizabeth believed that the QEP pushes for more opportunities to enhance student learning experiences. She said, "I think we are doing quite well. We have many resources to assist students, we have planned activities, and many of my students have taken advantage of it." Leslie added that the QEP gave most faculty members a rationale when they develop their courses. Sarah pointed out that the QEP made her professional goals more aligned with the university's goals.

Planning versus enhancement. The 13 participating faculty members played significant roles in curriculum development, planning, and enhancement. Faculty with moderate to high level of involvement in the institution's accreditation process believed that the accreditation plays a big role in curriculum planning and program development within departments. Three faculty members mentioned that the accreditation process somehow guides new course planning and program development. Julia described the role of accreditation in curriculum development as following:

> *The courses we teach we have to meet SACS accreditation standards. The accountability measures; they have their own guiding principles that we have to pay attention to. And also you have to show how you are meeting them. So for every class, we have assignments that we give to students… So I had to develop rubrics that measure each construct. And each one is broken down to criteria. I've worked with SACS until my rubrics were satisfactory.*

While nine faculty members identified accreditation as the driving force for course planning, their responses to the QEP's role were mostly related to curriculum enhancement and improvement. The Four faculty members who had experiences with the QEP indicated that the

QEP is more geared towards course enhancement and that it has helped align courses' objectives with the university's strategic plan and mission statement.

Quality versus quantity. Most faculty members appreciated that the mentality of accreditation has changed from being a quality assurance system to an innovative enhancement effort. Four of them perceived that the QEP is the driving force that guides the accreditation enhancement effort and that the QEP is more of a qualitative, performance-based approach. When asked about differences they noticed after SACS added the QEP component, three faculty members raised the issue of quality versus quantitative evaluation approaches. Specifically, these three faculty members criticized the accreditation requirement of quantifying student learning outcomes where they are performance-based in most cases. For example, Julia said, "It is a matter of ideology for most of us that we do not necessarily acquire. How do we quantify quality and social justice? It can't be measured and that is a good thing." Getting into the specifics of her experience, Julia said:

> *I had to develop rubrics that were measurable quantitatively even though I had not thought of it that way. I tend to function more into the as a qualitative researcher, and most more as a critical theory kind of person rather than this kind of positivist post-positivist quantitative approach that the college of education has taken in terms of showing how we do this work.*

Bill added, "how do you quantitatively measure students' ability to act and think as scientists, social scientists, or political scientists. The fact that these skills can not be measured quantitatively does not make them poor skills." Bill also believed that the accreditation process and requirements are geared towards quantitative assessment approach that came from K12 education, which is not relevant to the post-secondary education. He explained,

> *Particularly for education, there is no one good assessment instrument for student learning above the introductory level for any discipline. It is just unknown. So you have to do subjective kind of assessment and our assessment people come from K12 education. So they can't understand the situation. The content is relevant; it is whatever you need to*

do a project. What matters is the professional development. Professional development mindsets change. Do they think like the experts know? Do they approach problems in an appropriate way for the XXX discipline that they are in. Those are not multiple choice of questions kind of things. Those are essentially longitudinal kind of thing.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this chapter was to provide detailed information on faculty members' demographic characteristics, summery of their responses to the QEPQ, and findings related to the study's research questions. Fifty-three faculty members completed the QEPQ. Out of these 53 faculty members, 13 met the selection criteria and participated in face-to-face interviews. A total of 20 different themes were discussed based on the study's five research questions. The first research question was about faculty members' perceptions of the QEP process. The three themes emerged from the findings were: (a) the QEP is about globalization, (b) the QEP is an importance, necessity-driven process, and (c) the QEP is an ambitious process. The second research question was about faculty members' perceptions of the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness. Faculty members identified several roles the QEP could play in institutional effectiveness. Examples of these roles included increasing the institution's reputation, emphasizing the institution's global identity, and promoting international research collaboration. Faculty members, however, stressed the need for institutional conversation to occur at the institutional level in order to engage the entire university community in the QEP's planning and implementation.

The third research question explored faculty members' perceptions about the QEP's role in student learning. Faculty members captured three major roles the QEP could play in student learning. Particularly, they associated the QEP with helping students to develop a global mindset and to be competitive in the workplace. Additionally, faculty members highlighted the need for

students' active participation in the QEP global activities for improving their global competencies. The fourth research question investigated faculty member's perceptions regarding the relevance of the QEP activities. Faculty members highlighted the study abroad program as the most relevant QEP activity to infusing student global competencies. The fifth research question looked at how faculty members' involvement with the accreditation process associated with their perceptions of the QEP process. Faculty members perceived that the QEP had more relevance to student learning and that their involvement with the accreditation process contributed to a better awareness of the QEP. The next chapter provides a discussion of study findings and conclusions.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore faculty perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) in a US public, higher education institution with highest research activity. The five research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do faculty members in a public doctoral university perceive the QEP process?
    a. How is the QEP process described in institutional documents?
    b. How do faculty members' perceptions of the QEP process compare to how the process is described in QEP documents?
2. How do faculty members perceive the QEP's role in institutional improvement?
    a. How is the QEP's role in institutional improvement described in institutional documents?
    b. How do faculty members' perceptions of the QEP's role in institutional improvement compare to how the process is described in QEP documents?
3. How do faculty members perceive the QEP's role in student learning outcomes?
    a. How is the QEP's role in student learning outcomes described in institutional documents?
    b. How do faculty members' perceptions of the QEP's role in student learning outcomes compare to how the process is described in QEP documents?
4. How do faculty members perceive the relevance of QEP activities on student learning improvement?

5. How does faculty member involvement in the accreditation process associate with their perceptions of QEP process?

This chapter provides a discussion of study findings, limitations, and conclusions. The discussion of findings is organized by research questions and followed by overall study conclusions. Following the discussion of study findings, a discussion of study limitations and conclusions are presented. Lastly, implications and recommendations for future research are provided. The chapter ends with closing thoughts about the study.

