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A Qualitative Study of Common Faculty Perceptions of Online Healthcare Graduate Students' Writing Challenges

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A Qualitative Study of Common Faculty Perceptions of Online
Healthcare Graduate Students' Writing Challenges

by
Latazia Stuart

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
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for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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2019

Statement of Original Work

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I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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*Latazia Stuart*_____
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This research is dedicated to the memory of my late younger sister Clydia Miller who left her passion and desire for education within me.

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Abstract

A Qualitative Study of Common Faculty Perceptions of Online Healthcare Graduate Students' Writing Challenges, Latazia Stuart, 2019: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: faculty perceptions, grammar and APA, health administration faculty, healthcare graduate students, nursing faculty, online learning, online interventions, pedagogy, writing skills

This applied dissertation was designed to understand and explore common faculty perceptions of why some faculty engage their online healthcare graduate students who are deficient in writing skills to improve and what interventions they used. This study utilized a case study qualitative approach to collect and analyze the data. This study explored online faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students writing deficiencies, exploring how they defined it, what beliefs and motivations underlie their decision to engage these students in the improvement of their writing skills, and what interventions they used to address this problem in an online learning environment.

The participants in this study consisted of online faculty experienced in teaching online healthcare graduate students. The faculty participants were from two regionally accredited universities that predominantly provide healthcare based degrees including nursing, healthcare administration, and public health. The different locations, degree credentials, and healthcare programs utilized in this study allowed the researcher to create commonality between responses and the data reviewed to explore common faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students writing issues.

This study findings revealed that online faculty perceived the most prevalent writing problems of online graduate healthcare students to consist of grammar, writing structure, and APA issues. This study also revealed that online faculty perceived that providing detailed feedback to students on written submissions as the most effective means to help improve online graduate healthcare students writing problems, and escalating to one-on-one synchronous interventions to engage further students in improving as needed. Based on these findings higher education institutions are recommended to provide online faculty training specific to detailed feedback on written assignments, additional options for one-on-one synchronous student support on writing improvement, and enhancing student accountability for using faculty feedback provided to improve their writing skills.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Writing is a process and a product that is vital in developing the intellect of a specific discipline by its learners (Harper & Vered, 2017). A national study reported that 51% of college seniors have not written an academic paper over 20 pages in their last year. This finding is apparent in many students pursuing online graduate healthcare degrees who are not prepared to write at the graduate level (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bair & Mader, 2013). Writing skills are essential to students' academic and career success; therefore, it is critical that writing skills are addressed (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012).

Several studies reported that student writing difficulties in higher education have impacted program completion (Bair & Mader, 2013; Borglin & Fagerström, 2012; Cone & Dover, 2012). Borglin and Fagerström (2012) reported that graduate nursing students indicated thesis writing was the most challenging aspect of their program. The researcher of this applied dissertation explored (a) the common perceptions of faculty teaching online graduate healthcare students with writing challenges, (b) why some faculty decided to engage these students to improve their writing skills, and (c) what interventions faculty have used to help improve these skills.

The research problem. Most graduate programs require students to complete research projects, proposals, and a thesis that have extensive writing requirements. Additionally, it is a typical expectation in academia that graduate students have effective written communication skills when they become enrolled in a graduate program (Thomas, Williams, & Case, 2014). Unfortunately, many students entering online graduate healthcare programs are not prepared to write at the graduate level (Bair & Mader, 2013).

Background and justification. Many educators in higher education have the assumption that graduate healthcare students have previously obtained adequate preparation to write at the graduate level (Ariail et al., 2013). However, studies have identified the lack of graduate-level students' preparation in writing (Bair & Mader, 2013). Researchers conducted

A national study of three hundred thousand college freshmen and seniors in 587 four-year colleges and universities found that while 83% of freshmen reported that they had not written a paper in the current academic year that was twenty or more pages, 51 percent of college seniors had not done so either. Even at the top 10 percent of schools in the study 33 percent of college seniors reported they had not written a paper of this length during their last year in college. (Arum & Roksa, 2011, p. 71)

A study conducted at a private, regionally accredited university reflected perception concerns of graduate nursing faculty that talented students are having self-efficacy challenges due to their inability to write well (Cone & Dover, 2012). The authors found that many students discontinued their program due to weak writing skills. A study based on assessments of writing strengths and abilities for students in higher education revealed that faculty teaching online students encountered more writing issues than in their face-to-face courses (Cronley & Kilgore, 2016).

Two universities were included as sites in this applied dissertation. One university is located in California; the second university is located in Florida. These universities exclusively provide healthcare degrees ranging from undergraduate to doctoral degrees. This study focused on the common faculty perceptions of student writing deficiencies in online graduate healthcare programs and interventions that faculty utilize to address these

problems. The researcher of this applied dissertation is a university director of online learning who frequently discussed the issue of graduate online students' writing deficiencies with healthcare faculty.

Faculty teaching graduate courses for healthcare students have stated that many students in their online courses "don't know how to write properly" (T. Kasten, personal communication, August 17, 2017). Additionally, their students have stated, "They were never taught how to write like that before" when asked about their grammar or other basic writing skills" (J. Macmanus, personal communication, November 29, 2017). Faculty at the researcher's institution further expressed the opinion that many new students need to take advantage of institutional resources to improve their writing skills (I. Tardif, personal communication, November 16, 2017). At the researcher's school, course rubrics defined by each department include a small percentage of points on the grading for APA and writing syntax issues. These rubric grading weights have contributed to faculty perceiving there is little incentive by students to improve their writing skills. "If the need or desire is for writing and APA was a greater focus, then the need may be to increase the percentage of points in these areas for assignments submitted" (I. Tardif, personal communication, March 14, 2018). Most faculty are concerned with students obtaining proficiency in the course content for licensing or other program requirements; this focus on course content sometimes impedes writing skills instruction being provided. However, faculty play a significant role in the development of student writing skills, and students develop a reliance on their faculty for support.

Deficiencies in the evidence. A descriptive, qualitative study conducted by Borglin and Fagerström (2012) identified that nursing students' academic literacy, critical thinking, and academic writing were important skills that required more strategic focus

throughout nursing education. The researchers analyzed interviews that highlighted a gap between nursing students' perception of their writing skills in comparison to their educators' perceptions of their skills. This gap in their perceptions requires further study (Borglin & Fagerström, 2012).

Pintz and Posey (2012) studied the writing and adjustment challenges graduate nursing students experience due to their absence from the educational setting when they return to pursue online graduate programs. Mattson (2016) concluded that continuous improvement is needed for quality development to occur. The author stated that for continuous improvement to occur, faculty must help each student in this area, and that student writing improvement requires constant dialogue supporting the need for further research.

A research exploration of how expert nursing instructors teach nursing discipline-specific writing, highlighted a contributing instructional concern for the inappropriate writing levels of nursing students at various academic levels, creating a need specifically for further research at undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels (Perkins, 2014). This finding is further supported by completed research on university students' writing issues related to paraphrasing and citation skills that recognized that patch writing challenges of postsecondary students also exists (Schwabl, Rossiter, & Abbott, 2013). The researchers highlighted the need for a qualitative discipline-specific study to obtain more detailed information and recommendations for improving writing deficiencies of students in paraphrasing and citation skills. "More focused research on instructional initiatives, both online and in-class, needs to be designed, delivered, and evaluated to determine differential outcomes" (Schwabl et al., 2013, p. 412). Therefore, the researcher for the this applied dissertation conducted research on the common faculty perceptions of why

some online faculty engage their online healthcare graduate students to improve their writing issues at the post-baccalaureate academic level and what they do to improve their students' writing skills.

  Audience. Faculty exploring ways to improve or augment their instruction to develop the writing skills of their graduate students can benefit from reading online strategies of improving writing deficiencies in graduate students perceived by graduate faculty discussed in this study. Academic leaders in higher education tasked with addressing the issue of graduate students academic writing deficiencies in online courses or graduate healthcare programs can identify faculty training opportunities. Finally, students who have a self-awareness of the need to improve their writing skills and become effective communicators in the healthcare field could apply the techniques explored in this study to improve this critical skill necessary for academic and professional success. Additionally, online graduate healthcare students may gain an understanding of the reasons faculty value and place importance on the need for improving graduate student writing challenges.

Setting of the Study

  This study included graduate faculty who teach online healthcare graduate students at two regionally accredited universities that specialize in healthcare programs in California and Florida. The universities both have online graduate programs. Virtual conferencing meeting rooms served as the primary setting for this study and were used to conduct interviews.

  The first university, located in Southern California, is a regionally accredited for-profit university with two out-of-state campus locations in the Central South Western and Southern Atlantic Coast of the United States. The university has a student population of

over 5,000 students enrolled in healthcare programs including dental hygiene, nursing, occupational therapy, pharmacy, public health, and health administration. Degree offerings include undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees that vary by program. The university has a primary focus on preparing graduates for healthcare professions. The mission of the university is student-centric learning, delivered transformationally with integrity and personal accountability. The university strives to seek effective and innovative approaches to develop its students' competencies to satisfy the requirements of changes in the world and remain competitive with healthcare responsive programs in collaboration with faculty and industry professionals.

To accomplish its mission, the university consistently engages students in various community events, provides relative healthcare experience through its clinical partners, and delivers simulation-based classrooms to develop personal accountability in healthcare through the simulated experience. The university delivers its curriculum in several learning modalities including face-to-face, blended, fully online, simulations, and practicums. The learning modalities used in its curricula are evidence-based and designed to improve patient outcomes providing students with the skills needed to enter their healthcare professions. In alignment with its mission of developing competencies and confidence required in a complex and changing world, the university emphasizes the importance of educating its students to impact healthcare locally and globally through its international programs. These programs include its Oxford Honors program, Global Public Health program, and Global Internship program through the International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent. Overall, the university seeks to achieve a reputation of being ahead of the curve in the delivery of healthcare curriculum that its graduates would exemplify through integrity and personal accountability founded in its

mission.

