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Contents

Standing Room Only: The Contentious Crematory Debate in the Sleepy Town of Bethany, OK Gary Steward, Jr, John B. Fritch, & Jaclyn C. Spomer.....	4
Continually Searching for Quality Correlates in Funeral Service Education: Expanding the Research Population Seeking Statistical Significance and Enhanced Predictability John B. Fritch	31

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Standing Room Only: The Contentious Crematory Debate in the Sleepy Town of Bethany, OK

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Abstract

This study explored the controversy over a proposal to construct a crematorium in Bethany, Oklahoma. A well-respected funeral home in the community, submitted a zoning proposal to the city council to construct an additional funeral facility that included a crematory. A group of citizens, who opposed the construction of a crematory, had surfaced by the end of 2014. By June of 2015, the group had successfully mobilized resources and fiercely resisted the proposal. The antagonism launched by the community group eventually led the funeral home to withdraw their proposal. This research documents the growing controversy between competing interests within the theoretical framework of social movements. Data was drawn from the city's website, and particular media accounts. A timeline was developed to understand the manner in which the protesting group mobilized resources that would eventually frame the issue in the media as, among other things, a "health hazard."

Introduction

A controversy erupted during the first half of 2015 in a small suburb located on the northwest edge of the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Bethany, considered by many to be a sleepy and conservative community, drew the attention of local media when an established funeral home submitted a proposal that included, among other things, a crematorium. Gust (Opponents to Bethany Crematorium file Petition, 2015) described the debate as “bitter.” The city attorney claimed that this was the “most contentious issue Bethany has had in quite a while.” A community member noted her disappointment by the division the issue caused within the community, characterizing the debate as a “dog and pony show.”

The funeral home submitted a Planned Unit Development (PUD) proposal in the fall of 2014, seeking to rezone property (owned by the funeral home) that would allow for the construction of a new chapel and crematorium. The property had been zoned for commercial-retail. The proposal for the site was adjacent to a prominent neighborhood in Bethany. Also within close proximity to the site was a retail store, senior assisted-living center, and a small restaurant. A simple majority vote of a nine-member council was necessary to approve the proposal. Despite fierce protest as reported in the media, the city council approved the measure in mid-February by a 5 to 4 margin, paving the way for the construction of the new facility.

Confronted by the headwinds of legal challenges, heightened rhetoric, and a palpable division within the community, the funeral home formally withdrew its proposal in April 2015. Although the construction plans were withdrawn, opponents continued to press for a city-wide vote to reverse the council’s initial approval.

Local media coverage of the controversy spanned more than six months. The first media report on December 31, 2014, highlighted interviews with two concerned residents who lived in the neighborhood closest to the proposed site. Coverage of the controversy peaked in mid-February, and again in early April. By June 2015, the debate subsided with a final vote and the issue receded from public view.

This research focuses on the crematory controversy in Bethany, Oklahoma. Drawing from local media (including transcripts from broadcast from local networks), we construct a timeline of the controversy through the lens of media reports; broadcast, print, and internet. We also detail the manner in which proponents and opponents frame (based on media reports) the proposal of a new crematory and how these frames (or narratives) led to the sequence of events that ultimately resulted in a city-wide referendum.

Literature Review

Central to the investigation of the controversy surrounding the construction of the crematorium in Bethany, Oklahoma is an examination of the literature in areas that directly impact the study, including literature surrounding the history of cremation, development of cremation in the United States, and current trends related to this method of disposition.

Although cremation services, and the funeral service industry as a whole, has been the topic of extensive media and trade journal discussion, limited empirical research has been conducted focusing on the funeral service industry and cremation services, with no prior research focusing on the framing of media outlets with respect to a proposed crematory development.

Consequently, limited literature was discovered regarding this specific dynamic.

This review focuses on three areas. The first area examines materials related to the history of cremation followed by a brief review of cremation in the United States. The final area addresses the developing trends related to cremation.

The current increases in cremation in the U.S. should not be interpreted as a novelty, or a new direction regarding disposition of the body. It is believed that the first cremations took place around 3000 B.C., during the early Stones Age, and that by 1000 B.C. cremation as a method of disposition had become somewhat widespread (Fritch & Altieri, 2015; CANA, 2014; Prothero, 2001). Cremation, as a means of disposition, is evident in the ancient cultures of Greece, Rome, and Scandinavia (Fritch & Altieri, 2015; CANA, 2014; NFDA, 2014; Prothero, 2001). Without dispute, cremation is rooted in antiquity, and does not have its beginnings in contemporary society.

More suitable to the current study is a review of literature that presents the arrival of cremation as a means of disposition to North America. Fritch & Altieri (2015) note that 1876 marks the year that most scholars consider the dawn of the cremation age in North America. Fleege (2005), examines the six original arguments for cremation articulated by Dr. Francis Julius LeMoyne. LeMoyne is heralded as the first person to construct a crematorium in the United States. His arguments included; natural law, sanitary, economical, religious, social and political. Fleege further quotes LeMoyne stating, “Cremation treats the body of a prince as it does that of a peasant.”

CANA (2014) aptly documents the chronological evolution of cremation in the United States, showing a gradual increase from 20 crematories in operation in 1900, to 52 crematories by 1913. These 52 crematories were collectively conducting some 10,000 cremations annually. By 1975, more than 425 crematories engaged in nearly 150,000 cremations per year. This

increase from 1913 represented eight times the number of crematories, and 15 times the number of cremations. Another significant period of increase was from 1975 to 2006. The number of facilities increased nearly five-fold (more than 2,000), conducting more than 800,000 cremations per year in the United States (CANA 2014).

Central to the study at hand is the significant increase in the selection of cremation, and the concomitant motivations for this option of disposition. Fritch & Altieri (2015) report that in 2011, the annual cremations in the U.S. topped the one million threshold. It was predicted that in the calendar year 2015, the percentage of cremations would exceed the percentage of burials for the first time in the U.S. (CANA, 2014; NFDA, 2014). Why do people today choose a cremation service? CANA (2014) research indicates that 30% of people select cremation to save money, 13% to save land, eight percent claim it is a simpler form of disposition, six percent report that their remains will not be placed in the earth, and six percent simply cite that it is their personal preference.

As cremation rates continue to increase in the United States, funeral homes without crematories are evaluating the prospects of constructing their own facility. While some homes are equipped with their own crematorium, those who do not are undoubtedly conducting environmental scans and market analysis for the plausibility of new construction.

Methods

This study investigates the crematory controversy in Bethany, Oklahoma. Specifically, we identify the manner in which the funeral home staff and the opponents to the crematory frame the issues in the debate through the lens of the media reports. We utilized frame analysis and content analysis to uncover the development and communication of competing narratives between the funeral home and their advocates and a grass-roots citizen group.

The data used in the analysis draws from twenty media reports collected between December 31, 2014 and June 10, 2015. The media documents consisted of two local newspaper companies, the *Edmond Sun* and *Bethany Tribune*, and a regional paper with state-wide distribution, the *Daily Oklahoman*. Most of the media reports were from local network affiliates. Some of the content was delivered through evening broadcasts. In such cases, we used the transcripts of the broadcast in our analysis. The remainder of the reports were found on their respective websites as news stories. Analysis of these documents and media broadcasts (transcripts) provides a view, as reported by the media, of the narratives (frames) of the competing parties.

The analysis was divided into three distinct processes. First, we read all of the media reports in chronological order. We agreed to record our impressions of the controversy, regardless of the significance at the time. Second, we re-read the documents and coded or indexed comments and quotes. Finally, we combined and refined our codes to distill the data into frames or narratives that eventually were used for the content analysis. Once we refined the frames used by both parties, we simply counted the number of references made, either by the reporter or by a quote, to each of the frames or narratives.

For inter-rater reliability, two of the researchers counted the number of references made to the defined frames and came within an acceptable difference. The differences, while minor, were discussed and the process repeated. One initial problem involved quotes that encompassed two narratives or frames. While the frames are mutually exclusive, some quotes included more than one frame or narrative. For example, a protestor might complain of mercury pollution and depreciating home values. We determined to count the quote as satisfying two narratives.

Analysis

A Profile of Bethany, Oklahoma

Bethany is located on the northwest edge of Oklahoma City and considered a suburb of the larger metro. The city was founded on July 28, 1909, by members of the Church of the Nazarene. The founders desired to express their religious beliefs without interference from non-members. (cityofbethany.org, 2015). The town was named after the Biblical place of Bethany, meaning, house of song or house of affliction. Retrieved from Bible Study Tools website: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/bethany/>.

Bethany Quick Facts (2016) states the city encompasses approximately 5.2 square miles with an average population density of 3,644 people per square mile. According to the 2010 census, there were 19,051 people living within the municipal boundaries. Since 2010, it is estimated that Bethany experienced a slight growth in overall population at a rate of 2.8%. Almost 17% of the population is 65 years or older and nearly 60% of the residents are over 18 and under 65 years of age.

The median household income between 2009 and 2013 was nearly \$42,000. The racial composition of the community is mostly white (77.6%- 2010), with African-Americans at 5.6% and 13.4% self-reported as Latino. The homeownership rate within this same period (2009-2013) is estimated at 62%, with the median value of an owner-occupied home at \$108,000. Retrieved from Bethany (city) QuickFacts from the U.S. Census Bureau website: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/40/4005700.html>.

The City of Bethany (2016) specifies the city government is based on the council-manager form. The city council is composed of two members elected from each of the four wards. The mayor is elected to complete the nine-member council. The city manager, city attorney, and municipal judge are appointed by the council.