Discussion of Findings

Faculty perceptions of the QEP process. The first research question explored how faculty members perceive the QEP process and how their perceptions aligned with the QEP's description in the institutional documents. The three common themes that emerged from faculty responses to questions related to their perceptions of the QEP were: (a) The QEP is about globalization, (b) The QEP is an important, necessity-driven process, and (c) The QEP is an ambitious process. Faculty perceptions of the QEP at the University of South Florida (USF) were consistent with how USF QEP was outlined in the institutional documents. Achieving students' global competencies was the most identifiable purpose of the QEP as perceived by faculty members. Almost all faculty members provided thoughts and comments about the extent to which the QEP is connected to globalization and helping students to interact with the global world more effectively.

The reviewed literature indicated that faculty members often lack interest in accreditation-related activities because they are usually implemented outside the focus of teaching and learning (Land & Gordon, 2013). The QEPQ results also showed that about 60% had little to no interest in the accreditation related activities. However, involved faculty members

with the accreditation process suggested that the QEP made more sense to faculty members as it aligned with their goals regarding students' success. Additionally, faculty members acknowledged the accreditation's role in institution's prestige, improvement, and training outcomes (e.g., Hyson, Tomlinson, & Morris, 2009; Shim 2012). Faculty members in this study affirmed that the QEP is a worthwhile effort that strategically aligns student-learning outcomes with the institutional mission statement and goals. The alignment between student learning enhancement and institutional mission and goals can promote a better quality system and practice (Newton, 2010).

Overall, perceptions of the 13 faculty members about QEP were more similar to each other than different. Their perceptions did not conflict with how the QEP was outlined and described in the institutional documents. However, faculty members' level of awareness regarding the QEP varied based on department and/or college support, their roles, and their level of involvement in the QEP process. For instance, certain departments were very supportive of the QEP's theme because it aligned with their courses' content and also because one or more faculty members worked closely with the QEP team in the development stage. Additionally, the four faculty members with responsible roles in their departments demonstrated a clear understanding of the QEP process because of their mandatory exposure to the QEP in university-wide meetings and events. Finally, the four faculty members who were self-motivated to certify their courses to be QEP aligned also demonstrated a better awareness of the QEP activities and rewards. For those faculty members, the motive to participate in the QEP's course certification was to obtain the incentives granted for doing global research and collaborations.

Five faculty members described the QEP at USF as an ambitious improvement effort that needs time and resources to produce tangible outcomes. They stressed that evidence of

effectiveness may not be available in the short term given the QEP's long-term approach and goals. Goetsch and Davis (2014) argued that outcomes of educational innovation can be difficult to see when they require a significant mindset shift. As USF QEP designed to prepare students to "lead meaningful and productive lives in a global society" (University of South Florida, 2015, p. 1), two faculty members in this study indicated that achieving the QEP goals requires a significant mindset shift that can be accomplished through integrating global curriculum with relevant, real-life global activities.

One faculty member in this study suggested making effort to diffuse the USF QEP to campus and to remove obstacles to faculty participation. Goetsch and Davis (2014) suggested following a strategically based diffusion plan in order for the enhancement initiative to be influential and successful. For instance, Bennett and Bennett (2003), Sahin (2006), and Buc and Divjak (2015) recommended using Rogers' approach for diffusion of innovation in higher education. According to Rogers' approach (2010), four elements influence the diffusion or any innovation. These elements are: the innovation itself, the communication channels, the time needed for adapting the innovation, and the social system. Rogers (2010) encouraged improvement initiative teams to consider these four elements and factors that may help or hinder educational infusion when building a diffusion plan. As the nature of educational change is highly complex (Carey & Schneider, 2010), effective diffusion approaches (e.g., rogers' approach) can provide a useful framework for designing, implementing, and measuring the impact of educational innovations (Warford, 2005).

Faculty perceptions of the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness. The second research question dealt with faculty members' perceptions of the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness. Six themes emerged from the data related to the QEP's role in institutional

effectiveness: (a) emphasizing the university identity, (b) increased reputation, (c) promoting international research collaboration, (d) bureaucracy, (e) cost-effectiveness, and (f) need for institutional conversation. The researcher was hesitant to ask faculty members about their perceptions of the QEP's role in institutional effectiveness given their historical resistance to interact with institutional level conversations (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). However, it was surprising that faculty members provided insights into the different roles the QEP plays in institutional effectiveness.

Five faculty members in this study indicated that the USF QEP had emphasized the university's unique identity. Those faculty members believed that a unique university identity is a significant QEP's role in institutional effectiveness. It is important that universities build distinct identity profiles that attract both students and faculty in order to compete and become world-class (Steiner, Sundström, & Sammalisto, 2013). As USF's strategic plan promotes the university's unique identity through implementing improvement initiatives, five faculty members believed that the QEP could differentiate the university from other universities. According to faculty members in this study, having a distinctive theme that is integrated into university-wide curriculum and co-curriculum does not only give the university a unique identity, it can also increase its reputation and hence attract more students and faculty members with similar institutional interests. Similarly, O'Kane, Mangematin, Geoghegan, and Fitzgerald (2015) argued that the distinctive identity could also build legitimacy and enhance institutional reputation.

Seven faculty members in this study identified bureaucracy as a potential barrier to the QEP implementation. Bureaucracy has the tendency to facilitate complexity and achieve large-scale tasks through systematic work coordination (Birnbaum, 1988). Bureaucracy, however, can be a barrier to effective, innovative work (Wright, Sturdy, & Wylie, 2012). For instance, Findlow

(2008) perceived bureaucracy as an agent to inflexible educational system and a source of busy administrative work that is not necessarily relevant. Doctoral universities that operate as bureaucratic organizations such as USF need to be both adaptive at innovations and capable of ongoing improvement effort in order to respond to accountability demands (Eaton, 2012).

In order for the QEP improvement effort to be successful, seven faculty members suggested that the QEP team needs to make alterations to their bureaucratic structure. Despite the QEP value they perceived, the seven faculty members thought that the QEP added an additional layer of bureaucracy given the way in which it is implemented so far. More specifically, the QEP certification process, to four faculty members, felt overwhelming and time-consuming, which was not necessarily needed. Hodgson (2011) stated that engaging the entire university community in conversations related to the enhancement initiatives implementation could reduce bureaucracy. It is worth mentioning that the majority of faculty members were very pleased by the support and guidance provided by the QEP team.