The second university, located in Florida, is a private nonprofit regionally accredited university that has a student population of over 1,900 students enrolled exclusively in various healthcare degree programs. The university offers learning modalities in face-to-face, online, blended, and video conferencing technology. With its main campus based in Florida, it utilizes video conferencing technology to provide students at its Denver site the opportunity to interact in synchronous online learning with faculty and students in Florida. This university currently offers three Associate of Science degrees, seven Bachelor of Science degrees, six graduate degrees, and two doctoral degree programs. Additionally, there are eight programs delivered fully in the online learning modality. The degrees offered at the university represent a diverse healthcare curriculum ranging in the areas of nursing, occupational therapy, biomedical sciences, nursing, nuclear medicine technology, nurse anesthesia, radiological sciences, healthcare administration, strategy and innovation, nursing, occupational therapy, and biomedical sciences.

With the mission of developing skilled healthcare professionals with the compassion of Christ to help heal others, the second university achieves this goal through the opportunities they provide students for extending their healing ministry. These opportunities include community service projects, community fairs that offer free healthcare screenings, and a clinical experience at the largest health care facility operated by a major denominational faith-based national healthcare system. The campus of the second university is integrated with a local faith-based hospital that allows for teaching and research in its ministry-inspired healthcare facility that is supportive of the university mission.

All students enrolled at the university are required to participate in service-learning activities to align with the mission of living the healing values of Christ. An example of how students execute the university mission through service is in the Community Health Transitional Care internship (CHEP) program that the university developed in partnership with its local hospital. In this program, students have the opportunity to enhance the quality of life for patients returning home and their respective communities through the effective care that they provide for them during this transitional period. As of June 2017, the university reported 100% of students participating in service learning, approximately 15,000 hours of service learning, 21 service-learning partnerships and affiliations, and 1,512 hours of faculty service provided to the community ("Community Service," 2019).

This university has a unique niche as a denominational university that is committed to service opportunities that align with its mission. For students who have a passion beyond just becoming a healthcare professional but who are also interested in local and worldwide healthcare Christian service opportunities, the university provides local service affiliations and campus ministries, to engage in nurturing their service and spiritual development. A significant opportunity that students who successfully complete their academic program look forward to is being first priority candidates for employment within the local faith-based hospital system attached to the university.

Definition of Terms

The following research terms are used in the study.

Academic writing skills. Writing is a process and a product that is vital in developing the intellect of a specific discipline by its learners (Harper & Vered, 2017). Bair and Mader (2013) described writing as an element of the ability individuals have to

describe and demonstrate their critical thinking and further references it to an external product produced from an internal thought process. This term also includes appropriate use of citations, grammar, and spelling (Schwabl et al., 2013). The intent of the academic writing product is to inform a specific audience through the reasoning of an argument or position with scholarly sources (Bair & Mader, 2013).

Anchor papers. These papers are a representation of where most students at a specific level should be for the specified writing task (Holland, Wright, & Goering, 2016).

Constructivism. This theory is based on individuals constructing and creating meaning of their knowledge through active engagement within their learning environment (Schcolnik, Kol, & Abarbanel, 2016).

Engagement. This term refers to the activities that faculty integrate into their online classroom or curriculum to facilitate student participation and learning.

Graduate healthcare students. This term refers to students enrolled in a healthcare program to earn a master's degree for their respective field. Examples of graduate healthcare programs are nursing, public health, occupational therapy, and health administration.

Online students. This term represents students who enroll in an online program and complete all courses exclusively online. These students are the case of this research. Creswell (2018) describes a case as consisting of an individual or group of individuals that are studied.

Online faculty. This term represents faculty who are teaching online students exclusively enrolled in online graduate healthcare programs.

Online learning. According to Allen and Seaman (2013), online learning consists

of "online courses [in which] at least 80% of the course content is delivered online" (p. 7).

Patchwriting. When an individual reviewing an article, copies and pastes elements of it to suit their needs and then paraphrases those sections creating a patchwork of their writing (Howard, 1995, as cited by Schwabl et al., 2013). This is a writing deficiency consisting of inappropriate paraphrasing and incorrect citations (Schwabl et al., 2013).

Self-efficacy. This term represents a student's level of appreciation for their individual understanding of a particular task.

Scaffolding. This concept is the layering of knowledge during instruction to increase a student's understanding of a particular task. A student is guided to learn one element of a particular task, and once they have achieved its understanding, they have the opportunity to be guided to another layer of understanding associated with the prior one (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore common faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students with writing deficiencies, why some online faculty engage these students to improve their writing skills, and what interventions they use. The aim of the researcher was to fill in the gap between online graduate healthcare students and faculty perceptions in regard to the need for improving graduate student writing challenges.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Harper and Vered (2017) described writing as a process and product that is vital in developing the intellect of a specific discipline by its learner. According to Bair and Mader (2013), writing is an element of the ability individuals have to describe and demonstrate their critical thinking and further references it to an external product produced from an internal thought process. This description also includes appropriate use of citations, grammar, and spelling (Schwabl et al., 2013). The academic writing product is to inform a specific audience through the reasoning of an argument or position with scholarly sources (Bair & Mader, 2013). According to Roberts and Goss (2009), the importance of the art of writing is equivalent to the content learned and requires faculty to instill this importance in their students through using various methods, technology, and tools. This chapter addresses a review of the current literature on (a) student writing issues, (b) faculty and graduate student perceptions of student writing, (c) pedagogical applications in online learning, (d) writing and healthcare programs, and (e) best practices on student writing in higher education.

Merriam and Tisdell (2017) highlighted the importance of a literature review to describe the past and current state of a problem, and then use those studies as the background to advance knowledge of the topic in a new study. There are many students pursuing graduate studies in healthcare programs that are not prepared to write at the graduate level. Writing is essential to students' success before and after school and therefore, writing must be addressed in education settings to aid students in achieving success in this necessary skill (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). The goal of this literature review is to provide an explanation of the current writing challenges observed in online

healthcare graduate students utilizing the theoretical concepts of constructivism theory.

The discussion in this review will have a two-fold focus including both faculty and

student perspective. The following Figure presents a literature map that reflects the

literature review conducted through the lens of constructivism theory.
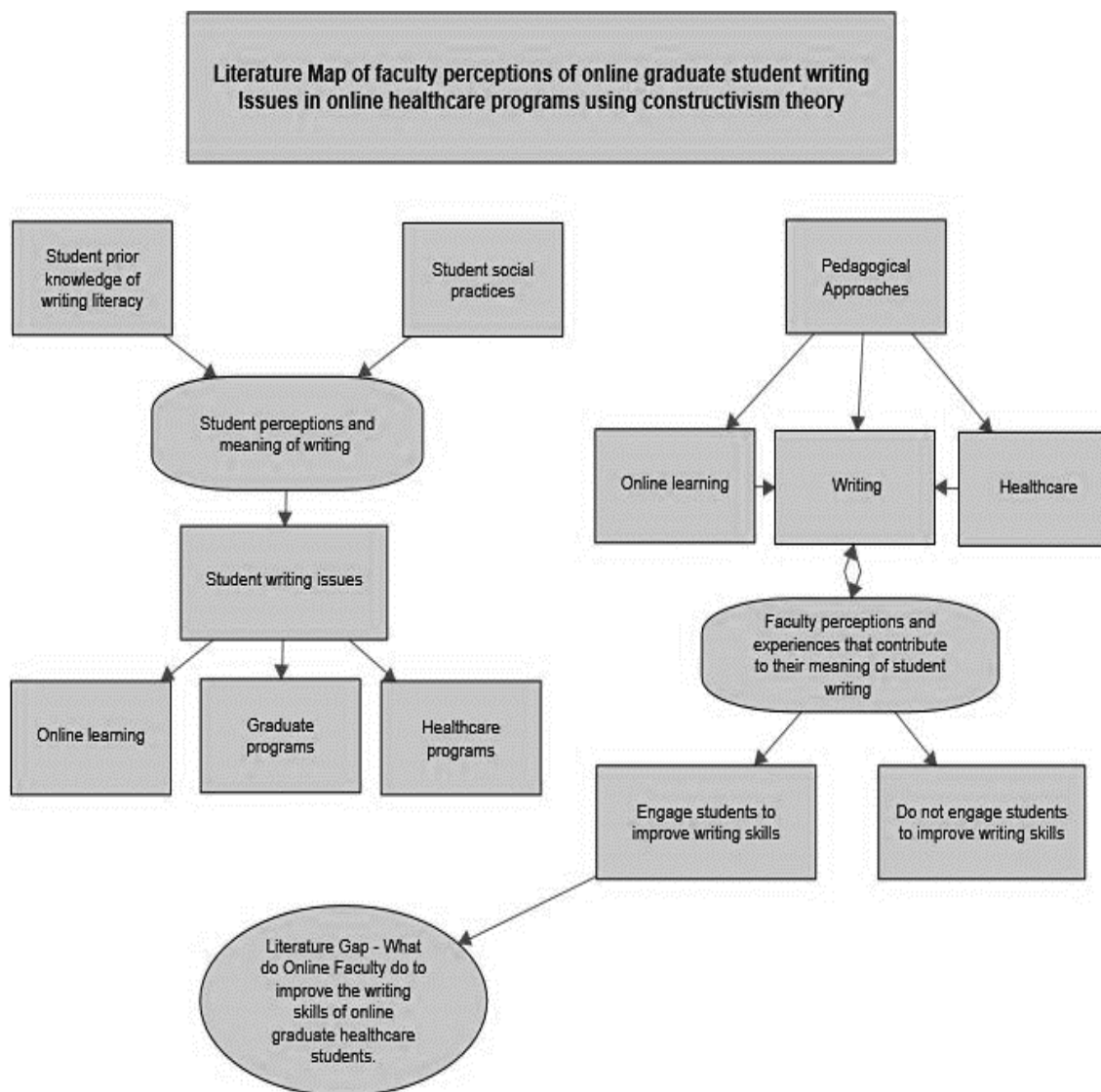
Figure. Map of literature review that reflects faculty perceptions of online graduate student writing through the lens of constructivism theory.