Notable employers include two private four-year liberal arts universities (Southern Nazarene University and Southwestern Christian University), Bethany Public Schools, Deaconess Hospital, the Children's Center, and Wiley Post Airport. Retrieved from City of Bethany website: <http://cityofbethany.org/>.

Media Coverage

Media coverage of the controversial construction of a new crematory began at the end of 2014 and continued through the first half of 2015. The Proposed Unit Development (PUD) by an established funeral home in Bethany was contested by some community members. Ultimately, the contestation of the proposal by ardent opponents resulted in a city-wide referendum. While the controversy unfolded over a six month period, this research centers on the key narratives or frames crafted by the competing parties. This view is derived through the lens in which the media reported their respective positions.

The first media report appears on December 31, 2014 (news9.com, 2014). This is followed by a second media report from the same outlet on January 16, 2015, which described a public hearing convened by the community development group. In the midst of standing room only, views were aired from all sides of the issue, including expert testimony. Nearly a month later, the city council approved the proposal by a 5-4 margin on February 16, 2015. In the latter half of March, those who opposed the new crematory filed an injunction on the construction of the facilities. Opponents collected the number of signatures to meet the threshold for a city-wide referendum to reverse the council's approval. (See Appendix Figure 1 for timeline of events)

Twenty media reports were examined that appeared between December 31, 2014 and June 12, 2015. The distribution of sources included three local newspaper articles, two articles published by the state paper, and 15 reports that were a mix of broadcasts and stories found on

the news stations respective websites. For consistency, we analyzed the transcripts from the broadcasts. This ensured similar textual analysis across all mediums.

Our initial impressions based on the first read of the texts converged on three salient themes. First, is the favored status of “crematory or crematorium” in the titles of the media reports. We found this word appeared in a disproportionate number of titles between December 31, 2014 and June 2015. Of the 20 media reports, the word “crematory” or “crematorium” appear 16 times in the title. It is important to note that the crematory was only a part of the proposal. The construction of a new funeral home (chapel) was overshadowed by the presence of a crematory. Contrary to the center of the controversy, the chapel would have been the most visually prominent structure, with the crematory attached to the back-end of the facility. Throughout the controversy, the crematory crowded-out virtually all other considerations. When a rare reference was made about the funeral home, it was always inextricably entangled with the more notable narrative of the crematory.

The second theme in our initial scan of the documents was an escalating expression of emotion conveyed in both the media titles as well as the content of the reports. This was most notable at three chronological points; the public hearing, the city council vote, and the city-wide referendum. For example, “concerns” grew into “push back.” Later reports cite “strong opposition” and “outrage” on the part of the protestors. There is a growing emotional investment that unfolds in the media reports. The earlier reports in which “concern” was the overriding emotional theme, intensifies, an agitated opponent who emphatically stated.

I pray to God you don't approve this... If I thought it would do any good, I would get on my knees and beg you not to approve this. I know we're supposed to respect the dead, but what about respecting the living? (Gust, 2015, “UCO professor adds to debate,” para. 13). The third impression that we noted in our initial scan may be one of the more intriguing elements of the debate. It was cited in the first media report and surprisingly did not resurface

throughout the controversy. A resident defines what would become the elements of the debate and proactively precludes frames of morality and the economics of cremation. He reportedly stated, "... and other homeowners support cremation services, but not on that land" (news9.com, 2014, para 4).

In this manner, the individual preference for body disposition, whether burial or cremation, was removed as a possible narrative or frame from the outset of the debate. Frames of morality, ethics, economics, or preferences, were simply excluded from the media reports. This seemed an oddity to us, especially in a small community, flanked by two private four-year religious universities. We incorrectly assumed that a religious frame would find traction within the midst of the controversy.

Oppositional Frames

The opponents of the Proposed Unit Development (PUD), framed their concerns around three major narratives, including: 1) air quality, 2) depreciation of property, and 3) appropriateness of a crematory next to a senior assisted-living center. Later in the debate, traffic and parking issues gained traction as a narrative.

The first media report citing the concerns over the construction of a crematory surfaced on December 31, 2014. While these early narratives lacked the precision of their later counterparts, they foreshadow the landscape of more focused narratives in the ensuing weeks.

The early stages of the opponents' efforts were marked by feelings of "concern," with the primary narrative of "location" bubbling to the surface. For example, one resident states, "We just feel that a crematory is way too intense of a land use issue here next to all these homes, particularly next to an elderly assisted living facility" (news9.com, 2014, para 4). Another example of a less focused narrative (or one of uncertainty) is denoted by the word "possible."

This word appears twice in a quote by another resident in the neighborhood that is adjacent to the proposed crematory. This resident reportedly stated, "...worried about a possible odor from the facility and a possible change in property values... its important to air [error] on the side of safety when it comes to our public health" (news9.com, 2014, para 6-11).

"*Air Quality*" The first narrative outlines air quality, and includes mercury poisoning, odor, and public health issue. A few opponents are cited in media reports that underscore this narrative.

"We will have to look at it, smell it and breathe the air that comes from it (newsok.com, 2015, para 10). "I am concerned about the toxicity and quantity of the emissions" (newsok.com, 2015, para 11). Another media report claims that several of the neighbors' perspectives are captured in the following, "...they don't want the smell of death floating in their backyard. They are also concerned about mercury being released into the air" (Shanahan, 2015, "Property owners oppose plans for Bethany crematorium," para 5).

Gust (2015, "UCO Professor adds expertise to debate"), a reporter for *The Daily Oklahoman*, cited opponents objections to the proposed crematory due to "air quality (mercury), foul odor, and a general nuisance" as the basis for their opposition. At the public hearing, opponents contended that the Environmental Protection Agency's lack of regulations regarding crematoriums is due to underreporting. As this opponent suggests, "...there are odors associated with crematoriums and that discussed mercury levels were underestimated" (Gust, 2015, "UCO Professor adds expertise to debate," 2015, para 7).

The executive director of a nearby senior assisted living center also is concerned with air quality issues, "It will become a three-story neighborhood icon that regularly spews smoke and though there are claims that it will not smoke, there is no evidence backing up those claims." and

again, "...crematories emit smoke and other pollutants, such as mercury" (Schleicher, 2015, para 6).

"Depreciation of Property" The narrative of property depreciation was evident in the seminal stages of the controversy. As one resident bluntly put it, "If I knew a crematorium was going in there, I would never bought a house here" (Shanahan, 2015, "Bethany residents concerned about proposed crematory," para 2). Another resident frames the proposal in terms of investment, "The homeowners need to be taken into consideration... We have a lifetime investment in our homes and when we bought, did not expect zoning to be open for this type of business" (newsok.com, 2015, para 9).

"Inappropriate Location for Type of Business" The frame or narrative of the "inappropriate type of business at this location" is largely connected to the mental health of seniors living in an assisted living center adjacent to the property. Presumably, the crematory would remind elderly of their own demise. It is implied that this reminder would cause mental anguish or anxiety. For example, the executive director of the senior living center reminded the media of the purpose of her facility and the negative psychological impact on residents. She is claimed to have said...

The crematorium will have an adverse psychological impact on the residents who live within 100 feet of the proposed funeral home. The 23 residents are between the ages of 70 and 104... We try to create an environment for our residents that focuses on possibilities rather than limitations and provides a foundation for a positive aging experience... We are greatly concerned that the presence of a crematory will undermine this... (newsok.com, 2015, para 12).

Another resident in the adjacent neighborhood also is concerned with the senior citizens in the center, stated:

It's right by Sterling house of Bethany, a senior adult living center. Six of their residents will be looking out at it, sipping a cup of coffee and realizing they see a person going up in smoke. It's emotionally devastating for that person (Calderon, 2015, para 4).

A later narrative that develops as part of the “inappropriate location,” initiated by the senior living center executive director, involves the daily congestion of traffic and parking issues, “...a new funeral home, especially one with a crematorium, would not be appropriate located next to her senior living facility (Gust, 2015, “Bethany City Council approves rezoning for funeral home,”).

Proponents of the Funeral Home

The key frames of the funeral home can be divided into three distinct categories; technical, business-driven, and appeal to reputation. While the technical frames and business-driven frames are most widely used, appeal to reputation appeared to resonate with supporters. “*Technical Frames*” Technical frames include information that details the operation of the crematorium. They typically were crafted by proponents to counter or respond to questions or claims that were considered false, wrongheaded, or misinformed. The need to respond with a technical frame is noted in a quote by one of the staff members of the funeral home, “...people are misinformed due to information found on the internet. The most disturbing thing is people are finding things on the Internet that are not thoroughly researched... information being circulated is not true” (newsok.com, 2015, para 15).

In another media account, one of the funeral home directors attempts to counter the assertion that crematoriums smoke and emit odors. In this report, the director provides a technical frame to refute such claim.

...the odor is actually non-existent. There is a little bit of smoke when the cardboard container that a person is in initially catches fire in the cremator, but beyond that, you hit 1700 degrees and everything is re-burned essentially and there is virtually no smoke (news9.com, 2014, para 8).

And again, the report includes technical information about the process of cremation.

...two crematorium chambers reaching temperatures of 1800 degrees. What human remains don't turn into hot gas and exit out the top of the stack fall to the bottom. Each stack, which is the chimney like structure, has to be at least 13 feet tall to operate properly, but code requirements in this case call for 15 feet (Chaney, 2015, para 4).