Faculty perceptions of the QEP's role in student learning. The third research question addressed how faculty members perceive the QEP's role in student learning. Four themes emerged from faculty members' response regarding their perceptions of the QEP's role in student learning. These themes were: (a) globally oriented students, (b) curriculum enhancement, (c) competitiveness in the workplace, and (d) students' active participation. The majority of faculty members shared the belief that the QEP can help students to have a globally oriented mindset. All of the 13 participants provided comments regarding the importance of the global mindset and how the QEP can be the driving force for helping students think and act globally. Because most faculty members realized that the university is still in the developmental stage of

the QEP's implementation, most of them have not seen actual outcomes of how the QEP has turned students into global citizens.

In addition to the importance of globally oriented mindsets, faculty members seemed to acknowledge the QEP's role in enhancing the curriculum and co-curriculum. Two faculty members shared their approaches of adding global components and relevant assignments to their courses. They were optimistic about implementing the changes, and they expected improved global behavior as a result of these changes. Jennifer, Leslie, and Donald, for example, took serious steps to enhance their courses in order to fit into the QEP's global approach.

Globally oriented mindset represents an important personal quality to most workplaces (Zhang, 2010). There has been a universal recognition that the human resources side is a key component in any workplace and that individuals with global perspectives are needed for better organizations' productivity (Brown, Green, & Lauder, 2001). Three faculty members highlighted the QEP's role in helping students to be more competitive in the workplace. They believed that the global perspective is both valuable and desired by employers and that it can be only achieved if the QEP successfully expose students to global experiences. In addition to increasing students' opportunities in the workplaces, the exposure to global experiences can also improve career decision-making abilities among students (Kronholz, & Osborn, 2016).

The literature demonstrated that students' active participation in institutional activities helps develop intellectual skills and enhance their learning experiences (Kariyana, Maphosa, & Mapuranga, 2013; Tan, & Pope, 2007). This links to another important theme that emerged for research question three, which was the importance of students' participation in global institutional activities. Multiple faculty members shared the belief that the QEP's effort may not be worthwhile or meaningful if the QEP team fails to engage the students in the global activities.

According to the institutional documents, the QEP claimed to achieve students' participation through rewards (e.g., the Global Citizens Award) (University of South Florida, 2015). The development of the award program, according to the 2015 USF QEP, sought to obtain more students' participation. To date, none of the participating faculty members had seen the Global Citizen Awards granted to their students. Two of them, however, were motivated to certify their courses in order to give students the opportunity to win the global citizen award. Lee, Rho, and Lee (2003) confirmed that reward systems have a strong positive impact on quality enhancement processes and students' performance.

Faculty perceptions of the QEP activities relevance to student learning. The fourth research question explored how faculty members perceive the relevance of the QEP activities to improving student learning. Three themes emerged from faculty members' responses: (a) appropriateness to student learning, (b) study abroad, and (c) bilingualism. According to the participants, the study abroad program was the most relevant and appropriate activity the QEP adopted to enhance students' global experiences. Particularly, when faculty members were asked questions related to the relevance of the QEP activities, they described the study abroad program as appropriate and relevant to students' global competencies. Additionally, faculty members indicated great support of study abroad and valued its impact on students' success in a global society.

Historically, study abroad opportunities have contributed to increased self-confidence (Dwyer & Peters, 2004), global competency (Dwyer & Chapman, 2004) open-mindedness (Hadis, 2005), and independence (Black & Duhon, 2006) among college students. Describing potential benefits of study abroad on students at USF, participating faculty members used encouraging words such as: "it will change your life", "it will expand your horizon", "it changes

your own opinion", and "it may change your career path." That is, faculty members realized the great impact of study abroad programs on students' lives, career paths, world-view, and global awareness. Two faculty members discussed the desire for study abroad activities to be built into some courses when appropriate. Others believed that this might be challenging to implement especially with faculty busy schedules and workloads. Tarrant, Rubin, and Stoner (2014) argued that study abroad programs can prepare students as responsible global citizens and also can help them gain intercultural competence. They encouraged enhancement initiatives' teams to engage students' reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis of students' experiences with study abroad programs in order to use them towards programs' improvement.

In addition to the relevance of study abroad programs to students' global competencies enhancement, eight faculty members stressed the need for more effort to engage students in second language learning experiences. Faculty members did associate second language learning with study abroad activities. Most of them, especially the ones who were exposed to study abroad programs, believed in the power of study abroad programs in acquiring second language. Donald, for example, believed that if you visit a country where you do not speak or understand its language, you are missing 80% of its culture and values. That is, learning a second language maximizes communication efficiency and minimizes misconceptions. Eight faculty members suggested that USF should provide second language learning opportunities and provide rewards for both faculty and students with moderate to advanced second language proficiency. These rewards could be academic trips to countries where faculty and students can actually experience global communication and collaboration. The use of a second language is not limited to face-to-face interaction with foreign people. Faculty members and students benefit from acquiring a second language in globally, distance communication engagement (e.g., email communication,

video calls) and also in global literature exposure (Block & Cameron, 2002). The literature indicated that learning a second language can facilitate social interaction, encourage global professional collaboration, and help view the world from a different perspective (Ellis, 2015).

The association between faculty involvement in the accreditation process and their perceptions of the QEP. The fifth research questions explored how faculty involvement with the accreditation process associated with their perceptions of the QEP. The four common themes that emerged from the data pertaining to the fifth research question were: (a) better awareness, (b) more relevance, (c) planning versus enhancement, and (d) quality versus quantity. Even though all participated faculty members had a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation-related activities, their perceptions of the QEP process were not completely consistent. Particularly, variations among faculty perceptions of the QEP were not based on their involvement in the accreditation process. Instead, these variations were based on the support that the QEP team had given to faculty members in particular departments. Additionally, faculty perceptions of the QEP associated to some degree with the relevance of the QEP's focus to their particular disciplines.