Theoretical Framework

Through the lens of constructivist theory, the pedagogical approaches of online learning, writing, and healthcare are discussed as the foundation from which faculty perceptions and new meanings are developed in connection with student writing issues. Constructivist theory is based on an individual constructing their knowledge to make meaning of the knowledge obtained (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). The approach in which this knowledge is constructed, however, is based on the perspectives of two different theorists, Lev Vygotsky and John Piaget. Whereas both theorists focused on the cognitive development of children and held to the philosophy that individuals have the ability to construct knowledge, they differed on the manner this ability is obtained (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013).

Lev Vygotsky was a Russian theorist who focused on child cognitive development and how that development was based on learning through social interactions of more knowledgeable peers that build on prior knowledge (Toulmin, 1978). Pocaro (2011) stated that Vygotsky's approach to constructivism is commonly referred to as social-cultural constructivism. The main element of constructivism based on Vygotsky's theory was the principle of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In the ZPD, an individual learning occurs by being associated with an individual who has an increased knowledge of a particular skill that the student is trying to develop. The individual with an increased knowledge of the skill provides the necessary assistance to help the student perform or develop the skill. ZPD is defined by Vygotsky as awareness of cognitive functions that are in the process of maturation. (Vygotsky, Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, & Souberman, 1980). For example, the student has a foundational knowledge of how to accomplish a task that places the student in the ZPD to learn further about a particular

task. However, to achieve the ability of independently carrying out the task while in the zone of learning, the student requires the assistance of someone more knowledgeable.

Vygotsky (1980) described the ZPD as, "the distance between the actual development as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential of development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86, as cited in Chaiklin, 2003, p. 2). The approach the individual with more knowledge takes to accomplish having the individual in the ZPD achieve the independent ability to complete a task is typically theorized as scaffolding. Scaffolding is a concept frequently used in higher education and is referred to when an instructor builds on concepts one layer at a time to aid in an individual's knowledge to complete a specific task independently.

Although Piaget shared a similar perspective in the ability of an individual to make meaning of their knowledge, he theorized that a child's cognitive development was based on their construction of knowledge at the four different developmental stages that occur at different age levels (Pocaro, 2011). Piaget's theory, commonly referred to as cognitive constructivism, is based on an individual's active construction of knowledge that is achieved with minimal assistance due to their ability to make meaning based on their reality which is developed at various stages in their age (growth) (Pocaro, 2011).

The most significant difference between the constructivist views of Vygotsky and Piaget was that Vygotsky theorized an individual's development was at the center of social interaction with others who scaffolded their instruction in the zone of proximal development. In contrast, Piaget's view of constructing knowledge and making meaning of it (as cited in Pocaro, 2011) was individually based and developed through stages of growth. Although both Vygotsky and Piaget were born in the same year, Vygotsky died

at the age of 37 from tuberculosis, and Piaget lived to the age of 87, thus allowing more time to develop his series on cognitive development. After Vygotsky's death, his work did not become publicly available for many years; however, today Vygotsky's theory on constructivism is commonly used within psychology and education (Pocaro, 2011).

The researcher of this applied dissertation used the theoretical lens of Vygotsky's constructivist approach to learning to develop a new meaning and understanding of improving online graduate healthcare students' writing through review of faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare student writing issues and what their online faculty do to improve students' writing. Vygotsky's theory was best suited for this study because it creates the framework for constructing knowledge based on meaning derived from the research of online healthcare faculty perceptions. Several studies have utilized this theoretical approach in understanding faculty perceptions (Dowd, 2014; Bellamy, 2047). Dowd asserted that the construction of new knowledge and meaning was derived from understanding faculty perceptions that led to engaging students in a traditional nursing classroom. The new meaning derived from this study resulted in the development of an action plan to improve technology integration in a traditional nursing classroom setting. Similarly, Bellamy (2017) highlighted the use of the constructivist theory to bring meaning and understanding of college faculty perspectives of student writings in undergraduate programs.

Faculty and Student Perceptions of Student Writing Issues in Higher Education

Writing issues in higher education are visible across multiple disciplines and specifically, online learning; researchers have documented a variety of reasons including technical, time away from school, lack of preparation, and anxiety (Bair & Mader, 2013; Cone & Dover, 2012; Pintz & Posey, 2012; Thomas et al., 2014). Several studies

indicated that many adult learners pursue online learning opportunities to advance their educational goals due to the flexibility and convenience for work while obtaining a degree (Amro, Kupczynski, & Maxwell, 2013; Pintz & Posey, 2012). Kimmel, Gaylor, and Hayes (2014) found that childcare, geographic location, and financial limitations were additional reasons nontraditional students pursued online learning opportunities.

Conversely, learning in an online modality has been noted to create learning challenges, including writing issues for nursing students who were away from the learning environment for many years. Some of these challenges are contributed to by nursing students who return to online graduate programs with insufficient exposure or knowledge of learning technology tools, coupled with the lack of utilizing academic writing in their professions (Connell, Kenny, Kidd, & Nankervis, 2011; Pintz & Posey, 2012).

Researchers suggested that it cannot be overstated that health profession students need a strong start when beginning graduate programs (Walker & Coby, 2013). There are multiple ways to literacy, which include writing that can be attained through social practices and new modalities (Rebmann, 2013). Despite the need for a strong start in graduate programs, researchers have identified the lack of preparation in academic writing of graduate-level students (Bair & Mader, 2013).

Unfortunately, there has been minimal research completed on online graduate student writing issues. Bellamy (2017) focused on undergraduate faculty perceptions of student writing. According to the author, there has been minimal serious analytical research on the decline of student writing quality despite the prominence of this concern existing in higher education. Other literature reinforces that there is minimal research in academic writing issues of graduate students in comparison to undergraduate and

doctoral students, despite the concern being prevalent for this group of students (Bair & Mader, 2013). The fact that many instructors in higher education have an assumption that graduate healthcare students have previously obtained adequate preparation to write at the graduate level further complicates this issue (Ariail et al., 2013).

Researchers have described one of the more significant writing issues noted in higher education as Patchwriting; students copying large portions of information in sections of their academic writing without appropriate synthesis or citations (Bair & Mader, 2013; Schwabl et al., 2013). Howard (1995) (as cited by Schwabl et al., 2013) described Patchwriting as when an individual reviewing an article, copies and pastes elements of it to suit their needs and then paraphrases those sections creating a patchwork of their writing. In the study by Schwabl et al. (2013), university students' writing issues reflected problems with paraphrasing and citation skills, highlighting that Patchwriting challenges continue to exist. The researchers highlighted the need for a qualitative discipline-specific study to obtain more detailed information and provide recommendations for improving writing deficiencies of students. "More focused research on instructional initiatives, both online and in-class, needs to be designed, delivered, and evaluated to determine differential outcomes" (Schwabl et al, 2013, p. 412).

Plagiarism. Inappropriate paraphrasing and lack of citing appropriately as seen in Patchwriting are elements of plagiarism. Due to the widespread issues of plagiarism affecting higher education, Schwabl et al. (2013) conducted research related to paraphrasing and citation issues seen in plagiarized student work where Patchwriting was observed. Researchers agreed that plagiarism is a writing issue of graduate students that faculty are concerned with given its increasing prevalence in higher education (Pintz & Posey, 2012; Schwabl et al., 2013). A central state university study that included a faculty

focus group highlighted professors' perceptions that students plagiarized thinking that faculty are not able to find in their plagiarized work (Brockman, Taylor, Kreth, & Crawford, 2011). The authors posited that in some instances, students had developed the habit of simply going online to copy and paste what they found.

Student writing has been plagued with plagiarism issues in higher education for many years. Bennington and Sigh (2013) sought to determine whether faculty decisions to address these writing issues were influenced by their perception of their respective administration to address plagiarism offenses. In using the theory of planned behavior as the framework to conduct their study, the researchers deployed a survey that established three targeted behaviors (also referred to as intentions) that impacted faculty's perception of reporting plagiarism offenses when they were observed. According to Bennington and Sigh these intentions included (a) whether a faculty decided to report future plagiarism offenses when observed, (b) faculty following established procedures to address plagiarism, and (c) faculty escalating plagiarism offenses through a filed report. These intentions precipitated if the faculty had a perception of how a designated committee may address plagiarism offenses, and whether the institution had a formalized plan on educating students regarding plagiarism to proactively address the problem. Although the study concluded that faculty perceptions were indicative of their reporting of plagiarism offenses, the study was not conclusive concerning faculty perceptions related specifically to how to address plagiarism offenses administratively. Moreover, the study lacked providing faculty perception of students' plagiarized writing creating a need for further study (Bennington & Sigh, 2013).