To underscore the technical frame, another employee of the funeral home states his hands-on research of residents in two suburbs considered part of the larger Oklahoma City metropolitan area, "...[he] researched the issue and found funeral homes with established crematoriums in Midwest City and Edmond and do not have odor problems. 'Don't you think if they did that people would be complaining to the press?'" (Gust, 2015, "UCO professor adds expertise to debate," para 7) As a follow-up, another funeral director states, "Other communities have crematories... You don't even know if someone is being cremated" (newsok.com, 2015, para 18).

In the community meeting, on February 17th, one of the opponents of the rezoning proposal showed a YouTube video of black smoke billowing from a crematory in Oklahoma City. The worker of the facility is overheard to say that this is an issue at times with obese persons. In responding to this video clip, one of the directors of the funeral home implies the plausibility of this claim by noting, "There is no smell, no smoke of any kind. There could be with larger individuals, so that's something we would do out of house" (Schleicher, 2015, para 8).

"Business-Driven Decision" The second frame used by the staff and funeral directors of the funeral home relied on business-driven narratives or frames. This type of frame addresses the "reason" or "motivation" of the rezoning proposal, paving the way for the construction of the new chapel and crematory. An example of this type of frame, from one of the directors of the funeral home, is quoted as, "They have tripled [cremation rates] in the last 25 years...It would be beneficial for the business to have its own crematory, instead of contracting with a third party" (news9.com, 2014, para 10). In another media report, another director is cited as stating, "The

cremation percentage has increased to the point where it's economically feasible to have our own" (Shanahan, 2015, "Bethany residents concerned about proposed crematory," para4).

A version of the business frame, which can often be perceived as a untoward motivation, is found in the comments of one of the directors of the funeral home. In this frame, the director acknowledges the growing cremation rates (business) but softens the frame by suggesting that an in-house cremation would bring comfort to families, "...there is a growing trend toward cremations, and having it on site would give families comfort versus taking the body to another location for cremations" (Gust, 2015, "Bethany City Council approves rezoning for funeral home," para 7).

"Appeal to reputation" This version of the business frame actually bridges the final frame. Appeal to reputation is a frame that attempts to connect to the professionalism and compassion of the staff. It teases out both intent as well as artifacts that can be verified by those who question the intent of the funeral home. An example of this narrative includes a statement from Bethany's community development director, "...the funeral home has a long track record of maintaining an attractive and reputable business in Bethany" (newsok.com, 2015, para 6).

A customer of the funeral home characterizes the funeral homes reputation as professional, and treating her with "great passion" at the passing of her father. This customer stated.

For \$600 they took him [deceased father] to Missouri for burial... They were gone from their families for two days and paid for their hotel, meals and gas. They saved me thousands from having to use a second funeral home in Missouri (Gust, 2015, "Bethany City Council approves rezoning for funeral home," para 19).

In another report, the directors of the funeral home were surprised by the public opposition. They vigorously contend that they would not do "anything to harm their neighbors" (Shanahan, 2015, "Bethany residents continue to fight crematorium," para 13). A staff member

adds, “If we thought it was any type of threat, we wouldn’t put it in that proximity.” It is noteworthy to mention that proponents were also appreciative and spoke highly of the funeral home and the contribution they have made to the community in the past. Finally, as a final attempt to appeal to reputation one of the funeral directors actually lives in a neighborhood in close proximity to the proposed site.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to identify the chronology of events and uncover the frames or narratives used by competing groups in the Bethany crematory controversy, as seen through the lens of media reports. We collected 20 media reports. Two sources were from a large newspaper company with state-wide circulation (The Daily Oklahoman), three reports were from small suburban newspapers (Bethany Tribune and Edmond Sun), and 15 sources were from local network affiliates. Some of the sources were transcripts from broadcasts during the evening news. In other cases, the reports appeared as an article on their respective websites. For consistency, we determined that everything should be analyzed as a text.

In viewing the chronology of events, there were three clusters or inflection points of reports. Collectively, thirteen of the 20 reports analyzed (65%) are published on or around mid-February, mid-March, and around June 10, 2015 (See Appendix Figure 1). Each of these coincide with a significant event in the controversy; 1) the vote of the city council to approve the Proposed Unit Development (PUD), 2) the filing of the petition, and 3) the referendum (city-wide vote) on the city council’s approval of the PUD.

In reviewing both Table 1 and Table 2 in the appendix, the number of references to the opponent’s frames are reported about a third more often (n= 62 to 41). This is likely explained by journalistic style in reporting contrasts and perhaps the over-reporting of the narratives of the

protesting group. It may also reflect the victorious party in the referendum, as the citizen's group successfully reversed the decision of the city council. A numerical count of references to frames in different periods throughout the conflict was beyond the objectives of this research.

Table 2 clearly reveals a consistency among the number of times each of the three primary frames are mentioned, by either the reporters or protestors. The eight references to traffic and anti-business frames was a later development in the controversy. Conversely, the proponents of the proposal clearly referenced technical frames more often than business-driven and appeal to reputation frames. The distribution of references, 20 (technical) 13 (business-driven), and eight (appeal to reputation) (see Table 1), is a reflection of a group endeavoring to educate the public. While the funeral home staff failed to convince or assuage the fears of the protestors, they did persuade the city council. The approval of the zoning proposal was clearly a victory for the funeral home.

As it turns out, proponents were contesting with two different audiences. The city council and the residents and business owners impacted most by the new construction. While technical frames may work to disarm suspecting council members who pledge to lead dispassionately, they may not be an effective narrative for the opponents fueled by anxieties of public health and depreciating home values. We are not suggesting that the protestors acted irrationally. After all, they provided evidence vis-à-vis a YouTube video of black smoke bellowing out of a crematorium in Oklahoma City. The funeral home directors had to reframe their "no smoke" narrative to "no smoke if the decedent is not obese." In fact, the funeral home agreed to contract with a third-party provider for all decedents weighing more than 400 pounds. While this appears to be a minor admission, it may have called into question the veracity of other technical frames.

Another interesting finding within the distribution of the proponents frames (Table 1), is the lack of reference to “reputation” by the local newspapers. It was a surprise to us that not one reference was made to the funeral home establishment as a reputable business and friendly neighbor for decades. This may be the result of the few references to “reputation” in general or the few number of published reports by local organizations (three reports published). The state paper seemed to be much more generous in reporting the reputation frame. Several opponents stated that the funeral home staff were compassionate and had been part of the Bethany family for decades.

Limitations

There were several limitations connected to the research. First, we developed frames or narratives and assigned meaning accordingly through the lens of the reporters. Journalists do not report in a neutral free environment nor are their reports neutral free. While journalistic standards of neutrality and objectivity are highly valued, research has shown repeatedly that one’s observations are always strained through the filter of experience, values, language, education, etc.

Another limitation rests in the low number of reports coming from local sources. We only identified two stories in the Bethany Tribune over the seven month period. A third limitation of the study rests in the reality that this is a single case scenario. In order to generalize the findings of this research, it would be beneficial to examine media reports surrounding other debates surrounding the construction of proposed crematories.

Future Research

The Bethany crematory controversy is a potentially rich source of future research. To address the issue of assigning meaning through media reports (see first limitation), in-depth

interviews with proponents, opponents, and city council members will confirm or disconfirm the frames developed in this research.

Future research demands more aggressive and exhaustive research in local sources surrounding this debate. This includes searching through the student publications at both universities (Southern Nazarene University and Southwestern Christian University). We are also interested in references made to social media and the Bethany 300, a social media website developed by members of the opposition. In-depth interviews would likely tease out the strategies used by the opponents. There was a notable shift in strategies after the city council rendered a favorable vote to the funeral home. We are interested in the manner in which the opponents mobilized their resources and sustained a campaign over a several month period to reverse the city council's decision in a city-wide referendum.

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Appendix

Table 1

Proponent Frame	Technical	Business	Appeal to reputation
Media/Broadcast/Print	11	10	2
State	4	2	6
Local	5	1	0
Total	20	13	8

Explanation of Data Set Table 1

The frames found relating to the proponents included; technical, business, and appeal to reputation. There were 41 total sources.

The **technical** frames found within media pertain to the operation of a crematorium and the overall safety of the community. The **business** frames found in the media were linked to the decisions of the funeral service and how it would help or hurt the overall community. The **appeal to reputation** frames were associated with the overall reputation of Mercer-Adams Funeral Service.