Eschenfelder, Bryan, and Lee (2010) argued that involved faculty members with the accreditation process were inclined to understand, value and support accreditation related activities. Generally speaking, faculty members in this study believed that their involvement with the accreditation process contributed to a better understanding and awareness of the QEP process. They, however, held a wide variety of views regarding the QEP's roles in both student learning and institutional effectiveness. Eschenfelder, Bryan, and Lee (2010) indicated that variations among faculty members' views were based on their active participation with accreditation related activities. In this study, faculty views regarding the value of the QEP

differed based on the support their departments have been given, the appropriateness of the QEP's focus to their particular disciplines, and their departmental roles. Particularly, two faculty members stated that a colleague in their department who work closely with the QEP team encouraged and supported their involvement with the QEP. Another faculty member indicated that her exposure to the QEP was because of her responsible role in the department: "that was really my first exposure [to the QEP] and I think because I was associate director I went because of that role."

Sujitparapitaya (2014) discussed the importance of faculty understanding and awareness of enhancement initiatives in order for these initiatives to be effective. The majority of faculty members in this study believed that the QEP team needs to put extra effort to promote the QEP across disciplines as their colleagues are not really aware of the QEP and its associated activities and opportunities. Bazler and colleagues (2014) stated that faculty commitment to engage in enhancement initiatives connects to the lack of institutional support. Specifically, the QEP team needs to specify how faculty can incorporate the QEP into the curriculum and co-curriculum (Bazler & colleagues, 2014).

Bucalos (2014) argued that faculty resistance to engaging in the accreditation process comes from their perceptions that accreditation is "administrative work" that does not necessarily align with their teaching and learning responsibilities. In this study, faculty members felt the QEP process is more relevant to their work given that it focuses on enhancement as opposed to planning and also in the quality of student learning rather than the results of quantitative measures. Specifically, multiple faculty members appreciated the change of the accreditation mentality from being a quality assurance mechanism to a student focused enhancement effort. For most, student success could not simply be reflected in quantitative-based measures that come

from K-12 education. Rather, valid student success assessment at the university level requires a long-term, broad approach that monitors students' professional development with the use of a variety of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Discussion of Study Limitations

Before discussing the study conclusions, it is important to acknowledge the limitations associated with the conduct of this case study. One major limitation of this study is that it was conducted in the second year of the QEP implementation. The current USF QEP was affirmed in 2014 and has set goals that won't be reached until the 2020-2021 academic year. As this case study was exploratory in nature, it did not intend to entail an evaluation or provide judgment of the overall QEP effectiveness. The purpose was to explore how faculty members perceive the QEP during its implementation and to gain insights from a faculty perspective.

Another limitation of this study is that it is a small-scale study that is limited in scope. That is, the conclusions, recommendations, and implications were based on a limited number of faculty members at USF and also limited to similar university context. However, the recruitment process of this study required that the 13 faculty members who participated were familiar with the QEP and have better knowledge about its goals, objectives, and activities. Those faculty members were better positioned to identify areas of strength and areas that might need improvement given their level of involvement with the QEP (Newton, 2010; Provezis, 2010; Smith, 2012).

Conclusions

The guiding question for this qualitative case study was how faculty members perceive the QEP process. Participants in this study provided insights into their perceptions of the QEP's roles in student learning and institutional effectiveness. Findings from this study can serve as a

starting point for discussions among faculty members and the institutions' leadership team involved in institutional improvement initiatives. As faculty members play a primary role in the QEP's development and implementation (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2003), their insights into the QEP process can contribute to an improved institutional practice (Newton, 2010).

Generally speaking, the faculty members interviewed held positive views of the QEP process. The analysis of faculty responses emphasized their belief of the importance and necessity of the QEP process in achieving educational quality. Faculty members in this study perceived the QEP as an opportunity for the university to enhance student learning and institutional quality. These perceptions aligned with the QEP's description in the institutional documents. The successful recruitment process for this study indicated that even involved faculty members with the accreditation process could have concerns regarding the QEP implementation. Particularly, despite the positive views they held regarding the QEP process, faculty members stated that USF needs sufficient resources for achieving the QEP's ambitious goals.

The results of this study suggested that faculty believed that the QEP emphasized USF's unique identity. The development phase of any institutional change initiative involves discussions about institutional identity (MacDonald, 2013). Five faculty members in this study stated that the QEP successfully captured the shared values, qualities, attitudes, and practices that represent USF identity. However, they stressed the need for planning and promoting relevant events and activities to help the entire university community make sense of the improvement effort and thereby acknowledge its value (MacDonald, 2013).

Additionally, findings from this study suggested the need for institutional conversations that engage the entire university community in the QEP's planning and implementation. That is,

engaging faculty members in discussions and then linking these discussions to conversations at the department and institutional level about specific QEP objectives and activities may help faculty to raise more awareness and gain a better understanding of the QEP process. Even though most faculty members described the bureaucratic structure of USF and its associated top-down information dissemination style, they thought that participating in department and institutional conversations can reduce the uncertainty and ambiguity of the QEP among faculty members.

Faculty members stressed the importance for students to appreciate and respect the fact that people come from different parts of the world may think differently and hold other values. Therefore, they hoped for a successful QEP implementation that helps students enhance their global competencies. For faculty members, the QEP as it rolled out has, to some extent, the potential to help students succeed in a global society. However, they believed that a significant effort is needed to achieve wider student participation. It was clear to faculty that a considerable amount of time is required for the widespread adoption of new educational improvement effort (e.g., the QEP). They felt it is the institution's responsibility to think about creative ways to effectively promote the QEP content and encourage student participation.

Given the rapidly accelerating rate of educational innovation in the world (Rogers, 2010), it is increasingly important for students and faculty to take the advantage of existing learning opportunities that can better prepare them for the workplace. Students with enhanced global competencies and acquired global experiences are more likely to compete in the globalized job market (Dickmann & Harris, 2005). When students understand the value and importance of global experiences and global competency training in building their future career paths, they are more likely to engage actively in the QEP global activities (Brown, Green, & Lauder, 2001). Faculty members who participated in this study stated that the university should provide a

working global learning environment in which students are improved in a systematic and stimulating way with appropriate global activities. According to faculty members, study abroad programs and service-based learning are among the most relevant QEP activities that could add to students' global experiences.