Writing anxiety. Writing anxiety is a writing challenge for graduate students discussed by several researchers (Bair & Mader, 2013; Cronley & Kilgore, 2016; Thomas

et al., 2014). In Cronley and Kilgore's (2016) study, graduate social work students who were surveyed strongly agreed, "Writing is stressful." Thomas et al. (2014) first highlighted anxiety as a writing issue of graduate students citing Rose and McClafferty (2001) who stated that many graduate student writing issues stem from anxiety of prior challenges they have had with their writing skills. In response to this, the researchers completed a study of dissertation workshops and boot camps. Through a faculty survey, the researchers found that discipline-specific faculty were concerned that they were not writing faculty experts. This lack of expertise may have caused the faculty to provide generic responses related to student writing issues identified without specific guidance on how to correct them (Thomas et al., 2014). Although this purpose of the study by Thomas et al. (2014) was to address the anxiety challenge students have regarding their writing, the lack of specific feedback to students on how to improve their writing issues was uncovered. Many faculty and higher education institutions have different approaches for addressing various writing issues. These issues are further discussed in the best practices for engaging students to improve writing section of this literature review.

Graduate Students' Perceptions of Writing

The concern of students not knowing how to write effectively in higher education has been a challenge for schools, faculty, and students. However, in a study conducted by Cronley and Kilgore (2016), graduate students reported feeling positive about their overall writing skills while identifying there were specific areas they could improve on. Interestingly, the study reflected a variation of graduate students' perceptions of their writing abilities based on students' race and whether they were part-time or full-time students. Research has shown that graduate students have multiple perceptions related to contributing factors influencing their writing challenges (Luke, Scales, & Tracy, 2014).

Challenge 1: writing does not align. In a case study conducted on graduate student writing deficits, the focus on writing pedagogy highlighted the difficulties described by a graduate student related to her writing. A key factor obtained from the graduate was her perception of herself not being able to meet the rigors and objectivity of academic writing. This perception was at odds with her creative writing abilities that came easily through poetry that she frequently enjoyed writing (Badenhorsta et al., 2015).

Challenge 2: restricted by writing. The graduate student who had a passion for writing poetry about love, but who perceived it to be at odds with academic writing, frequently described that her professors noted her conceptualization of love was "too broad" or "touchy-feely" (Badenhorsta et al., 2015). However, the student described that it was her desire to discuss love in her thesis holistically and felt stifled by the process of needing to please others to satisfy the academic writing requirements.

Challenge 3: students' perceptions differ from healthcare faculty's perceptions. Costello (2014) conducted a study pertaining to faculty and student perceptions of learning in an online modality. The two primary factors the study was based on included sustaining and learning enhancement. These two factors are components of the Herzberg's model of satisfaction that are identified as components necessary for work to be completed (Costello, 2014). A disconnect between the perception of online faculty and students regarding what was needed in the online classroom to facilitate learning was identified. The disconnect of faculty and students' perceptions in higher education described in Costello's research is consistent with other studies related to healthcare instruction (Ariail et al., 2013; Bair & Mader, 2013; Borglin & Fagerström, 2012).

Borglin and Fagerström (2012) found that online faculty were more likely to provide learning enhancement and motivational factors like encouragement to engage and satisfy their students. In contrast, students in the same study were more strongly aligned to the need of sustaining factors like consistency, structure, and prompt interaction from their faculty to be engaged in the online learning environment. In another research study, the disconnect between faculty and student perceptions included the issue of students' inability to effectively synthesize research literature (Bair & Mader, 2013). Many graduate faculty expressed frustration and concern for students' inability to synthesize literature. According to Bair and Mader (2013), faculty perceived this issue as a result of students' lack of critical thinking skills. However, students in the same study perceived that they needed more assistance on how to locate literature related to their theoretical perspectives and be provided with an opportunity to understand and practice what was expected of them (Bair & Mader, 2013). A cross-sectional study of social work graduate students and faculty in both face-to-face and online modalities recognized the significant difference between student perceptions versus faculty perceptions of graduate writing skills (Cronley & Kilgore, 2016). The findings of this study were congruent with other research discussed in this section that reported faculty perceived students writing needed significant improvement in comparison to students that perceived their writing positively.

Challenge 4: students' disability in reading and writing. Reading allows for one to understand the learning process, and writing provides evidence of an individual's understanding (Pirttimaa, Takala, & Ladonlahti, 2015). According to the authors, there is also a percentage of the adult population who has dyslexia in reading and writing that may impact their ability to write successfully in higher education. The study highlighted the perceptions of these students of their reading and writing challenges that included its

impact on lowering their goals and prolonging their studies. They feared negative labeling, mixed feelings, and had concerns about being denied support. Pirttimaa et al. (2015) demonstrated that this group of students has typically developed compensatory strategies to hide their disability, and with teaching in this area not being commonplace, most students have had to develop their own strategic plan to be successful in their reading and writing. According to Long and MacBlaine (as cited by Pirttimaa et al., 2015), there is a need for further study on student engagement and self-efficacy as it relates to student writing and reading.

In qualitative studies of college students with disabilities (including writing), it was highlighted that many students are provided accommodations by their institutions, and that online graduate student participants with disabilities perceived it was faculty's responsibility to meet their needs through accommodations (Hong, 2015; Terras, Leggio, & Phillips, 2015). However, when faculty received accommodation letters of students with disabilities, some faculty perceived that these students are not able to successfully complete the course, and in some instances, have discouraged students from continuing (Hong, 2015). These perceptions are reflective of the additional challenges some faculty may perceive they will face when working with students with learning disabilities, including writing. Despite these faculty perceptions, the study by Terras, Leggio, and Phillips (2015) confirmed that online graduate students with disabilities perceived that online learning provided them the opportunity to self-accommodate and self-advocate their academic success.

Online Faculty Perceptions of Teaching Writing Responsibilities

Thomas et al. (2014) conducted a study of dissertation writing workshops and boot camps. Responses from a survey for discipline-specific faculty results demonstrated

that they were concerned because they were not writing faculty experts. Respondents only provided nonspecific responses interrelated to student writing issues identified without specific guidance on how to correct them (Thomas et al., 2014). According to the authors, the lack of specific feedback to students on how to improve their writing issues was an unexpected finding. Many faculty and institutions in higher education have different approaches for addressing various writing issues.

Research highlighted faculty concern for the time and challenge of covering the necessary discipline components of the curriculum and integrating writing improvement in their pedagogical approach (Clughen & Connell, 2012; Harper & Vered, 2017). Grossman and Johnson's (2015) discipline-specific study of faculty perceptions towards online education exposed that despite the growth of online learning at most institutions, accounting faculty did not reflect confidence in online learning to help students achieve interpersonal or written communication skills. Participants of the study stated that was because of the inability to interact physically when compared to traditional courses. This perception, however, was varied between faculty who frequently taught online compared to those who did not. Accounting Faculty recognized the value of student engagement benefiting student learning. The participants stated that online courses could be taught effectively if the instructor utilized appropriate online pedagogical techniques, "including synchronous and asynchronous discussions, group assignments, frequent interactions with instructor and multiple active learning activities" (Grossman & Johnson, 2015, p. 103).

Online Engagement and Student Satisfaction

Online learning provides faculty the opportunity to utilize technology to embrace virtual community learning. However, satisfying the academic requirement demands such

as student writing similar to face-to-face courses can be challenging. In a research study by Wiechowski and Washburn (2014), media rich, interactive learning modules reportedly engaged nontraditional graduate students effectively in online learning to achieve comparable learning outcomes similar to face-to-face courses and attained greater student course satisfaction results. These results are consistent with prior research by Cole, Shelley, and Swartz (2014), where student satisfaction was predominant and based upon the interaction between faculty and student and between the student with content.

Research findings suggest that faculty teaching online students encounter more student writing issues than in their face-to-face courses (Cronley & Kilgore, 2016). This creates the need for online faculty to engage students in their online learning to attain writing improvement. Online graduate students have claimed while they are confident in their overall writing skills, many are unsure of the requirements for writing research or satisfying APA requirement styles (Cronley & Kilgore, 2016).

Online Learning Pedagogical Principles

Online pedagogy to improve students' confidence in writing completed through developing their information literacy and organizational skills is important. Through incorporating synchronous sessions with a librarian in an online course or via a recorded video tour of the library resources, these skills have the opportunity to develop. The early introduction to the development of information literacy skills and resources in higher education enhances student confidence and ability to sustain the requirements of their program, including writing (Krishnamurthy, Mlis, & Wood, 2018).

The findings of a 2014 study by EDUCAUSE found that the majority of undergraduates stated technology makes them feel more connected to other students

(51%), their instructors (54%), and their institution (65%) (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014, p. 10). Minimal research was located in higher education online and traditional settings of innovative technological interventions taken by faculty or institutions to improve student writing beyond the typical approaches of writing centers, tutors, curriculum adjustments and faculty development. Nevertheless, Vie (2015) discussed a study conducted within an international business and management program at a university in the Netherlands that merits attention because of its innovative approach to improve student writing using social media.

The study examined by Vie (2015) emphasized that students today write more than is perceived by most faculty, just in a different form that needs guidance in an academic setting. With the high frequency and volume of writings students engage in daily, the researcher stated that constant misplaced blame for student writing issues was attached to increased usage of digital technology versus using it as an avenue to improve the problem. The researcher discussed the value of new students entering higher education with a Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube account along with their constant reading of various web pages, utilized as impetuous tools to have students write blogs as a requirement of their English course.

With appropriate guidance, faculty in this study were able to have students develop their academic writing skills through blogging their writing assignments; the work became more relevant and adept to their natural desire to share information with the world, and in most cases the writing was persuasive and transformative (Vie, 2015). In several instances, students exceeded the writing required for the course. This innovative approach engaged students with the academic writing process that also impacted their online realm. In some instances, their online readers commented on the quality of their

writing and requested continuation of the blog when students expressed they were discontinuing it because their course had ended (Vie, 2015).