***The Media/Broadcast/Print** related to anything television related. The **State** frames relate with Oklahoma newspapers

Table 2

Opponent Frame	Air Quality	Depreciation in Property	Appropriateness of location	Miscellaneous (Traffic/Parking/Anti-Business)
Media/Broadcast/Print	12	14	15	2 = Anti-Business
State	4	1	3	3 = Traffic
Local	3	3	1	1 = Traffic
Total	19	18	19	Traffic = 4 Anti-Business= 2

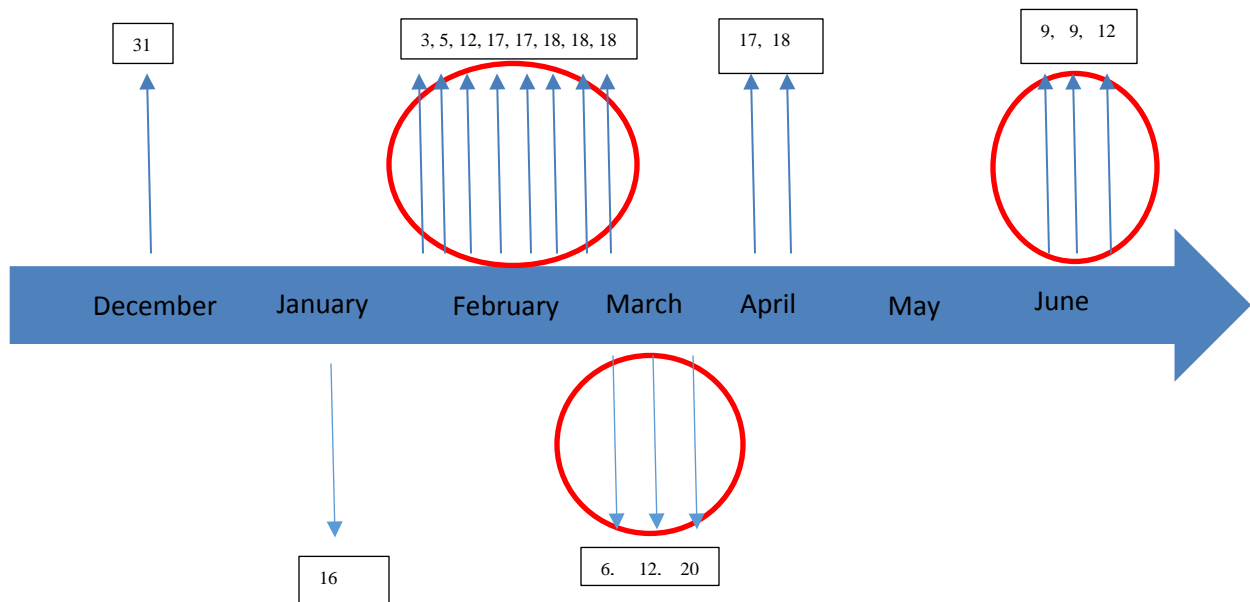
Explanation of Data Set Table 2

The frames found relating to the opposition included; air quality, depreciation in property, appropriateness of location, & miscellaneous (parking/traffic/anti-business). There were 64 total sources.

Air Quality was mentioned pertaining to pollution and overall health risks. **Depreciation of property** was mentioned due to community members in the area worried about their homes becoming worthless. **Appropriateness of location** was mentioned due an assisted living center being located near the proposed site. **Miscellaneous** frames were more directed at parking in the area, traffic would increase, and it would not promote businesses coming to Bethany.

*Media, State & Local are described in Table 1

Figure 1



Explanation of Figure 1

This timeline represents the narrative of events found in the media. The blue arrows depict certain dates when the media wrote stories or other news broadcasts were aired. The red circles depict a surge of this media attention.

Continually Searching for Quality Correlates in Funeral Service Education: Expanding the
Research Population Seeking Statistical Significance and Enhanced Predictability

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Abstract

This study sought statistical significance by expanding the research population of a previous study seeking to determine what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation. The population includes funeral service educators ($N=91$) at funeral service programs accredited by the American Board of Funeral Service Education. Participants completed a self-report online survey which assessed their perspectives regarding the importance of a collection of educational correlates related to program quality. Survey responses were statistically analyzed using standard multiple regression. The results indicated that 49% of program quality variance may be predicted by the set of predictors utilized in the study. These results, coupled with semipartial correlations, facilitated the advancement of the Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model. The results reveal a different ranking of elements associated with program quality and further add to the body of empirical research aiding those charged with assessing program quality in higher education.

Searching for Quality Correlates in Funeral Service Education: Expanding the Research Population Seeking Statistical Significance and Enhanced Predictability

The governing board of funeral service education in the United States is the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), (abfse.org, 2015; Bigelow, 1997) for which accreditation standards are designed to ensure that the basic and necessary academic components required to be a funeral service professional are consistently offered to every student. Despite the efforts of the ABFSE to secure that funeral service education institutions offer quality instruction, identical accreditation standards are set for all 57 accredited programs regardless of individual institution requirements or the degrees that are offered (abfse.org, 2015; Bigelow, 1997). Fritch & Williams (2011) indicated that although programs represent various levels of educational institutions offering diverse requirements and degrees the accreditation requirements remain the same. Fritch (2014) sought to ascertain what defines funeral service education program quality beyond basic accreditation, and found that 89% of program quality variance may be predicted by a set of predictors. He additionally discovered that by calculating semipartial correlations, a Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model could be developed to predict and reveal elements associated with program quality. These findings inspired the current study, and the desire to determine elements associated with funeral service program quality as well as to discover statistical significance.

The literature discovered during the original study is summarized here for research and discovery purposes. Funeral service education literature discovered centered on funeral service students or issues related to accreditation and instruction.

Cahill (1999) discovered that often the rest of the campus considered funeral service students outcasts. Mingling with members of the college outside of the mortuary program

usually was ended when it was realized that someone was an aspiring funeral director. It was further discovered that the classroom and lab environments were unique for this major and a distinctive vocabulary existed among the group; speaking of dead bodies as “cases” and referring to the embalming lab as “the morgue” are two examples of such rhetoric. The study found that students not capable of dealing with these considerations do not last long in the program as they often struggle with every aspect of the curriculum and the practice involved with funeral service. The author concluded that although the mortuary science experience is significant in the preparation of students for a career in funeral service, including certain aspects of normalizing and socializing death and the uncomfortable aspects associated with these realities, this experience in and of itself is not the only acting element with respect to professional socialization in the field of funeral service. The majority of students that are successful in this program have had some level of exposure or experience with death and dying.

Shaw and Duys (2005) sought to ascertain the dominant work values of mortuary science students and if any similarities or differences exist with respect to these values when gender, age, family work history, and ethnicity are considered. Evaluating data with regression analysis, it was discovered that the work values most significant to mortuary students were economic security, achievement, personal development, ability utilization, and economic rewards. It was further realized that differences did exist involving race. African American students were more driven by advancement and personal development, and were less driven by social interaction and social relations as compared to Anglo Americans, of which creativity was unimportant (Shaw & Duys, 2005). Shaw and Duys concluded that the racial difference may reflect the level of prestige a race holds for the funeral profession and the low score related to creativity may inhibit

a successful career in funeral service as contemporary families expect funeral directors to be creative in celebrating the lives of loved ones.

The National Board Exam (NBE) serves as one of the final steps in achieving licensure in numerous states and the ABFSE maintains records of the successes and failures of every student because schools of mortuary science must maintain a minimum first time pass rate of 60% or a program may be put on probation, and if scores do not improve lose accreditation status (abfse.org, 2015; Bigelow, 1997; Habenstein & Lamers 2010; Poston, 1987). Poston (1987) investigated if certain demographic variables can serve to predict the performance of mortuary science students on the NBE. Data were collected from a pool of graduates from a Midwestern school of mortuary science over a five year period, $N=107$. The variables considered consisted of age, ACT Natural Science score, ACT Math score, ACT Composite score, final grade point average in mortuary science and funeral service courses, experience in funeral service prior to entering mortuary school, high school class rank, and gender. Utilizing multiple regression and correlational analysis, certain variables were discovered to serve as predictors for performance on the NBE. Significant relationships exist between GPA, ACT scores, high school rank and success on the NBE. No significant relationship was found between prior experience in funeral service, age, gender, and success on the NBE (Poston, 1987). This research showed that prior academic success may serve as a predictor of future academic success. As NBE scores are critical for obtaining and maintaining program accreditation, the knowledge of the relationship between these variables and NBE scores can assist educators in assisting students that may be at risk of not succeeding on the NBE.

Frade (1997) found that it is critical to ensure that all students have adequate access to appropriate educational technologies. These tools may aid in the student learning process,

research, and publication process. Survival in an ever-changing educational environment was cited as a need for the enhancements and trends proposed in the study. As the student population in mortuary science grows more diverse it will be necessary for educators in this field to challenge students with a creative vision (Frade, 1997).

Carter (1999) found that effective instructors listen to questions, problems, and viewpoints both patiently and sympathetically, and the effective instructor demands courtesy from all students. Associated with the ineffective instructor was making negative comments, skipping steps in developing theory, exhibiting no interest in student problems, and blaming students for poor work while never questioning one's own presentation of material. Explaining topics, reviewing test and paper responses, allowing time for questions and the logical development of subject matter are the cornerstone elements of effective instructors in funeral service education.

Broomfield (2000) concluded that the majority of funeral home operators do not believe that a baccalaureate degree is necessary in mortuary science. He further determined that Illinois funeral directors do not believe a baccalaureate degree should be required for licensure nor would they offer a higher wage for employees with a baccalaureate degree.

Considering the contemporary struggle with accountability in higher education it would be beneficial to inquire if a program is adequately preparing students to enter the work force. Focusing on recently licensed funeral directors' opinions regarding their perceptions of the level of professional preparedness offered from the funeral service curriculum, Taggart (1989) examined these opinions relative to certain personal variables. Employing a survey instrument with a five point Likert scale, the relationship between professional preparedness in 10 areas significant to funeral service (e.g., removing the deceased, preparing the body for embalming,

arranging for the funeral, etc.) and five personal variables (class rank, prior work experience, age, educational level, and employment status) was examined. These variables were explored to determine preparedness using information from 447 recent graduates. Taggart found that three of the personal variables explained more than half of the variation realized in the study. The perceptions of educational preparation were highly influenced by individuals' backgrounds, class rank and age. Taggart (1989) concluded that if ratings are to be used as a tool to gauge professional training it is important to remember that these data are highly subjective in that ratings on ability may be related as much to personal experience as to their real preparation. A graduate's status within the funeral home of employment, rank in their graduating class, and age have a significant influence on individual opinion regarding professional preparedness.