A viable QEP often focuses on areas pertaining to enhancing the general curriculum, developing approaches to experiential learning, and introducing innovative teaching and learning strategies. Faculty can make improvements in curriculum, instruction, and student support services with the support of the QEP (Ford, Covino, Robinson, & Seaman, 2014). To four faculty members who participated in this study, the QEP has given a rationale for planning globally oriented assignments and introducing new teaching and learning strategies. As the QEP is geared toward undergraduate education, the different QEP activities could be expanded through the inclusion of graduate education. This could further integrate and broaden the scope of the QEP and its associated activities.

Involved faculty members with the accreditation process demonstrated more awareness of the QEP process compared to their colleagues who had little to no involvement with accreditation-related activities. The QEP should be more faculty-centered and more faculty engagement is needed for incorporating the QEP objectives into the curriculum (Provezis, 2010; Smith, 2012). As many accreditation requirements are driven by external demands, the QEP to some extent fits into faculty focus of teaching and learning. Comments from faculty members in this study suggest that the QEP is more tailored to the need of student learning improvement and also more focused on the qualitative aspect of student learning rather than quantitative measures.

Finally, faculty members in this study identified ways to achieve a more successful QEP process.

- The QEP implementation team could present a 10-minutes presentation to inform faculty members about the QEP's focus, objectives, opportunities, and resources at the beginning of each semester when departments' meetings are well attended.
- In order to encourage their colleagues' engagement, participating faculty members in the QEP activities could share their experiences, how they benefited from it, and the different ways to participate and get involved.
- The QEP team could provide incentives and rewards to maximize opportunities for faculty engagement and participation.
- The QEP course certification process could be shorter and more focused on developing instructional practices and curricular projects that enrich student learning experiences.
- As the QEP team received sufficient resources for the QEP implementation, they should invest in faculty and staff and support the relevant QEP activities such as study abroad programs and second language learning.
- The QEP implementation team could increase students' awareness and participation by developing a strategically sound marketing plan that guides the QEP implementation and allows for more participation and engagement.

Implications for Practice

Perceptions and insights that are drawn from empirical research in actual university setting can provide a better understanding of quality systems and processes as practiced and experienced (Newton, 2010). This study can inform practice for universities required to develop and implement a sound QEP for reaffirmation. Particularly, USF and other doctoral universities that have been through the QEP implementation are encouraged to use the results of this study in

conjunction with their ongoing institutional evaluation to identify ways by which they improve their QEP planning and implementation. Other institutions with similar setting and educational improvement plans can gain insights into how a sample of faculty members described these improvement initiatives within their university and the different ways in which the QEP implementation can be improved. Additionally, other accrediting agencies besides the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) can use the results of this study to see the impressions, from a faculty member's standpoint, of adding a quality enhancement component as part of the re-accreditation process.

Additionally, given that participating faculty members provided ways to achieve a more successful QEP process, the QEP team within USF can gain insights into faculty perspectives of the QEP's roles and relevance from the results of this study. Understanding faculty perspectives of the QEP can result in an improved effort to outline and deliver the QEP. Faculty awareness and acceptance are required for successful QEP implementation (Provezis, 2010; Smith, 2012). Knowing that the level of awareness and acceptance of the QEP's objectives, activities, and opportunities is not consistent among faculty members at USF can suggest ways to improve the overall communication (Romero, 2008).

Gaining faculty interest and support of the institution's improvement activities is a major historical challenge for universities (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). It is my hope that this study could provide the QEP team with an opportunity to move forward and think creatively about ways to increase faculty members' support, participation, and meaningful engagement. Being rewarded for the work associated with the QEP was recommended by four faculty members to increase engagement and participation. This study could shed lights on the importance of developing a

reward system for achieving successful faculty support of the QEP and other similar improvement initiatives.

Multiple faculty members who had experience with the QEP commented that they were not fully aware of all the QEP's objectives, activities and opportunities before their participation in this study. It is my hope that this study encourages faculty members to engage more with the QEP and encourage their colleagues to take the advantage of the QEP's existing opportunities. Ensuring that faculty, as influential members in the educational process, are engaged with the QEP process and informed of the QEP's opportunities can lead to a successful QEP implementation (Silva, 2009).

Recommendation for Future Research

Findings from this study suggest a number of possibilities for future research. First of all, the ideal time to conduct this study would be after the complete implementation of the QEP when the outcomes are more clear and visible. I interviewed faculty members in the second year of the QEP implementation and given that the QEP is a 10-year course of action, most of them described the current time as a "developmental phase." Therefore, to better reflect faculty perceptions of the QEP, a future study can be done after the full QEP implementation. Additionally, as this study included participants with experience in the accreditation and the QEP process, a future study may include uninvolved faculty members with the accreditation and the QEP and compare the results with involved faculty members to see if there are any major differences in their perceptions, challenges, and suggestions.

Even though USF has more than 1,700 instructional faculty members (University of South Florida, 2015), only 53 faculty members (3%) responded to the Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire (QEPQ). Additionally, the participants of this study indicated that their colleagues

often do not have an interest in accreditation-related activities. A future research could investigate why faculty or other key educational stakeholders respond to organizational reform or accountability efforts with resistance. Another future research possibility can explore ways to get faculty members' meaningful participation and engagement with improvement initiatives such as the QEP. Additionally, The fact that there was a communication issue between faculty and the QEP's implementation team also suggests further investigation

As this study highlights the importance of students' active participation in the QEP and other educational innovations that target student learning, a future study could explore students' perceptions of similar educational improvement initiatives and how to increase students' participation in these initiatives. Finally, given that this study is a single case study that is exploratory in nature, a multiple case study approach would be helpful to compare perceptions of faculty across different university settings. It is my hope that continuing this line of research will help to build the knowledge base related to quality improvement practices in higher education so that improvement innovations, initiatives, and activities can be more meaningful to faculty and students, and hence, more likely to improve institutional effectiveness.

Closing Thoughts

This qualitative single case study was conducted to explore a relatively new educational phenomenon. As this study was exploratory in nature, it helped the researcher learn more about the QEP and how faculty members perceived it in its second year of implementation. An effective exploration of the QEP is better done after it reaches all its stated goals. However, this study did reveal faculty members' key beliefs, challenges, and concerns related to the current QEP implementation in its limited scope.