Whereas this intervention is uncommon, the incorporation of social media within the curriculum as a means of improving student writing was not readily applied by faculty. and is in the early stages of getting the attention of individuals in higher education. This aligns with the findings regarding writing faculty experiences and attitude towards incorporating social media in their course instruction (Vie, 2015). Findings from the study suggested that faculty perceived value in digital writing utilizing social media as a pedagogical component when teaching academic writing. However, many did not feel it was appropriate for course content and that it interfered with faculty privacy by crossing the boundary between personal and scholarly lives. Vie mentioned that although the study presented faculty embracing social media on a personal level, readily applying this intervention to address student writing skills was not a major consideration or desire of most writing instructors to use in teaching.

Writing Pedagogical Principles

A graduate research writing pedagogy case study by Badenhorst, Dyer, Moloney, Rosales, and Ruc (2015) concentrated on the necessity of students becoming discourse analysts, developing authorial voice and identity, and acquisition of critical competence. With a concern for the attention of writing solutions primarily being based on technical skills and written text, the case study addressed the challenges academic writing may have related to invisible discourse practices. The case study investigated the writing frustrations of a graduate student enrolled in an interdisciplinary program who had a background in engineering, but were enrolled in a humanities program to complete thesis work in the topic of love. Badenhorst et al. (2015) emphasized the benefit of a graduate

research writing pedagogy beyond the constructs of student writing deficit and support. The research writing pedagogy was layered in three parts; conceptualizing research, epistemologies, and development of identity voice and authority. Throughout the course, the student was able to recognize how to express the theory of love without compromise through learning the process of identifying and layering methodology, arguments, and conceptual frameworks. Through the utilized pedagogy, the student developed confidence in her ability to defend her topic, justify the value of the touchy-feely perspective, and satisfy the academic writing requirement by defending her perspective through a layering approach that was protected by a strong framework. The student developed a new meaning for writing when she understood and realized the benefit of a conceptual framework providing her with the ability to speak with authority on the topic (Badenhorst et al., 2015).

At a Midwestern university, a descriptive self-study was done to identify the source of its graduate students' writing issues. The results of the collaborative self-study reflected issues within the process used by the university to prepare graduate students for writing at the master's level. Researchers concluded that they must actively pursue effective research in order to improve students' writing skills (Bair & Mader, 2013).

Healthcare education. An early intervention approach to nursing students' writing issues highlighted the value of storytelling as a pedagogy. This technique incorporated students using their own stories and experiences to connect them to the literature. Using the academic writing early intervention approach developed by Hanson (2007), the researcher developed an abbreviated version of the intervention approach through a one-day workshop designed for new graduate nursing students. The intensive intervention utilized storytelling as a starting point, providing a distinction between

academic writing and other types of writing, connecting the literature with their stories, and APA common errors. The result of this intervention included students developing confidence in their writing; APA familiarity; a new meaning, use, and respect for understanding their stories in relation to the literature; and an improved knowledge of how to exercise their academic writing skills (Walker & Tschanz, 2013).

Best Practices for Engaging Students to Improve Writing

   Writing institutes and boot camps. The problem of graduate students' writing issues has led to multiple studies on students of varied graduate disciplines, including healthcare, that have shown the benefit of providing intensive writing support sessions to improve graduate student writing (Cone & Dover, 2012; Thomas et al., 2014; Walker & Tschanz, 2013). Thomas et al. (2014) addressed the problem of writing anxiety in graduate students recognized in prior research in a study on graduate writing institute's related benefits to help graduate students overcome their writing challenge of anxiety. The researchers deployed a 4-day writing institute twice over spring break and a school term over a 2-year period. The institute outline included non-discipline-specific hands-on writing activities, specialized holistic learning assistance, pre- and post-test assessments, and demystifying writing myths techniques. The results indicated that graduate students revealed the graduate writing institute improved their perception of writing.

   In similar studies, writing institutes and boot camps addressed the basic needs of graduate students to write effectively and develop the new confidence needed to address challenges in the writing process shared by graduates who complete these writing intensive events (Cone & Dover, 2012; Thomas et al., 2014; Walker & Tschanz, 2013). In an effort to improve the academic writing of students enrolled in a specialist nursing program, a cohort of two graduate nursing student specialist classes and two faculty

members were engaged in a quality improvement writing research study of graduate

nursing specialists (Mattsson, 2016). Studies regarding writing concerns highlighted

graduate students' lack of preparation for writing a master's thesis and general writing

issues including grammar and poor spelling (Borglin & Fagerström, 2012; Friberg &

Dahlborg, 2013). Although Mattson's primary focus was on improved academic writing

of specialized nursing students by deploying a quality improvement writing strategy, it

was surprising that students' writing improvements were also realized through external

collaborative activities. The pedagogical ability of tutors was realized as a necessary

factor to consider in its contribution to students' change in attitude for learning and

improving their writing (Mattson, 2016).

Most of the previously referenced studies described writing improvement

solutions that can be done in a face-to-face or online modality. An Australian study of

mature nursing students concluded a contrasting perspective that students would require a

first year of face-to-face learning to be successful (Kidd, Nankervis, & Connell, 2011).

This perspective supports findings from a study by Brockman et al. (2011), where faculty

had a common perception of first-year college students' writing being inadequate. This

perception is consistent with research identifying inadequate writing preparation of

students at the graduate level (Bair & Mader, 2013).

Writing across the curriculum and writing-in-discipline strategies/pedagogy.
Writing across the curriculum (WAC) and writing-in-discipline (WID) strategies have

become a mainstream approach to writing improvements in higher education, across

various disciplines, and learning modalities including online (Clughen & Connell, 2012).

Writing across the curriculum refers to the pedagogy of integrating writing requirements

to develop student writing skills that are embedded and assessed alongside the discipline-

specific requirements (Clughen & Connell, 2012; Harper & Vered, 2017). These approaches are known for being based on Vygotsky's cognitive integration theory and Piaget's constructivist learning theory. Furthermore, both studies established that in many disciplines, there are faculty who are starved for time in covering the necessary discipline components of the curriculum. These faculty perceive it as a greater challenge to integrate writing improvement in their pedagogical approach (Clughen & Connell, 2012; Harper & Vered, 2017). This challenge was further recognized in a focus group study where writing faculty participants perceived that program differences created a disparity between what each program defined as "good writing" (Brockman et al., 2011).

Time is a factor that many faculty struggle with when new initiatives are implemented; however, there is a need to conduct professional development courses to help faculty learn the best instructional strategies and tools available to support their implementation of enhanced writing within the curriculum approach. In a study conducted at a large southern state university, there was increased direction to deliver more courses online while simultaneously enhancing writing pedagogy across interdisciplinary areas (Good & Shumack, 2013). According to the authors, many faculty perceived that they were already overextended in teaching, research, service, and other areas. So, the university provided a monetarily incentivized faculty training program geared specifically towards content-specific and discipline-based integration of writing in the classroom. The purpose of their study was recognizing the value of having trained faculty who contribute to improved student academic writing. The training program consisted of a comprehensive WAC faculty professional development program that consisted of ten 3-hour professional development sessions. The findings of the study reflected that this type of training did provide faculty with the skills needed to effectively

utilize technology to improve their writing instruction (Good & Shumack, 2013). The authors asserted that there exists a need for reform of technology used during instruction to connect with the current student population. This finding is consistent with Cronley and Kilgore's (2016) discipline-specific study of graduate students in social work. Results of the study suggested that faculty with more preparation in writing instruction had better results in student writing improvement. Despite this finding, more than 60% of the faculty surveyed had little or no training to teach writing (Cronley & Kilgore, 2016).

In Cronley and Kilgore's (2016) study, many graduate students expressed confidence in their writing for social work courses; however, many students also reported being unsure regarding APA and research methods. This finding further supports the need for the integration of discipline-specific contextualization of academic writing and APA style in graduate courses utilizing writing across the curriculum. Writing concept in some countries is viewed as an end product of a student's ability to express their complex understanding of their professional field. However, researchers have stated that the opportunity to practice what is needed to deliver this product that could be accomplished through writing across the curriculum pedagogy is not typical (Harper & Vered, 2017).

Writing improvement project of middle to high school students' teachers' pedagogies. Several studies discussed the lack of preparation students have had to write successfully in higher education (Bair & Mader, 2013; Arum & Roksa, 2011). This literature review includes an examination of writing improvement pedagogical approaches in middle to high school. The inclusion of the middle to high school sector in this review is to provide insight on current approaches to improve the writing skills preparation of students before entering higher education and highlighting strategies that can translate to higher education. The Northwest Arkansas Writing Project College-

Ready Writers Program was developed as a part of the National Writing Project and focused on improving the teaching of academic writing. This study included English language arts teachers, Grades 6-12 as participants, meeting on a monthly basis to focus on three specific practices to assess student writing. These practices included constructivist coding, calibrating with anchor papers, and affinity mapping (Holland, Wright, & Goering, 2016). In the constructivist coding practice of this project, faculty reviewed submissions to understand the student level of work, reviewed their initial feedback, and through feedback assessment, determined the necessary instructional changes needed to make to take their students to the next level.

By calibrating anchor papers, faculty collected the work of excellent writing for students at different grade levels to develop an expectation for the next grade level (Holland et al., 2016). Although the common core standards provide information on what is to be taught at a certain grade level, it is up to the instructor to determine how that standard should be covered. Through the lens of constructivism, with this new knowledge, faculty can determine how best to modify their teaching approach on a writing skill to engage and increase the challenge of the student's ability. According to Holland et al., affinity mapping uses open-ended analytical questions that allow faculty to help students develop the skill of effectively substantiating claims they make in their writing. This is done by understanding what makes a claim effective, being able to define the elements of what a claim should have and identifying how to help students effectively write it. With the specific qualities for developing a competent and effective claim in an activity to be completed by the participants of this project, faculty were able to have a concrete process to follow. Through the deployment of the process, it showed the evidence of improved student writing claims.