Two studies focused exclusively on elements of the ABFSE, considering both the history and central elements of the board and also considering specifically the external evaluation team (Bigelow, 1997; Reinhard, 2010). Presenting the historical development of the ABFSE, Bigelow (1997) offered the process that was required for the ABFSE to become the sole accrediting agency for funeral service education. The 5 major divisions of the board are offered:

- Scholarship: A national scholarship program is available to both undergraduate students and to graduate faculty members.
- Curriculum: Responsible for insuring that the common curriculum taught at every accredited program is current, relevant, and accurate.
- National Board Exam Liaison: A responsibility exists to communicate between the ABFSE and the Conference of Funeral service Examining Board (CFSEB); this board handles the testing functions as mandated by the United States Department of Education.

- Accreditation: Responsible for accrediting all academic programs in funeral service.
- College and University Council: This organization reviews recommended motions for new or altered policies and procedures and also serves as the only national voice for funeral service educators in the United States.

Additionally, Bigelow explained: that each accredited program must undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once each 7 years, that contrary to widespread speculation the board does not provide any ranking of the programs, all programs are required to meet all standards, and accreditation serves to assure the consumer that students will receive adequate, fair, and relevant instructions in all accredited programs.

The lack of empirical research on funeral service program quality necessitated the investigation of the literature researching program quality in higher education. This search exposed a triad of recurring themes; exploring different ways to define quality and the characteristics associated with quality in higher education, the importance of previous studies that provide indicators of institutional prestige and reputation in the development of additional research, and research that directly sought to determine elements that are associated with quality educational programs or institutions.

A primary step necessary to unearth educational elements associated with quality institutions and programs is to grasp a clear understanding of the definition of quality. The search for this understanding is common in the literature (Bogue, 1998; Dew, 2009; Freed, 2005; Grunig, 1997; Odden, 1990; Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009; Tam, 2001), resulting in various perspectives on the same issue. Quality as endurance (stand the test of time), luxury (luxury items are of high quality), conformance (reduction of quality to specified characteristics), continuous improvement (encouraged innovation), and value added (education should add value

to the student) is the Dew (2009) approach to this challenge, who asserted that it is possible to frame the issue of quality in higher education through these lenses.

Partially concurring on the traditional elements associated with quality, Bogue (1998) offered theories and definitions of quality including conforming to specifications, fit for use, achieving a mission, improving continuously and considering multiple factors. Bogue further offered three theories of quality in higher education, including limited supply, quality within mission, and the theory of value added. The contemporary issue of accountability is present in this understanding of quality; the ability to assess both student and program performance should be part of any quality investigation. Bogue (1998) concluded that the discussion of the definition of quality initiates a conversation about the purpose of quality. Quality is a moral and ethical issue in higher education. The concept of the ethical professor and a variety of accountability measures are additional gauges of quality in higher education.

Tam (2001) explored measuring quality and performance in higher education. Central to her presentation is an understanding that quality means something different to different people. At the heart of the presentation is the necessity of the inclusion of elements central to the students' experience when evaluating quality. If an evaluation fails to address elements associated with student learning and the general level of intellectual and emotional progress being made throughout the years in the educational institution, it is incomplete (Tam, 2001).

Various studies associated aspects of a total quality environment when defining or explaining frameworks of quality in higher education. With a focus to create educational institutions that mirror the world that students will encounter, a more extensive presentation of a total quality environment was developed by Freed (2005). This model consists of 11 characteristics associated with total quality environment:

- Ask new questions and be concerned about the answers; assist the students in understanding the learning process.
- Create a learner-center environment. The learning process should be collaborative.
- Through continuous feedback develop more self-awareness.
- Develop trusting relationships with students through conversation and other communication.
- Allow communication to create a sense of community in the educational institution.
- Be aware of your value system and work to understand others; share these with others to develop a common understanding of the educational institution.
- Utilizing feedback, require students and faculty to reflect on both successes and failures in an effort to improve the organization.
- Work to make connections to the world outside of the educational arena. This will aid in making learning more applicable to the students.
- Design challenging assignments and provide students with an opportunity to achieve these lofty goals.
- Realize that teaching is a service and implement service-learning into the curriculum, and
- Faculty need to understand the importance of asking the right questions. Strive to make students think critically by asking challenging questions.

The importance of the application of these characteristics rests in the belief that students need to focus on skills that will be required in the workplace. As evidenced in these characteristics, students will not necessarily need to know the answer to specific questions but attain an understanding of how to ask insightful questions. If these characteristics are missing from the

educational institution students will not be adequately prepared to address the challenges of the workplace and life in general (Freed, 2005).

Investigating the literature concerning higher education quality one quickly realizes the significance of previous research related to measurements of higher education reputation in the development of additional studies (Bogue, 1998; Dill & Soo, 2005; Grunig, 1997; Schmitz, 1993; Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009; Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006). The importance and potential impact of educational indicators are more than trivial. These items can influence policy makers, resource allocation, admissions and staffing decisions. Schmitz (1993), concerned with the accuracy and validity of educational indicators, sought to discover to what extent educational indicators are valid and if indicators commonly used in a national perspective are appropriate from a regional standpoint. Two sets of data compiled by *U.S. News and World Report* serve as the data analyzed. He confirmed that entrance test scores serve well in predicting reputation in all institutions and that retention and graduation serve in a lesser capacity in this role. He further noted that interactions exist between selected indicators and institutional categories, creating limitations to these findings. Research, student assessment, and faculty and administrator development are all regularly accepted as indicators of higher education quality, but if these educational indicators are going to influence public policy it is critically important that additional research be conducted in order to ascertain a more definite definition of quality and more relevant indicators of exceptional educational processes (Schmitz, 1993).

Volkwein and Sweitzer (2006) investigated elements of higher education that have been identified as contributing to reputation and prestige related to research universities and liberal arts colleges. The existing literature that served as foundational elements for this study found that size, selectivity, percentage of faculty possessing Ph.D.s, faculty publication, average cost of

tuition, room, and board, as well as retention and graduation rates are associated with institutional reputation and prestige. Results of regression analysis concluded that institutional control, age, size, and resources are foundational elements with respect to enrollment levels and that strong faculty, students and academic outcomes work together to enhance institutional reputation and prestige at research universities and liberal arts colleges (Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006).

Continuing the investigation of higher education reputation and prestige, these authors searched for elements associated with prestige among individual graduate and professional schools. Sweitzer and Volkwein (2009) examined the peer assessment ratings developed in the 2008 *U.S. News and World Report* regarding schools of business, education, engineering, law, and medicine. Although studies inquiring about reputation and prestige at the undergraduate and graduate levels existed, studies that examine correlates of prestige for individual programs and professional schools were short in supply. Beyond identification of correlates of reputation and prestige in these specific programs, Sweitzer and Volkwein also wanted to determine if the same correlates hold true in these programs as they do for undergraduate and graduate levels in general. Validity problems associated with ratings in higher education were offered, including doubts with respect to using ratings to measure quality and the very issue of differing opinions about what actually constitutes quality.

Regression analysis revealed that the indicators of reputation and prestige for these programs were very similar to the results at the undergraduate level found by Grunig (1997) and at the graduate level indicated by the *U.S. News and World Report* data, which indicated that reputation and prestige are influenced by enrollment size, admissions test scores, and faculty publications. Although the exact level of relationship between each indicator and specific

program varied, these indicators were consistently associated with reputation and prestige at the undergraduate, graduate, and across various disciplines (Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009).

With an interest in the direct implications of increased research on institutional reputation and prestige, Grunig (1997) examined the relationship between undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs at research universities. The impact of reputation on different programs and levels of education as influenced by research were of special interest in this study. The comparative analysis revealed that among undergraduate programs, both public and private, the difference in ratings is largely due to institutional size and admissions selectivity. Results further indicated that the amount of research performed by an institution has a substantial impact on the ratings received by undergraduate programs. Implementing education that has an important effect is essential in the contemporary higher education arena. Competition for resources is increasing and governmental support is diminishing. Central to attracting funds and improving educational reputation and prestige is increased dedication to institutional research (Grunig, 1997).

Grasping the international interest in indicators and increasing demand for data on higher education quality, Dill and Soo (2005) conducted a comparative analysis of predictors. In search of a consensus regarding the measurement of higher education quality and examining the implications of different ranking systems, Dill and Soo compared systems in Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and the United States. Notwithstanding differences in rating systems, they found that a common approach to evaluating quality in higher education is emerging. Indicators such as selectivity, quality of faculty, and research were considered important measures across systems. They further discovered that the definition of academic quality is converging across rating systems, consisting of input measures such as selectivity of admissions, quality of faculty,

and financial resources available to the institution. Additionally, the importance of governmental policy, and the impact determinants of quality may contribute to this policy, entered the equation with respect to the overall educational quality rating of an institution (Dill & Soo, 2005).

Acknowledging the inherently controversial nature associated with rating academic quality, Geiger and Feller (1995) investigated the importance of academic research in ascertaining academic quality. Inspecting growth and dispersion of funds for academic research in the 1980s, the fundamental argument in this study centered around the accumulation of institutional assets through dispersions related to research. The link between quality faculty, research funding and institutional capabilities served to enhance institutional quality. The quantity of full professors combined with programs that graduate a large number of doctoral students enhance academic quality, it is argued. The connection between quality and research benefits institutions of higher education, providing incentive for all institutions to pursue faculty accomplished in research and publication (Geiger & Feller, 1995).