Previous studies indicated that active faculty engagement in educational improvement activities is a key factor for these activities to be meaningful and successful (Baker, 2000; Murray, 2002; Tincher-Ladner, 2009). Even though a limited number of faculty member participated in this study (e.g., 13 faculty members), it is my opinion that improvement initiatives such as the QEP could benefit greatly from faculty members insights and perspectives. This study, in fact, supports these findings and suggests that educational improvement teams need to plan appropriate activities and employ effective communication methods to obtain faculty engagement and support, increase students' participation, and hence improve institutional effectiveness.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire (QEPQ)

Completing the questionnaire should take approximately 10-15 minutes. Please respond to every question. The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your identity as well as the identity of your college will not be published in the research findings. The information you provide about the QEP process as well as your levels o f experience and involvement in institutional planning and accreditation will be combined with the data o f your colleagues to present an institutional perspective o f the factors that influenced the QEP process at your college.

The following questions request basic background information. The purpose o f this section is to develop your study participant profile. It will also enable me to contact you to collect additional data.
Name:

_____

Please indicate the email address your prefer to receive emails during the conduct of this study:

Please identify the following:

1. Employment Category:

   ___Assistant Professor

   ___Associate Professor

   ___Professor

   ___Other, please specify _____

2. What is your employment status?

   ___Part time

___Full time

3. What is your gender?

□ Male □ Female

4. Into which of the following age groups do you fall?

□ 25- 34

□ 35 - 44

□ 45 - 54

□ 55 - 64

□ 65 and over

5. Which one o f the following best describes your ethnic background?

□ Asian

□ Hispanic

□ Black/African American

□ Native American

□ Pacific Islander

□ White/Caucasian

□ Other, Please specify _____

6. How many years have you been employed at this institution?

□ 0 – 5

□ 6 - 10

□ 11- 15

□ 16 – 20

□ 21 and over

□ Other, Please specify _____

7. What is your level of involvement in your institution's ongoing planning and evaluation?

□ No involvement

□ Little involvement

□ Moderate involvement

□ High involvement

8. What is your level of involvement in your institution's accreditation process?

□ No involvement

□ Little involvement

□ Moderate involvement

□ High involvement

9. What is your level of involvement in your institution's QEP process?

□ No involvement

□ Little involvement

□ Moderate involvement

□ High involvement

10. How much knowledge do you possess about the ideas, content, processes, and methodologies used to develop and select the focus o f the QEP?

□ No knowledge

□ Little knowledge

□ Moderate knowledge

□ High level of knowledge

11. What was your level of interest on the ideas, content, processes, and methodologies used in the QEP process?

□ No interest

□ Little interest

□ Moderate interest

□ High interest

12. What was your level of involvement in developing the QEP?

□ No involvement

□ Little involvement

□ Moderate involvement

□ High involvement

13. What was your level of involvement in selecting the final focus the QEP?

□ No involvement

□ Little involvement

□ Moderate involvement

□ High involvement

14. What topic did your campus ultimately select for the focus of the QEP?

_____

_____

15. How relevant do you see the focus of the QEP to student learning?

□ No relevance

□ Little relevance

□ Moderate relevance

□ High relevance

16. How relevant do you see the focus of the QEP to institutional improvement?

□ No relevance

□ Little relevance

□ Moderate relevance

□ High relevance

Would you be interested in being interviewed for further information?

□ Yes, My email address is: _____

□ No

Appendix B

QEPQ Recruitment Email

Subject: Faculty Perceptions of the QEP Research Study

Study title: Faculty Perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan in a US Public Doctoral University with Highest Research Activity: A Single Case Study

Dear faculty member,

My name is Maha Alamoud. I am a doctoral candidate in the Measurement and Research Department at the University of South Florida. I am conducting a research study as part of the Ph.D. requirements of my degree and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying faculty perceptions of the quality enhancement plan at USF. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that will take from 10 to 15 minutes. The questionnaire will help me identify participants who will be part of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the primary researcher office. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

This study was approved by the USF IRB (IRB#: Pro00026258) on May 27, 2016. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me

at malamoud@mail.usf.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Jennifer Wolgemuth, Phone: (813) 974-7362, or Email: jrwolgemuth@usf.edu If you have concerns, complaints, questions or wish to discuss your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Office at (813) 974-5638.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate in the questionnaire, the link below will take you the questionnaire. Thank you for taking the time to participate in the study.

https://docs.google.com/a/mail.usf.edu/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf1haDkeMRdBcmomV84Zentz1fOS66fz2PldsjrBdfoUEysUA/viewform?c=0&w=1

With best regards,
Maha Alamoud

Appendix C

Initial Faculty Members' Interview Protocol (Initial Version)

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this study that will explore your perceptions regarding the QEP process in your institution. I appreciate that you are willing to take your valuable time to meet with me.
You have completed the Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire and now will participate in the interview. You will be asked a series of questions. I will record this interview and the recordings will be transcribed. The transcript will be shared only with my advisor. Please understand that anything you share with me will be treated as confidential and reported only in codes. No names will be used. Your institution name will appear as pseudonyms.
Before we begin, do you have any questions?

1. How long have you worked in this institution?
2. Please describe your role in curriculum development regarding the courses you are teaching.
    a. Probe: what about your role in accreditation related activities?
3. Do you believe there is a need for change and improvement in your institution with regard to student learning?
    a. Probe: How?
4. If a new faculty member to your department was to ask you about the QEP process and why it exists, what would you tell him?
5. What is different after the QEP component was added to the accreditation process than before?
6. How is your experience as a faculty member different since SACS accreditation added the QEP component as part of the reaccreditation process?
7. What do you think about the activities included in the QEP? Were they relevant to student learning?
8. How has the QEP impacted the curriculum? Classroom assessment? Program design?
9. How sufficient are resources allocated to implement the QEP?