Faculty who were involved in the Northwest Arkansas Writing project have expressed improvement in the writing skills of their students' claims. Through using assessment tools provided by the National Writing Project, there was a "9.9% improvement in student integration of source material to support their claims" (Holland, Wright, & Goering, 2016, p. 43). Additionally, a significant improvement increase from 2.9% in November to over 21% in January was evidenced by student writers' ability to separate their ideas from their claims (Holland et al., 2016).

Literature Review Summary

Writing is a fundamentally necessary skill for student success in academia. However, research disclosed that there are students at various degree levels in higher education who have writing deficiencies that hinder academic success. Faculty play a vital role instilling the importance and value of good writing skills being equivalent to the content of a student's field (Roberts & Goss, 2009). The literature review summarized several of the critical issues related to academic writing in higher education in online learning, various disciplines, student and faculty perceptions of graduate students' academic writing, teaching pedagogies, and interventions to improve student writing skills. The issue of student academic writing is global and at various levels of education.

As examined in this review, many students pursue online learning for the flexibility it affords. However, many students who return after being away from the educational setting for many years are challenged with understanding and using appropriate writing skills necessary in higher education and in online learning settings (Bair & Mader, 2013; Pintz & Posey, 2012; Schwabl et al., 2013). Several studies have noted that faculty and students have different perceptions on student writing issues and how to resolve them (Ariail et al. 2013; Bair & Mader, 2013; Borglin & Fagerström,

2012).

In the study on Patchwriting conducted by Schwabl et al. (2013), the researchers emphasized the need for a discipline specific study to obtain more detailed information and recommendations for improving writing deficiencies of students in paraphrasing and citation skills. "More focused research on instructional initiatives, both online and in-class, needs to be designed, delivered and evaluated to determine differential outcomes" (Schwabl et al., 2013, p. 412).

Bair and Mader (2013) highlighted the importance of faculty and all higher education stakeholders understanding the gaps in graduate students writing challenges. This study explored common faculty perceptions of graduate student writing issues and what they do to improve it in a discipline specific study and modality to understand these gaps further. This supports alignment with the theoretical framework of constructivism in this study that sought to understand the meaning created by the faculty of their students' writing issues. The lens of constructivism bases learners using prior knowledge and constructing on it to interpret a new knowledge or understanding of a particular area (Porcaro, 2011).

Bair and Mader (2013) presented several current perceptions of faculty and students of student academic writing skills that contrast each other. The authors also found that there exists a dichotomy of many healthcare professionals who perceive academic writing not being relevant to their role as practitioners creating a disconnect between research and practice. Despite this disconnect, it is necessary to understand faculty perspectives on why writing skills are important to their students and how writing skills are utilized in the healthcare field (Bair & Mader, 2013). With existing research supporting that students' perceptions differ from faculty related to their writing skills

(Ariail et al., 2013; Bair & Mader 2013), there is a need to understand faculty perceptions on what should occur when student writing is found to be deficient.

Research Questions

Notwithstanding several research studies conducted on writing issues in higher education, the goal of the researcher was to provide information and recommendations for improving writing deficiencies of online graduate students with focused research on instructional initiatives (Schwabl et al., 2013). The researcher sought to develop an understanding of common faculty perceptions of online healthcare graduate students' writing deficiencies and derive meaning to why and how they implement improvement with these students.

The central questions for this qualitative research study were what common perceptions faculty have concerning online healthcare graduate students' writing challenges and what techniques faculty use to improve these skills. Bair and Mader (2013) highlighted the importance of faculty and all stakeholders to understand the gaps in student writing in order to successfully collaborate and implement improvement.

The following research questions are aligned with the theory of constructivism to develop a meaning and understanding of faculty perceptions for improving online graduate healthcare students' writing.

1. What do online faculty members identify as the deficiencies of online graduate healthcare students' writing skills?

2. What do online faculty report about their beliefs and motivations underlying their decision to engage online healthcare students in the improvement of their writing skills?

3. What are online faculty processes for identifying which pedagogical

approaches to use to improve the writing skills of online healthcare graduate students?

4. What pedagogical interventions do individual faculty members use to aid an online healthcare graduate student in improving their writing skills?

A considerable amount of literature on faculty perceptions, writing challenges of students in undergraduate programs, and online learning exists. Nonetheless, upon investigation of various databases with the research support of university librarians, the researcher determined that there was minimal information available to online learning specific to the healthcare field or graduate writing in healthcare programs, or faculty perceptions of these areas. This finding created a challenge in locating surveys, questionnaires, or other instruments related to this topic. Therefore, a new instrument was developed that was based primarily on the literature of these individual areas.

Chapter 3: Methodology

A qualitative researcher may consider five approaches for a reliable qualitative study. These approaches include grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and case study. Grounded theory design explains an issue in a particular population and seeks to develop a theory to address the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study did not seek to develop a new theory; hence, this approach was not selected. An ethnographic design is a qualitative approach that only investigates experiences and practices of a culture or social group (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The study does not involve the practices or experiences of a culture or social group but rather the perceptions of individuals, ruling out ethnography as an appropriate design for this study. Phenomenology design relates to one or more individuals providing their experiences of the phenomenon studied and typically involve in-depth interviews to examine the life as lived by its participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Narrative design research has the primary feature of storytelling used to reflect on a phenomenon during a specific period and providing participants the opportunity to tell a story of a timeline of events that may have transpired (Creswell, 2018). The study did not seek to examine the experiences of individuals or understand the timeline of events. Therefore, phenomenology and narrative designs were not appropriate approaches for this study. Case studies bring together various collected data and make interpretations and meaning of the data that has converged in an effort to make it visible to ordinary daily experiences (Yin, 2018).

The researcher of this applied dissertation utilized a case study approach. A case study consists of two segments: "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries

between phenomenon and context may not be clearly defined" (Yin, 2008, p. 15). According to the author case studies are developed through the multiple types of data that converge in triangulation, to establish validity and reliability of the data analysis completed.

The researcher explored common faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students' writing issues at two university sites and what faculty do to engage students in improving their writing using an exploratory single instrument case study approach. Yin (2018) focused on an issue of concern and selected a bounded case to illustrate this issue. This case study utilized qualitative research sources including individual interviews and archival data. Yin suggested that case study methodology is best to answer how and why questions that explain some present circumstance. In addition, the author stated that case studies do not attempt to control behavioral events as in experimental research and that the research occurs in the natural setting. A case study is a standard suitable qualitative research method in the field of education because it can contribute to knowledge regarding individuals and related phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Because this researcher intended to examine the perceptions of faculty teaching graduate online healthcare students and the processes faculty use to improve graduate students writing skills, the study appropriately fit into a qualitative case study research methodology.

Bellamy (2017) explored faculty perceptions of students writing in undergraduate students. Utilizing a case study approach, the researcher followed a predetermined set of guidelines to explore the phenomenon of a specific population and their perceptions of student writing. In addition, Bellamy conducted interviews with faculty to understand the phenomenon in its natural

environment versus collecting data to explain it. The researcher did not seek to control the environment of the study where the data were collected, but rather understand it. Bellamy's research further supported the research methodology selected by the researcher for this applied dissertation.

Participants

The researcher used purposeful sampling to invite 18 online faculty from two sites who teach online graduate healthcare students, enrolled at a regionally accredited university that has a primary focus of offering healthcare degrees, to participate in this applied dissertation study. According to Creswell (2015), purposeful sampling enables researchers to intentionally select individuals and sites rich in information, in order to learn or understand a central phenomenon. The purposeful sampling strategy was appropriate as it permitted the researcher to provide an in-depth description of individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that embodied defining characteristics (Creswell, 2015). The researcher was able to meet the desired number of online faculty needed to complete the study using purposeful and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling uses existing participants to provide referrals to other potential participants that satisfy the eligibility requirements needed for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The researcher used two research sites and three healthcare programs for this study. The rationale for selecting multiple sites and programs was to create commonality between responses from different programs, locations, and types of institutions as stated in the purpose of the study. Additionally, two research sites in different geographical locations provided a more in-depth view of the phenomenon from institutions with a predominant healthcare focused curriculum. The researcher obtained approvals to recruit from the two selected research sites located in California and Florida.

The Florida research site required that a co-investigator be assigned; a faculty at the Florida research site enabled the researcher to have access to the research site faculty list who could serve as potential participants. The researcher added two co-investigators at the Florida research site that served as gatekeepers at this research site. Upon receiving approval at the California site first, the researcher initiated recruitment at the California site first. This was followed by recruitment at the Florida site with the assistance of co-investigators once approval was received from that site. The researcher collected archival data, maintained reflective journal notes, and conducted interviews during the Fall 2018 term at both selected sites in the study.

The recruitment invitation letter was sent via email to 13 online faculty divided between the two sites. However, the researcher selected the first 12 participants who responded and agreed to participate in the study. A co-investigator at the Florida research site served as the gatekeeper at the Florida site; the researcher served as the gatekeeper at the California research site to obtain participants' contact information. Participant's eligibility to participate in the study was described and requested the during the recruitment process. Each research participant was required to be a faculty who met the following criteria: (a) have taught in higher education for a minimum of one year, (b) have taught graduate students in an online graduate healthcare course for at least one full term, and (c) completed a signed study consent form.