Hagstrom (1971) examined correlates of program prestige by analyzing the quality ratings of 125 departments in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. The study utilized a survey instrument to gather data, the collection of career data for sampled people via the American Men of Science, and information regarding participant publication records through the Science Citation Index. Linear multiple regression analysis revealed significant results with respect to departmental prestige. Hagstrom found that department size, accounting for nearly one-third of variance associated with departmental prestige, is found to be significant when considering department prestige. The average production of research publications coupled with average citations were found to account for more than half of the variance with respect to departmental quality. Research opportunities, faculty background, student characteristics, and

faculty awards and offices held were also found to be significantly correlated with quality programs. Hagstrom further noted that quality programs typically have higher morale and better interpersonal communication, providing additional support for the importance of achieving a quality program (1971).

Continuing the investigation of correlates of departmental quality in higher education, Conrad and Blackburn (1985) suggested that “Program quality or excellence is both timeless and a timely issue in American higher education. What constitutes quality, how to identify it, and how to foster it are questions that have concerned educators since the colonial colleges” (p. 279). This claim leads to an examination of correlates of departmental quality at the masters and doctoral level, specifically in regional colleges and universities. Conrad and Blackburn investigated five departments: biology, chemistry, education, history, and mathematics at 22 regional colleges and universities. In order to measure the dependent variable, department quality, teams of external evaluators were developed to evaluate the programs. To quantify the results of the evaluations a 5-point scale was used in the evaluation process and scores ranged from high praise to a recommendation of closure. Five major categories were part of the evaluation; these consisted of faculty, students, program, facilities, and support. In total, 164 independent variables within these five categories became part of the study. Using the analytic tools established in the Hagstrom (1971) study, results revealed that scholarly productivity (the strongest indicator), age, tenure status, origin of highest degree, teaching workload, as well as proportion of advanced degree programs and library size, are all correlated with departmental quality at regional colleges and universities. These findings are consistent with studies of nationally highly ranked institutions but the relationship between the variables in the regional

schools are not as strong, revealing that at the regional level departmental quality correlates are more diverse and multidimensional (Conrad & Blackburn, 1985).

In a study that replicated the work of Conrad and Blackburn, Young, Blackburn and Conrad (1987) expanded the sampled programs in the analysis of program quality in regional universities. The sample doubled the number of departments and increased the number of institutions and programs investigated. Even with the increased sample in this study the same variables were determined to have the greatest predictive value when measuring program quality. Scholarly productivity by faculty was again the greatest predictor of program quality, but the relationship is not as strong indicating that “traditional indicators of quality may be valid, but they carry a different weight at regional institutions” (Young, Blackburn, & Conrad, 1987, p. 322). In conclusion, Young, Blackburn, and Conrad suggested that additional research needs to be conducted to further the understanding of the fundamental problem of defining program quality and ascertaining correlates of quality in various educational areas, including regional institutions.

The continual search for elements that correlate with departmental and program quality and prestige in higher education was brought into question when Keith (1999) studied the institutional context of departmental prestige in American higher education. The focus of the study was the comparison between university characteristics and attributes bestowed upon specific departments within the university. Investigating data from three previous studies that examined the perceived quality of faculty in departments granting research doctorates, selected faculty were mailed a list of competing departments and were requested to judge the departments; no evaluator was permitted to comment on their respective department. The survey instrument included variables such as prestige ratings, scholarly publications, citations per

faculty, departmental publications, faculty size, graduate student enrollment, proportion of highly rated departments, research universities, and institutional control. Analyzing the data with factor analysis, regression analysis, and a two-way analysis of variance, significant results were obtained. Keith discovered that specific departments within universities had comparable ratings to one another and that university's reputations influenced individual department ratings. The implications of this research are significant in that "this study shows that departmental ratings are primarily tied to institutional reputations" (Keith, 1999, p. 431). Keith advised that future research needs to address the purpose of teaching, research, and scholarship needs, and he calls for attention to the educational-economic connection and the necessity to track career patterns of graduates associated with different institutions (Keith, 1999).

The literature presented discloses a strong interest in what defines quality in higher education. This, coupled with a lack of empirical research in funeral service education, supports the need for additional research directly related to this field and specifically dedicated to seeking correlates that predict quality in funeral service education. This follow up study expands the research population in search of correlates that identify a quality funeral service education and seeks statistical significance. The central research question of the current study remains, what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation?

Method and Results

This research sought statistical significance and enhanced predictability concerning what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation. The research methods of Fritch (2014) were duplicated, the new data provided the opportunity to examine the new population, and then when added to the original data expanded the population in an effort to discover statistical significance, greater predictability, and further develop models produced in

the original study. Both studies utilized elements commonly associated with quality in higher education, and additional items specific to funeral service education. Standard multiple regression (utilizing IBM SPSS 21) was used to analyze the data collected via an online self-report survey instrument, seeking to discover predictive qualities of the educational elements analyzed.

The central focus of this research, funeral service education, presents unique parameters with respect to location and number of programs. Currently there are 57 accredited funeral service programs in the United States (abfse.org, 2015), limiting the research population, which necessitated a census study. To best answer the fundamental research question, what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation, it was important to attempt to gather data from the entire population of accredited funeral service education programs in the United States. The original study sought the participation of all funeral service program directors, ultimately the data of 45 program directors was included in the original study. The current study utilized the relationships built with the program directors, and requested that they ask faculty, both adjunct and full-time members, to participate in the study. Ultimately an additional 55 funeral service educators participated in the research, more than doubling the population of the original study.

Consistent with the original study, and to maximize the amount of data collected, listwise deletion was utilized during the regression analysis. This resulted in the data of 49 of the 55 educators in the population evaluated in the study. When the data from both studies were compiled together, listwise deletion resulted in the data of 91 of the 100 educators as part of the research population.

An analysis of the demographic information of the current study was performed after the final subjects were determined. The data included both personal information and information about the institutions the participants represented. The data revealed a wide range of participants with regard to age. This range included: four participants between the ages of 20-30, six participants between the ages of 31-40, and 15 participants between the ages of 41 and 50, 18 participants between the ages 51 and 60, 11 participants between the ages of 61 and 70, and one participant between the ages of 71-80. Not consistent with the original study was the discovery that several educators are not licensed funeral directors and embalmers, nine participants indicated they are not licensed funeral directors, and 10 indicated they are not licensed embalmers, in the original study only one participant reported not being a licensed embalmer and only two reported not being licensed funeral directors. Consistent with the original study, the number of years teaching funeral service varied across categories; 15 subjects teaching 0-5 years, and 12 subjects teaching 16-20 years receiving the highest recurring responses. Two areas of the personal information revealed striking new data, departing from the original study. First, it is significant to note that in the current study 32 respondents are male and 23 female, a major difference from the original study that discovered the sample population of program directors to be male dominated (76% of the original study were male). Second, the current study discovered that 15 of the participants (or 27%) had earned a doctorate degree, an increase from 20% in the original study.

The institutional demographic information was consistent with the original study and revealed similarities and differences consistent with the diverse institutions in funeral service education. The majority of programs employed one to six full-time faculty members and relied

heavily on adjunct instructors. 26 programs counted on the assistance of one to three adjuncts, and three programs reported using more than 13 adjunct instructors.

Evaluation of the data consisted of a two-step process, examining the reliability of the scaled items, and the actual regression analysis. Cronbach's alpha calculated for the scaled items showed the reliability coefficient, $\alpha = .880$, indicating good internal consistency in the measurement of the importance items (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Statistical analysis did not suggest excluding any scaled items; the exclusion of any items would not have improved the reliability index.

Standard multiple regression analysis was conducted to answer the central research question of the study, what defines a quality funeral service program beyond accreditation. Descriptive indices (means and standard deviation) for the scaled items on the instrument were also calculated (see Table 1). The criterion was regressed against the list of predictors (regress y on x) to determine the R squared value which reports the strength of prediction, and allows for the creation of a prediction equation, which can be used to make future predictions with respect to program quality in funeral service education. This equation was developed (see Table 2). The prediction equation was developed using the unstandardized b-weights in an effort to generalize beyond the sample of the study. The regression analysis revealed R square = .837, indicating that approximately 84% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors [$F_{39,9} = 1.184; p = .420$], leaving only 16% unaccounted for in this model. However, the adjusted R square value = .130, indicated a large amount of fluctuation among the predictors due to sample size, but this value was more promising than the -.504 of the original study. The omnibus F test found the R square value and the subsequent prediction equation to be

statistically non-significant, a result expected by the researcher as a consequence of the small sample size and the large number of predictors used in the model.

The expansion of the original study (N=91) allows further assessment of the available data, principally immersing the entire collection of respondent responses together, increasing the study population in the search of more clarity regarding funeral service education program quality beyond basic accreditation. The results of combining the data from both studies revealed the following: Cronbach's alpha calculated for the scaled items showed the reliability coefficient, $\alpha = .892$, indicating good internal consistency in the measurement of the importance items, and statistical analysis did not suggest excluding any scaled items; the exclusion of any items would not have improved the reliability index.