10. What characteristics of the QEP of your institution do you believe it support student learning growth?
11. Are there any areas of the QEP in which you feel a need for additional professional development or assistance?
12. Do you feel satisfied in your understanding of the logic and theory behind the QEP?
13. Have you found a need for communicating to the university administration (QEP office) for specific additional professional development?
14. How do you feel about working in a QEP committee?
15. What factors hider the implementation of the QEP in your institution?
16. What factors support the implementation of the QEP?
17. What is your belief regarding the effectiveness of the QEP process in your institution?
18. As a result of the QEP process in your institution, have you adopted new instructional practices that has improved student learning?
19. In your estimation, has the QEP plan prompted students to improve their academic effort?
20. How relevant is the components of the QEP in your institution to student learning?
21. How relevant is the components of the QEP in your institution to institutional improvement?
22. How applicable is the QEP to your particular courses?
23. To what extent has the QEP process increased pressure on you as a faculty member?
    a. Probe: Was this pressure worthy? How?
24. Has the QEP impacted the way you develop and evaluate your own classes?
    a. Probe: in what ways?
25. What positive consequence do you associate with the QEP process?
    a. Probe: Do you find implementing the QEP has enhanced student learning? Institutional effectiveness?

26. What negative consequence do you associate with the QEP process?
    a. Probe: Do you find implementing the QEP has hindered student learning? Institutional effectiveness?

27. What other information would you like to share regarding the development and the implementation of the QEP in your role as faculty?
28. What other information would you like to share regarding the implementation of the QEP in your local setting (e.g. curriculum)?

Thank you so much for your time.

Appendix D

Faculty Members' Interview Protocol (Final Version)

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this study that will explore your perceptions regarding the QEP process in your institution. I appreciate that you are willing to take your valuable time to meet with me.
You have completed the Quality Enhancement Plan Questionnaire and now will participate in the interview. You will be asked a series of questions. I will record this interview and the recordings will be transcribed. The transcript will be shared only with my advisor. Please understand that anything you share with me will be treated as confidential and reported only in codes. No names will be used. Your institution name will appear as pseudonyms.
Before we begin, do you have any questions?

I. Background questions

1. How long have you worked in USF?
2. Tell me about your role in curriculum development regarding the courses you are teaching.
    i. Probe: what about your role in accreditation related activities?
3. Do you believe there is a need for change and improvement in your institution with regard to student learning?
    i. Probe: How?

II. QEP related questions

1. Faculty involvement

4. Have you been involved in accreditation related activities, if so, could you please describe that experience?
5. Have you been involved in the QEP process, if so, could you please describe that experience?
6. Tell me about how would you feel about working on a QEP committee?
7. Have you felt the need for additional professional development in regards to the QEP?

8. To what extent has the QEP process increased pressure on you as a faculty member?
    i. Probe: Do you feel this pressure was misplaced, well placed, or neither? How?
9. Tell me about what positive consequence do you associate with the QEP process?
10. Tell me about what negative consequence do you associate with the QEP process?

2. Description of the QEP

i. If a new faculty member to your department was to ask you about the QEP and why it exists, what would you tell him?
ii. Tell me about what differences you notice at USF in regards to the implementation of the QEP prior to and since the accreditation process?
iii. How is your experience as a faculty member different since SACS accreditation added the QEP component as part of the reaccreditation process?
iv. Tell me about your belief regarding the effectiveness of the QEP process in USF?

3. QEP's role in institutional improvement

15. In what ways, if any, the implementation of the QEP has enhanced institutional effectiveness?
16. In what ways, if any, the implementation of the QEP has hindered institutional effectiveness?

4. QEP's role in student learning

17. In regards to your courses, how has the QEP impacted the curriculum? Classroom assessment? Program design
18. Please tell me about new instructional practices you adopted as a result of the QEP process in your institution.
    i. Probe: have these practices improved student learning?

19. In what ways, if any, the implementation of the QEP has enhanced student learning?
20. In what ways, if any, the implementation of the QEP has hindered student learning?

5. QEP activities relevance

21. How are the activities put in place by the QEP relevant to student learning for the students in your classes/courses (mention examples of the activities)?
22. How relevant are the components of the QEP in your institution to institutional improvement?
23. How applicable is the QEP to your particular courses?
24. How sufficient are resources allocated to implement the QEP?

III. Additional information

1. What other information would you like to share regarding the development and the implementation of the QEP in your role as faculty?
2. What other information would you like to share regarding the implementation of the QEP in your local setting (e.g. curriculum)?

Conclusion of the interview

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today. If you think of anything you would like to add please contact me at: malamoud@mail.usf.edu or 813-451-5850. As I said earlier, all the information you provided will be kept confidential. Upon the completion of this study, the interview transcripts will be destroyed and discarded. The information you provide during the interview may be quoted, however, none of your comments will be linked to your name.

Appendix E

Interview Email

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study about faculty perception of the QEP in a US public, SACS accredited, doctoral university with highest research activity. As stated in invitation email, the risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. Upon your consent, I will record this interview. The interview will be transcribed only for research purposes and **will not** be used for any other purposes. The audiotapes will be kept in a secure place throughout the study. Upon the completion of this study, the interview transcripts will be destroyed and discarded. The information you provide during the interview may be quoted, however, none of your comments will be linked to your name.

This interview may take one to two hours. Follow-up interviews may be conducted as needed. Your participation is greatly valued. Please suggest a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available.

Thank you,

Maha Alamoud

Appendix F

Interview Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Pro # 00026258

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

Faculty Perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan in a US Public Doctoral University with Highest Research Activity: A Single Case Study

The person who is in charge of this research study is *Maha Alamoud***.** This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by *Drs. Jennifer Wolgemuth and Liliana Rodriguez-Campos*.

The research will be conducted at *the USF Tampa campus*

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore how faculty members in public, SACS accredited, doctoral universities with highest research activity perceive the QEP process. Specifically, the study will explore faulty members perceptions of the QEP's role in student learning and institutional improvement. Additionally, the study will find out how faculty involvement in the accreditation process associates with their perceptions of the QEP.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you completed the online questionnaire and elected to be considered for the interview. Additionally, you are asked to take part of the study because you are a faculty member who:

- Work full time
- Have a minimum of five year of experience in higher education
- Have a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation related activities
- Have a moderate to high degree of knowledge regarding the QEP process

Study Procedures:

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed. The expected duration of the interview is approximately 1 to 2 hours. The time and place of the interview will be decided upon based in your preference. The interview will be audiotaped. Audiotapes will be kept secure in a flash drive for the use of the primary researcher. The primary researcher will transcribe the audiotapes and will destroy them five year after the data collection.