The recruitment letter (see Appendix A) details the context, purpose, and timeline of the study. The researcher specified in the recruitment letter how the confidentiality of the participant's responses would be ensured during the collection process. The letter included the responsibilities of the participants, duties of the researcher, and the anticipated time of 2 hours that participants needed to dedicate to the study. The estimated

2-hour timeframe consisted of a 45-minute interview and a 1-hour post-interview review of the transcripts for accuracy. The researcher estimated that participants may spend an average of 15 minutes in other communications related to the study with the researcher. The researcher conducted the research inquiry for eight weeks during the fall 2018 term.

The researcher invited participants who were online faculty, had taught in higher education for a minimum of one year, and had taught fully online courses to graduate online healthcare students for a minimum of one term. To stratify the sampling of the online faculty to be interviewed, the researcher invited online faculty who fell into four categories: (a) adjunct faculty with terminal degrees, (b) adjunct faculty without terminal degrees, (c) full-time faculty with terminal degrees, and (d) full-time faculty without terminal degrees. Whereas faculty with terminal degrees teach most graduate program courses, the researcher recognized that terminal degrees are not required for all graduate healthcare courses. Therefore, faculty without terminal degrees were included in the recruitment process. The researcher requested participants to accept the invitation within one week of the initial email. The acceptance by all participants in the research study occurred within less than 5 days.

Data Collection Tools

The researcher collected data for analysis in this case study, by conducting individual interviews with 12 online faculty, reviewing archival data, and reflective journal notes maintained throughout the dissertation process. Archival data is typically routinely collected information of a particular society, community, or organization (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The data collected via interviews was triangulated with archival data available related to online graduate healthcare students writing issues. The archival data utilized in this study included writing center reports and correspondence,

program learning outcomes data, and signature assignment assessments.

Individual interviews. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were utilized as the Interview Protocol (see Appendix B) for collecting data in this study. Whereas interviewing is a common method used in case studies for data collection, a limitation of interviews is that fewer participants are typically interviewed in comparison to when a questionnaire is used with a larger population. However, this method was selected because of the benefit of using interviews that allows for immediate data collection, follow-up, and prompt clarification as needed during the interview process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviews were conducted using the video-conference technology tool Zoom, and each interview session was recorded.

To guide interview conversations, the researcher used an interview protocol with open-ended questions. An expert panel reviewed the developed interview protocol. The expert panel consisted of an online healthcare assistant professor, a nurse practitioner associate professor, a doctoral research faculty with qualitative study expertise, and a doctoral research professor with writing expertise. The researcher conducted two pilots of the interview protocol in between expert reviews and modified the protocol based on feedback. The expert panel was satisfied with the developed instrument and suggested minor edits to revise some questions for clarity and removal of one question that was not appropriate for the study. The pilot was completed with participants who met the eligibility requirements of the research study participants. The participants used in the pilot were not included in the data analysis of this applied dissertation study.

Archival data. Typically, archival data are routinely collected information of a particular society, community, or organization (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher's use of archival data in this study included writing center reports and

correspondence, program learning outcomes data, and signature assignment assessments. These items allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of the meaning of online healthcare graduate student writing challenges by triangulating the archival data with other collected data of faculty perceptions of these students writing challenges. These elements addressed the research questions for the study. Yin (2018) identified archival data as one of the six sources of evidence that can be used to establish triangulation in a case study allowing for an in-depth study of the phenomenon. For the purposes of this research study, archival data was used to help the researcher explore the phenomenon of online graduate healthcare students' writing issues and any faculty perceptions or processes related to this phenomenon recorded at the selected sites.

Reflective journal. The researcher maintained a reflective journal during the study that was used to track interview invitations sent, responses received, dates of scheduled interviews, dates of completed interviews, and dates that the transcripts were completed. The researcher also maintained critical thoughts and impressions developed during the research process in the reflective journal. The dates that coding was completed including notes taken during interviews were included in the journal. According to Yin (2018), reflective notes record the researcher's personal thoughts, biases, and impressions developed throughout a case study. The researcher's maintenance of the personal reflective journal to record personal thoughts and impressions aided in managing biases throughout various phases of the study.

Procedures

After research site approvals were received, the researcher began the recruitment process, first at the California research site. After recruitment and data collection at the first site, the research began the recruitment process at the Florida site with the assistance

of a co-investigator. The co-investigator provided a list of contacts at the site, and the

researcher emailed the recruitment letter inviting four online graduate faculty from the

Florida research site to participate in the study. At the California site, the researcher

contacted the program directors of the online graduate healthcare program disciplines. The

directors provided the contact information for eight online graduate healthcare faculty who

satisfied participant eligibility requirements. The number of faculty invited from each site

was based on a percentage of faculty that was a representative sample of each sites' online

graduate healthcare faculty population. Faculty from both sites combined were from each

of the following four categories: (a) adjunct faculty with terminal degrees, (b) adjunct

faculty without terminal degrees, (c) full-time faculty with terminal degrees, and (d) full-

time faculty without terminal degrees. The researcher represented the sampling of the

faculty of the four groups used to create commonality between responses from different

types of faculty in a coding table (see Appendix C). This rationale was deployed to align

with the purpose of the study to explore common faculty perceptions of why some online

faculty engage their online healthcare graduate students who are deficient in writing skills

to improve and what interventions they use.

The researcher recruitment and data collection process overlapped and

consisted a total of 8 weeks. The recruitment invitation letter used in this study detailed

the context and purpose of the study to be conducted with participants. The letter included

the expectations of the participants and the time commitment needed for the study. The

time commitment of this research consisted of approximately, 45 minutes for the

interview, 15 minutes for email communications and approximately one hour for post

interview review of the transcription completed of the interview. The review of the

transcription was conducted to have each participant verify the accuracy of the

information collected during the interview. Confidentiality of participant responses

through the use of pseudonyms was used during the transcription process and referenced

in the recruitment letter. Below is a summary timetable of the process that was followed

after approvals were received.

Week 1. The researcher emailed a recruitment letter inviting online graduate

healthcare faculty to participate in the dissertation case study. The letter detailed the

context and purpose of the study and the timeline for the study, which at completion was

eight weeks during the fall 2018 term. Of the 13 participants who were invited to the

study, the researcher selected the first 12 participants who accepted the invitation and met

the following criteria; have taught in higher education for a minimum of one year and

have taught students in an online graduate healthcare course for at least one term. The

researcher requested archival data from the Florida research site via the co-investigator

from that site and retrieved archival data from writing center staff and program directors

directly from the California research site.

Week 2. The researcher scheduled all interview appointments at the California site

and was assisted by the coinvestigator with scheduling interview appointments at the

Florida site. Interviews were scheduled individually with each of the 12 participants who

accepted to participate in the study. Interview appointments were scheduled using Outlook

calendar invitations and included a link to the video conferencing application, Zoom. The

researcher offered participants the option of using the video feature during the meeting

via the video conferencing application. Six participants utilized the video feature with the

remaining participants using audio only. The Zoom video conferencing tool provided the

researcher the ability to meet with participants who were located in various geographical

locations (Creswell, 2015).

Weeks 2 through 7. The researcher conducted recorded interviews with study participants who were scheduled via Outlook during week two. The researcher also continued review of archival data. As interviews were completed, the recordings were provided to a transcription service to transcribe. As transcriptions of recorded interviews were received, the researcher reviewed each one and then forwarded transcripts to study participants for review and accuracy. This process, member checking, was completed after transcribing each participant's interview to add a layer of trustworthiness to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

For scheduled interviews, the researcher used a developed interview protocol that included open-ended questions that explored the study's research questions and completed each interview within 45 minutes to one hour. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher expressed an appreciation to the participants for their time. Next, the researcher provided a timeline that the transcript of the interview would be sent to the participant for review. When the interview transcripts were emailed to the participants for member checking, it requested the review to be completed and returned within three days. Eleven of the twelve participants returned the reviewed transcripts completing the member checking process. The member checking process employed provided an opportunity for participants to correct or clarify any part of the transcript from the interview for accuracy and integrity of the transcript.

Week 4. The researcher requested archival data related to online healthcare graduate students writing issues. The request included but was not limited to faculty surveys, student surveys, and writing center reports. The researcher obtained writing center reports, program learning outcomes data, and signature assignment assessments that were primarily based on writing requirements of online graduate healthcare students.

Week 8. The researcher completed any pending interviews that were rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances. The researcher also continued to forward transcribed transcripts to study participants for review and accuracy of transcribed interviews completed. Then the researcher began the coding process of transcripts and archival data.

Data Analysis

As suggested by Creswell (2015), the researcher of this applied dissertation study followed analytic strategies necessary for qualitative research. Using a case study approach, the researcher was methodical in using multiple sources of information to develop a rich in-depth understanding of the research gap discussed in chapter 2. The strategies included were collecting, organizing data, analyzing data, coding, identifying categories, developing themes, and reporting findings.

Overall, the researcher collected all the data and organized it in electronic files. The researcher then categorized material according to the data source; i.e., transcripts of personal interviews, archival data, reflective journal notes, and maintained a backup copy of all data. The researcher identified all interview files using the pseudonym P1 through P12, to protect participants' confidentiality. The researcher then read each interview transcription thoroughly and listened to the audio recording of each interview multiple times. This process allowed the researcher to become engaged with the data. The transcribed interviews were then coded by the researcher and entered into the qualitative analysis tool, NVivo that was used to assist in the organization of the codes and analysis of the transcript. During this phase of the analysis, the researcher began to "play" with the transcript data to seek patterns or concepts that were useful (Creswell, 2018).