The regression analysis revealed R square = .493, indicating that approximately 49% of the variance in program quality was accounted for by the set of predictors [$F_{39,51} = 1.271$; $p = .209$], leaving 51% unaccounted for in this model. However, the adjusted R square value = .105, indicated some fluctuation among the predictors due to sample size. The omnibus F test found the R square value and the subsequent prediction equation to be statistically non-significant, a disappointing, yet expected result as a consequence of the small sample size and the large number of predictors used in the model.

Discussion

The discussion of the results of this study will present both general observations and the advancement of the Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model developed in the original study.

The expanded population found that the percent of participants holding a doctoral degree increased from 20% to 26%, still problematic when considering improving the overall research

in the field, but certainly a general improvement with respect to members of this population trained to conduct empirical studies in this discipline. No doubt immense opportunities exist for trained professionals interested in funeral service and funeral service education research.

It is also encouraging that gender diversity was significantly improved with the expansion of the study. The original study discovered 76% of the respondents were male, when the population is expanded, the percent declines to 72%. This is certainly not representative of the current funeral service student population, approximately 53% (abfse.org), but movement in the right direction.

The current study indicates that it is possible to predict 84% of variance in program quality in funeral service education. Consistent with the original study, this analysis facilitates the creation of a Funeral Service Education Program Quality Model. The model is initially based on the prediction equation developed from the regression analysis; it is then enhanced through the calculation of the squared semipartial correlations associated with the importance items.

Utilizing the methods of Fritch (2014), a funeral service education quality prediction equation was developed. The equation assigned a coefficient to each importance item analyzed in the survey instrument, allowing for the numeric evaluation of quality. This enables the prediction of quality by ranking how a specific program values each importance item. For example, ten may be used as the base number in order to assign a value to each item, representing that a program would expend the highest level of resources on this particular item and decrease the base number in areas that would not be valued as highly by the program. Upon assigning each item a numeric value (1-10) one could solve the equation and the resulting numeric value would represent the Funeral Service Program Quality numerically; this value can be manipulated through the value assignment with respect to each predictor. In sum, this model

allows funeral service program directors the ability to evaluate how they rank with respect to program quality regarding the set of predictors established in the study. Furthermore, this model provides program directors the ability to assess areas which, with further investment, may improve the overall quality of the program (see Table 3). This table presents a visual presentation of this model for the current study, including each importance item and the value associated from the regression prediction equation. The equation utilizes the unstandardized b-weights in an attempt to generalize beyond the sample of the study, but the scales remain attached, not allowing for direct comparison across samples.

Consistent with the original study, the squared semipartial correlation values for the importance items were calculated for the current study (see table 4). This calculation provides the unique contribution of each importance item in accounting for variance in program quality when the other predictors are controlled. The item with the greatest unique contribution to program quality in the current study, “Faculty members have a current funeral director license,” represents nearly 6% unique variance in program quality as indicated by the squared semipartial value. Additional items indicating substantial unique variance include, “The program works to make connections to the world outside of the educational world,” with almost an 5% unique variance, and “The program designs challenging assignments” indicating more than 4% unique variance as calculated by the squared semipartial. For organization and ease of critical evaluation the importance items are grouped into five categories for the model enhancement. The five quality categories are: curriculum, facilities, faculty, program administration, and students. The model enhancement, presented in Table 4, shows the unique contribution of each predictor as indicated by the squared semipartial correlation values; the items representing the greatest unique variance are highlighted for immediate identification.

In an effort to make meaningful connections to the original study and in order to fully examine the expanded population, the semipartial correlation values of the importance items from the original study are included in Table 5, and semipartial correlation values for the importance items of the expanded population, derived by combining the two studies, were calculated and are presented in Table 6.

The item with the greatest unique contribution to program quality in the original study, “The program provides students with an opportunity to achieve lofty goals,” represents nearly 12% unique variance in program quality as indicated by the squared semipartial value. Additional items indicating substantial unique variance include, “The program conducts mock funeral arrangements and services as part of the professional training,” with more than 8% unique variance, and “Full-time faculty members are on tenure track or have obtained tenure” indicating 7% unique variance as calculated by the squared semipartial.

When the data was expanded to include respondent responses from both the current and original study, the item with the greatest unique contribution to program quality in the current study, “A minimum of 80% of students pass the national board exam on the first attempt,” represents more than 3% unique variance in program quality as indicated by the squared semipartial value. Additional items indicating substantial unique variance include, “The education is well-rounded and goes beyond the required American Board of Funeral Service Education curriculum,” with more than 3% unique variance, and “The program creates a sense of community in the educational institution through communication” indicating more than 3% unique variance as calculated by the squared semipartial.

This study advances the model to ascertain what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond accreditation. This research provides funeral service educators

information about elements associated with quality programs and a method to determine the importance of various educational elements. The fundamental goal of this research is to facilitate opportunities to improve and enhance overall quality in funeral service education. The results and methods of this study offers funeral service educators a method to examine program quality and assess possible areas of improvement through the examination of the regression prediction equation and the squared semipartial correlations. This study perpetuates the line of literature that examines program quality in higher education and more specifically advances the literature in funeral service education.

Although this study continues the search for correlates associated with quality in funeral service education, and attempts to predict this quality, the lack of statistical significance, although anticipated, was disappointing (Pedhazur, 1982). Notwithstanding, this study and these results are developing a foundation to continue this field of research. Additional research, involving a larger population might aid in the discovery of statistical significance. To expand this research beyond funeral service educators to funeral service practitioners is a reasonable next step. It is critical to understand the needs of practitioners and determine how they define and identify quality in funeral service education. Extension of this research to professionals in the funeral service industry will allow for a comparison between the manner in which educators evaluate quality in funeral service education and how the same question is addressed by current professionals in the industry. This research would provide the opportunity to discover any disconnections that exist between these two distinct populations, working to unify these groups and ultimately improving the funeral service industry through quality education. Furthermore, this would be a critical step toward achieving statistical significance, and truly unearth what defines a quality funeral service education program beyond basic accreditation.

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Table 1

Descriptive Indices

Scaled Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Dependent Variable	6.2449	1.42201
Predictor 1	4.8367	1.61177
Predictor 2	6.3061	1.02478
Predictor 3	6.2449	1.09031
Predictor 4	4.9388	1.91929
Predictor 5	4.1224	1.67870
Predictor 6	5.7347	1.49688
Predictor 7	4.3673	2.10845
Predictor 8	4.7551	1.57494
Predictor 9	5.8776	1.70334
Predictor 10	4.9592	1.74355
Predictor 11	5.8571	1.06066
Predictor 12	6.0000	.88976
Predictor 13	6.2245	.71488
Predictor 14	6.1020	1.17695
Predictor 15	6.0204	1.63923
Predictor 16	5.1633	2.03457
Predictor 17	6.2041	1.02020
Predictor 18	5.7755	1.34265
Predictor 19	6.4490	.64747
Predictor 20	6.7755	.71488
Predictor 21	5.2653	1.11384
Predictor 22	4.5714	1.54110
Predictor 23	4.4694	1.56926
Predictor 24	4.3469	1.61440
Predictor 25	5.9184	1.16970
Predictor 26	5.8571	1.24164
Predictor 27	6.2857	1.02062
Predictor 28	6.5306	.98111
Predictor 29	6.5102	1.02312
Predictor 30	6.5510	.76543
Predictor 31	6.4082	.78842
Predictor 32	6.3469	.77865
Predictor 33	6.2449	.90210
Predictor 34	6.3469	.92536
Predictor 35	6.4082	.76153
Predictor 36	6.0408	1.01979
Predictor 37	6.5510	.61445
Predictor 38	4.8571	2.11148
Predictor 39	6.3061	.87092

Table 2

Regression Prediction Equation

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Program Quality} = & 3.814 - .268i1 + 1.907i2 - .674i3 - .170i4 + .061i5 + .187i6 - .363i7 - \\ & .013i8 + .097i9 + .433i10 + .417i11 - 2.548i12 + .033i13 - .183i14 + .319i15 + .679i16 - \\ & 1.031i17 - 1.159i18 - 2.346i19 - .185i20 - .609i21 - .197i22 + 1.684i23 - 1.665i24 + \\ & 1.004i25 - .474i26 - .077i27 - .142i28 + .873i29 + .062i30 + 1.085i31 + 1.185i32 + \\ & 1.1526i33 - 2.514i34 + 1.661i35 + .967i36 + .373i37 + .248i38 - .009i39 \end{aligned}$$