Total Number of Participants

About 15 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.
You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits

The potential benefits of participating in this research study include improving the QEP process in your institution.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, research nurses, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call *Maha Alamoud* at *813-451-5850*

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study**.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____ _____

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix G
Reminder email for interview

Dear,

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my study. This email is confirming our interview time at ___ on ____.

I am very excited to have your insight into the QEP. Attached please find the informed consent form for you to sign and return to me either hard copy or electronically. I also attached the interview protocol in case you want to read it.

Thank you for your time and support. I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,
Maha Alamoud

Appendix H

Thank You Letter After Interview

Dear,

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in my study. I appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts about your experience with the QEP and the accreditation process, which were extremely interesting and informative.

As I mentioned in the interview, all the information you provided will be kept strictly confidential. I will be using pseudonyms and no identifying information will be recorded.

Again, thank you for your time and assistance with the completion of my research

Sincerely,

Maha Alamoud

Appendix I

Individual invitations to faculty

Faculty Perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan Research Study

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Maha Alamoud and I am a doctoral candidate in the Measurement and Research program at USF. I am conducting a research study on faculty perceptions of the quality enhancement plan. If you agree to participate in this study, I would appreciate if you could fill out a questionnaire that will take from 10 to 15 minutes. The questionnaire will help me identify participants who will be part of the study.

https://docs.google.com/a/mail.usf.edu/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf1haDkeMRdBcmomV84Zentz1fOS66fz2PldsjrBdfoUEysUA/viewform?c=0&w=1

If you meet the inclusion criteria and are willing to participate in the study I would be very grateful. I will be using pseudonyms and any identifying information will be confidential. The interview will take about 1 to 2 hours.

I sincerely hope you agree to participate. If you have any questions please email malamoud@mail.usf.edu or call 813-451-5850.

Thank you for your time and assistance with the completion of my study.

Best,
Maha Alamoud

Appendix J

Face-to-face interviews IRB form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Pro # 00026258

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study. We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called: **Faculty Perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan in a Public Doctoral University with Highest Research Activity: A Single Case Study**. The person who is in charge of this research study is Maha Alamoud. This person is called the Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator is being guided in this research by Drs. Jennifer Wolgemuth and Liliana Rodriguez-Campos.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to explore how faculty members in public, SACS accredited, doctoral universities with highest research activity perceive the QEP process. Specifically, the study will explore faulty members perceptions of the QEP's role in student learning and institutional improvement. Additionally, the study will find out how faculty involvement in the accreditation process associates with their perceptions of the QEP.
Why are you being asked to take part?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a faculty member who:

- Work full time
- Have a minimum of five year of experience in higher education
- Have a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation related activities
- Have a moderate to high degree of knowledge regarding the QEP process

Study Procedures
If you take part in this study, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire should take approximately 10-15 minutes. Please respond to every question. The

information you provide will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be published in the research findings. The information you provide about the QEP process as well as your levels of experience and involvement in institutional planning and accreditation will be combined with the data of your colleagues to present an institutional perspective of the QEP process. The questionnaire is the first part of the study. That is, the other part of the study will be face-to-face interviews. If you chose to provide your contact information in the questionnaire, then you will be contacted to do a face-to-face interview. The target number of interviews is 15.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal
You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer; you are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits and Risks
You will receive no benefit from this study. This research is considered to be minimal risk.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online.

- It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the USF IRB at 974-5638. If you have questions regarding the research, please contact the Principal Investigator (Maha Alamoud) at [*813-451-5850*] or email: malamoud@mail.usf.edu.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by proceeding with this survey that I am agreeing to take part in research and I am 18 years of age or older.

[https://docs.google.com/a/mail.usf.edu/forms/d/1OF0_qtjvLZ13KkYh6K3LazRmVsMX2CJY1cHIXehJ3gU/viewform.]

Appendix K

QEPQ IRB form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Pro # 00026258

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study. We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called: **Faculty Perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan in a Public Doctoral University with Highest Research Activity: A Single Case Study**. The person who is in charge of this research study is Maha Alamoud. This person is called the Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator is being guided in this research by Drs. Jennifer Wolgemuth and Liliana Rodriguez-Campos.

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Why are you being asked to take part?

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- Work full time
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- Have a moderate to high degree of involvement in accreditation related activities
- Have a moderate to high degree of knowledge regarding the QEP process

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire should take approximately 10-15 minutes. Please respond to every question. The

information you provide will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be published in the research findings. The information you provide about the QEP process as well as your levels of experience and involvement in institutional planning and accreditation will be combined with the data of your colleagues to present an institutional perspective of the QEP process. The questionnaire is the first part of the study. That is, the other part of the study will be face-to-face interviews. If you chose to provide your contact information in the questionnaire, then you will be contacted to do a face-to-face interview. The target number of interviews is 15.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer; you are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits and Risks

You will receive no benefit from this study. This research is considered to be minimal risk.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online.

- It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the USF IRB at 974-5638. If you have questions regarding the research, please contact the Principal Investigator (Maha Alamoud) at [*813-451-5850*] or email: malamoud@mail.usf.edu.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by proceeding with this survey that I am agreeing to take part in research and I am 18 years of age or older.

[https://docs.google.com/a/mail.usf.edu/forms/d/1OF0_qtjvLZ13KkYh6K3LazRmVsMX2CJY1cHIXehJ3gU/viewform.]

Appendix L

IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX(813)974-2091

May 27, 2016

Maha Alamoud
Educational and Psychological Studies
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#: Pro00026258
Title: Faculty Perceptions of the Quality Enhancement Plan in a US Public Doctoral University with Highest Research Activity: A Single Case Study

Study Approval Period: 5/27/2016 to 5/27/2017

Dear Ms. Alamoud:

On 5/27/2016, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Study_Protocol

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
interview_informed_consent.pdf
Online_consent, version#1

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s). Consents granted a waiver are not stamped.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.117(c) which states that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either: (1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or (2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. (Online Consent)

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John A Schinka, Ph.D.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board