Table 3

Funeral Service Program Quality Model derived from the Prediction Equation

Program Quality = 3.814 - .268Faculty members have a terminal degree + .907Faculty members have a current funeral director license - .674Faculty members have a current embalmer license - .170Full-time faculty members are on tenure track or have obtained tenure + .061Faculty members publish research results in funeral service journals + .187Faculty members have work experience in the funeral profession outside of the educational institution in the past five years - .363The program offers a bachelors degree in funeral service - .013The program maintains near capacity student enrollment + .097The program includes an embalming lab in which students embalm on campus + .433Studentns are employed in funeral homes while attending classes + .417A minimum of 80% of students pass the national board examination on the first attempt - 2.548Studentns show strong academic ability, as witnessed in classroom performance + .033The program offers training that focuses on comparative religious and secular traditions with respect to funeral customs - .183The library has adequate resources for funeral service education + .319There are adequate laboratories for embalming on campus + .679There are adequate laboratories for human dissection on campus - 1.031There are adequate laboratories for restorative art on campus - 1.159There is adequate space to conduct mock funeral arrangements and services for the student population - 2.346The education is well-rounded and goes beyond the required American Board of Funeral Service Education curriculum - .185The program maintains accreditation by the American Board of Funeral Service Education - .609Program faculty are involved in leadership roles with the American Board of Funeral Service Education - .197Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at state conferences + 1.684Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at regional conferences - 1.665Faculty members participate in scholarly research and present results at national conferences + 1.004The program conducts mock funeral arrangements and services as part of the professional training - .474The program requires training in the practice of cremation as part of the curriculum - .077The program requires faculty to participate in funeral service continuing education - .142The chairperson of the program is a licensed funeral director + .873The chairperson of the program is a licensed embalmer + .062The program requires a course in funeral service ethics + 1.085The program creates a learner-centered environment + 1.185The program develops self-awareness through continuous feedback + 1.1526The program creates a sense of community in the educational institution through communication - 2.514The program works to make connections to the world outside of the educational world + 1.661The program designs challenging assignments + .967The program implements service-learning into the curriculum + .373The program strives to make students think critically by asking challenging questions + .248Faculty members that teach mortuary law courses have a Juris Doctorate degree and experience practicing law related to funeral service - .009The program provides students with an opportunity to achieve lofty goals

Table 4: *Funeral Service Program Quality Model: Utilizing Squared Semipartial Values*

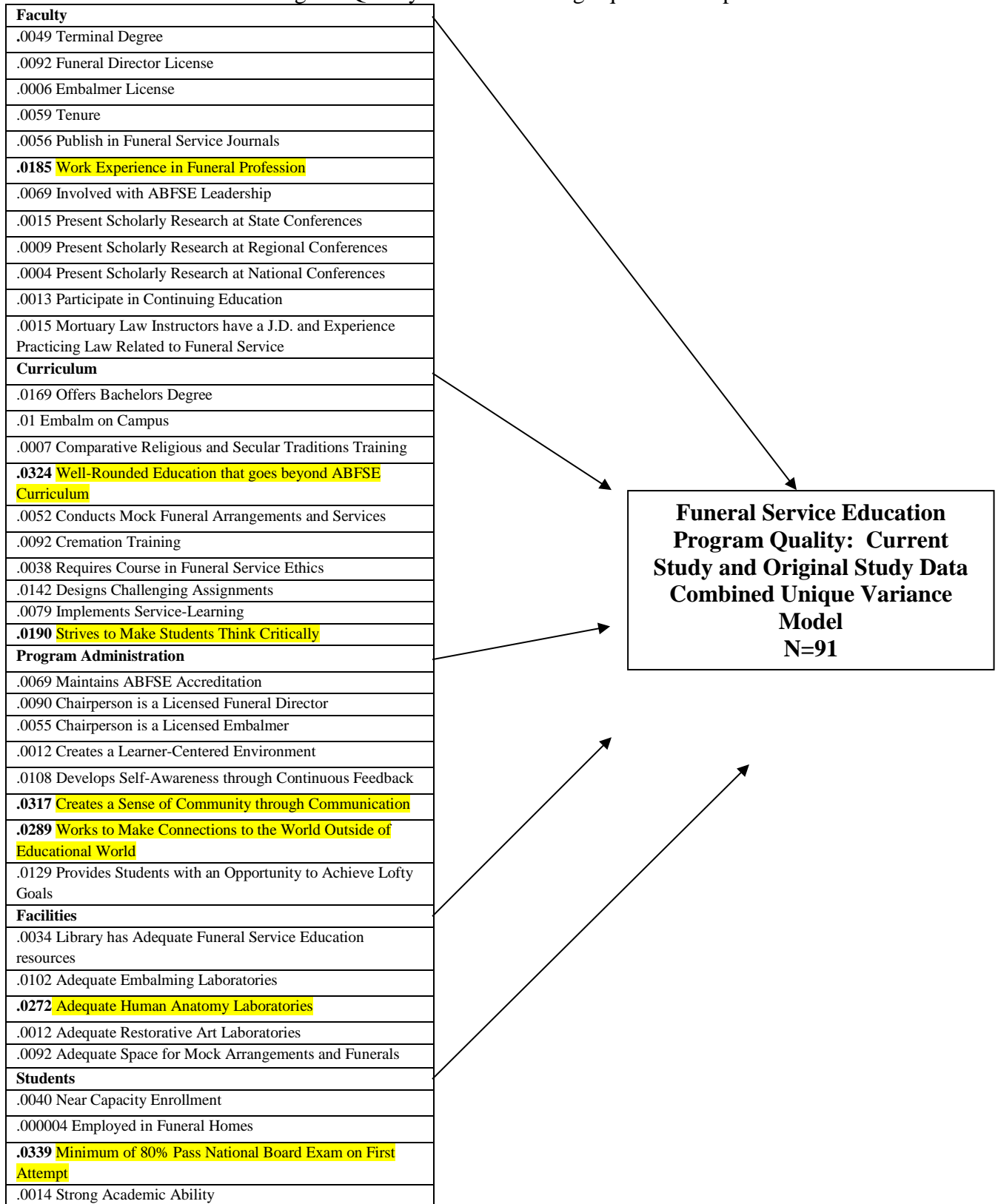
Faculty	
.01 Terminal Degree	
.058 Funeral Director License	
.0237 Embalmer License	
.0121 Tenure	
.000529 Publish in Funeral Service Journals	
.007 Work Experience in Funeral Profession	
.015376 Involved with ABFSE Leadership	
.000529 Present Scholarly Research at State Conferences	
.024649 Present Scholarly Research at Regional Conferences	
.016641 Present Scholarly Research at National Conferences	
.000784 Participate in Continuing Education	
.027889 Mortuary Law Instructors have a J.D. and Experience Practicing Law Related to Funeral Service	
Curriculum	
.018496 Offers Bachelors Degree	
.000841 Embalm on Campus	
.000016 Comparative Religious and Secular Traditions Training	
.021316 Well-Rounded Education that goes beyond ABFSE Curriculum	
.023409 Conducts Mock Funeral Arrangements and Services	
.016641 Cremation Training	
.000144 Requires Course in Funeral Service Ethics	
.042025 Designs Challenging Assignments	
.020164 Implements Service-Learning	
.005625 Strives to Make Students Think Critically	
Program Administration	
.0036 Maintains ABFSE Accreditation	
.000081 Chairperson is a Licensed Funeral Director	
.004096 Chairperson is a Licensed Embalmer	
.007921 Creates a Learner-Centered Environment	
.0196 Develops Self-Awareness through Continuous Feedback	
.013 Creates a Sense of Community through Communication	
.047524 Works to Make Connections to the World Outside of Educational World	
.000004 Provides Students with an Opportunity to Achieve Lofty Goals	
Facilities	
.0000326 Library has Adequate Funeral Service Education resources	
.007225 Adequate Embalming Laboratories	
.039204 Adequate Human Anatomy Laboratories	
.021904 Adequate Restorative Art Laboratories	
.039204 Adequate Space for Mock Arrangements and Funerals	
Students	
.000009 Near Capacity Enrollment	
.03276 Employed in Funeral Homes	
.008464 Minimum of 80% Pass National Board Exam on First Attempt	
.059536 Strong Academic Ability	

Table 5: Funeral Service Program Quality Model: Utilizing Squared Semipartial Values

Faculty	
.0276 Terminal Degree	
.00048 Funeral Director License	
.00608 Embalmer License	
.0702 Tenure	
.0665 Publish in Funeral Service Journals	
.00152 Work Experience in Funeral Profession	
.03685 Involved with ABFSE Leadership	
.02855 Present Scholarly Research at State Conferences	
.0036 Present Scholarly Research at Regional Conferences	
.00048 Present Scholarly Research at National Conferences	
.03168 Participate in Continuing Education	
.0121 Mortuary Law Instructors have a J.D. and Experience Practicing Law Related to Funeral Service	
Curriculum	
.00504 Offers Bachelors Degree	
.00084 Embalm on Campus	
.00845 Comparative Religious and Secular Traditions Training	
.0001 Well-Rounded Education that goes beyond ABFSE Curriculum	
.08179 Conducts Mock Funeral Arrangements and Services	
.03497 Cremation Training	
.00002 Requires Course in Funeral Service Ethics	
.0121 Designs Challenging Assignments	
.0231 Implements Service-Learning	
.00044 Strives to Make Students Think Critically	
Program Administration	
.00175 Maintains ABFSE Accreditation	
.0169 Chairperson is a Licensed Funeral Director	
.02045 Chairperson is a Licensed Embalmer	
.00757 Creates a Learner-Centered Environment	
.03459 Develops Self-Awareness through Continuous Feedback	
.00739 Creates a Sense of Community through Communication	
.01346 Works to Make Connections to the World Outside of Educational World	
.11902 Provides Students with an Opportunity to Achieve Lofty Goals	
Facilities	
.0324 Library has Adequate Funeral Service Education resources	
.01299 Adequate Embalming Laboratories	
.01638 Adequate Human Anatomy Laboratories	
.02528 Adequate Restorative Art Laboratories	
.01254 Adequate Space for Mock Arrangements and Funerals	
Students	
.0004 Near Capacity Enrollment	
.02657 Employed in Funeral Homes	
.01020 Minimum of 80% Pass National Board Exam on First Attempt	
.01588 Strong Academic Ability	

**Funeral Service Education
Program Quality: A
Unique Variance Model
N=45**

Table 6: Funeral Service Program Quality Model: Utilizing Squared Semipartial Values



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