Next, the researcher manually coded the archival data and reflective journal notes to manipulate that data and begin the process of the researcher describing, classifying,

interpreting, and coding of these data sources. The researcher utilized a qualitative

analysis software program, such as NVivo, to "facilitate the process of storing, analyzing,

sorting, and representing or visualizing the data" (Creswell, 2015, p. 239). Whereas the

qualitative analysis software does not analyze the data, the researcher used this software

as a tool to assist the researcher in highlighting the themes or codes that emerged from

the data (Creswell, 2015).

Coding involves the process of "aggregating the text or visual data into small

categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being

used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (Creswell, 2018, p. 190). To begin

the coding process, the researcher read each transcript and made notes in the margins of

any codes to be used as recommended by Creswell (2018) to avoid being distanced from

the analysis by the software. The researcher also completed memos during this process to

remain engaged with the data. According to Creswell (2015), memos allowed the

researcher to explore ideas and hunches while seeking a broader understanding. In a

review of the transcribed interviews, the researcher actively coded by taking several

portions of related texts, combined them into groups, and assigned a label to the code

(Creswell, 2018). The researcher developed a short list of initial codes, expanding only

the initial list as needed (Creswell, 2018).

Next, the researcher coded relevant archival data collected, and the researcher's

reflective journal notes. During the coding phase the researcher provided detailed

descriptions of the findings and the context of what the data found was in this phase.

After coding all interview transcripts, archival data, and reflective notes, the researcher

identified patterns in the data that were then organized into categories. The researcher then

recognized themes that began to emerge from the organized categories. A hierarchical tree

diagram (see Appendix D) of the developed themes in this research was designed to illustrate the information in the analysis (Creswell, 2015). The researcher summarized the findings in a rich narrative report of the findings in Chapter 4, and a coding table summarizing the themes of the research study. The researcher also and noted the research study limitations and further research suggestions (Creswell 2015).

Ethical Considerations

To minimize the risk of ethical concerns and considerations, the researcher followed established research protocol and any specific guidelines set forth by the two selected sites. Prior to each interview, the researcher provided each participant an informed consent form. The consent form outlined the purpose of the study, procedures, time commitment, compensation, and the benefits and risks associated with the study. The researcher maintained participant confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. To maintain the confidentiality during the study pseudonyms were used in the transcription of the participant's interviews. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and all identifying information was removed from their documents. The researcher used password-protected applications and devices while maintaining archival data and reflective journaling. Signed consents received from participants are kept in a separate electronic file from the participant's transcribed interviews. A table representing the demographics of the participants is provided in Chapter 4 that includes pseudonyms of the interview participants, their current teaching assignment, years of service in higher education, years of service in the healthcare profession, and years of service teaching online. Additionally, the researcher provided instructions to the transcription service used for transcribing interviews to utilize a headset when listening to recorded interviews and to discard transcription two weeks after transcript delivery to maintain

participant confidentiality and anonymity.

   Trustworthiness. The researcher utilized several strategies listed by Creswell (2015) in which a qualitative study can establish trustworthiness. Some of the strategies that were used for credibility included member checking for accuracy of the data. The researcher submitted the transcript to participants interviewed via email to request their review for accuracy of the information transcribed. This study also incorporated the strategy of triangulation of multiple types of data that included interviews, archival data, and a reflective journal. Triangulation allows for an exploration of the topic of study from different sources or methods to converge on a single point, enhancing the accuracy of the research study (Creswell, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher also sought to identify any plausible real-world rival explanations that became known during the data collection process. Finally, the researcher conducted an external audit of the study completed by a higher education professional. This external audit was completed after the summary of the findings of the data analysis phase. The external audit of this research study was to further validate the completion of this applied dissertation study (Creswell, 2015).

Potential Research Bias

   The researcher during the first term of enrollment in the doctoral program encountered unexpected challenges with academic writing that was highlighted in feedback from the researcher's professors during that term. The researcher is a director in higher education with over 15 years of experience in higher education instruction and administration with daily writing expectations. Therefore, the first term challenges related to writing was new and poignant. It was during the first term of the doctoral program that the researcher began to recognize and appreciate the difference in academic writing

requirements versus professional writing requirements. After several rewrites, redirection, and guidance from professors, the researcher who had earned a No Grade (NG) in the first assignment, at the end of the course earned an A grade in the Governance, Ethics, and Law course; a predominantly intensive writing course. Afterwards, the researcher continued to maintain a 4.0 gpa in the remainder of the doctoral program courses.

The writing challenges experienced in the first term by the researcher have continuously improved have the challenges improved or have your skills improved in response to these challenges? while enrolled in the doctoral program. However, the experience highlighted for the researcher a common challenge expressed by faculty at the researcher's institution of online graduate students writing issues. At the researcher's institution, there are several ongoing initiatives related to the improvement of students' writing at all degree levels. In the researcher's professional role, the improvement of online graduate healthcare students enrolled at the researcher's institution has become a personal mission given the researcher's personal experience. Given the positive outcome due to the support and redirection provided by the researcher's first term doctoral professor, the researcher believes that this perspective and approach by a professor would help to improve the academic writing issues of online students enrolled in graduate healthcare programs at the researcher's institution. The researcher strongly believes that online faculty have the ability to contribute to the improvement of their students' academic writing skills given this personal experience. The researcher maintained a personal reflective journal to record personal thoughts and impressions and manage biases throughout various phases of the study.

Validating the Instrument Process

There exists a considerable amount of literature related to faculty perceptions,

writing challenges of students in undergraduate programs, and online learning. Nevertheless, upon investigation of various databases with the research support of university librarians, the researcher determined that there was minimal information available to online learning specific to the healthcare field, graduate writing in healthcare programs, or faculty perceptions of these areas. This finding created a challenge in locating surveys, questionnaires, or other instruments related to this topic and resulted in the development of a new instrument based primarily on the literature of these individual areas.

The process of validating the instrument began with a review of existing literature in writing, graduate programs, and healthcare programs. Once the questionnaire was developed, it was discussed with an expert reviewer who exceeded the criteria of a key informant to provide trustworthiness to the instrument. The expert reviewer had over 7 years of teaching experience in higher education exclusively to online healthcare students at various degree levels. The expert reviewer recommended a revision of question one to request more specific information on the type of writing skills deficiencies seen in graduate students and supported the remaining questions without changes. The first question for the interview protocol was then revised, and an additional question was added based on the recommendation. The original question one stated, "What is the writing style of your students?" The revised question one now states, "What are the deficiencies seen in the writing skills of online graduate healthcare students?" "Where in the program are these issues identified?" was an additional question added to the first group of questions in the interview protocol to address the first research question.

A pilot interview of the revised instrument was conducted with a healthcare graduate faculty member who has had over seven years of nursing teaching experience in

higher education and two years exclusive online teaching of graduate healthcare students. After the pilot, a formative assessment of the instrument was completed with doctoral writing professors for expert feedback. A minor revision of the instrument was done to clarify verbiage and grammar of the interview questions, followed by a second pilot interview with the first expert reviewer. After the pilot, the expert reviewer established that the revised instrument was "not ambiguous, had a good progression, and should lead to responses needed to satisfy the purpose of the study." The final recommendation by the expert reviewer was to include a demographic questionnaire at the beginning of the interview. The demographic questionnaire requested that each participant share their current teaching assignment, years of service in higher education, years of service in the healthcare profession, years of service teaching online, and where in the program the faculty teaches (beginning, middle, or end of program).

Researchers highlighted the importance of faculty and all stakeholders with the same common goal; the necessity to understand what the writing issues of graduate students are and where the gaps in student writing exists in order to successfully collaborate and implement improvement change (Bair & Mader, 2013). This supported the first group of questions in the interview protocol that the researcher of this applied dissertation study asked to better understand faculty perceptions of their students' writing issues. This further supports alignment with the theoretical framework of constructivism in this study because it sought to understand the meaning created of their students writing issues (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013).

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the common faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students writing challenges and what faculty do to improve these skills. A semi-structured interview was conducted with participants using Zoom, a video conferencing tool. The interview transcripts of 12 participants from two sites, reflective notes taken throughout the dissertation collection phase and archival data that included writing center reports, program learning outcomes data containing faculty contributions, and emails were significant data elements used to triangulate the data collected that converged evidence to the findings in this study.

The population sample consisted of 12 online graduate healthcare faculty who exceeded the participant criteria for this study having taught in excess of three years in higher education and a minimum of teaching fully online for at least one term. This population sample provided opportunity for the researcher to identify the most common themes amounts research participants. Pseudonyms were used for participants and numerical site name used for each site within this research study to maintain confidentiality.

The researcher used NVivo, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQ DAS) to interpret and analyze the data collected. The researcher used NVivo to conduct an initial coding process across interview transcripts, and manually for archival data and reflective journal notes. All data collected was further coded within each individual research question and including identifying repetitive phrases to identify themes. Focused coding was conducted on the initial codes which were categorized to discover the main themes of this research. The demographics and program disciplines of

the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant's Demographics and Program Disciplines

Participant Pseudonym	Current Degree level	Current Status	Years in higher education	Years teaching online	Location of courses	Healthcare Discipline
P1	Doctorate	Adjunct	13	7	Beginning	Health Administration
P2	Masters	Adjunct	3	3	Beginning	Public Health
P3	Masters	Adjunct	2	2	End	Health Administration
P4	Doctorate	Adjunct	13	5	Throughout	Nursing
P5	Doctorate	Full-Time	6	5	Throughout	Nursing
P6	Masters	Full-Time	4	4	Throughout	Nursing
P7	Doctorate	Full-Time	7	5	Throughout	Health Administration
P8	Doctorate	Adjunct	18	3	End	Nursing
P9	Doctorate	Adjunct	17	0.5	Beginning	Nursing
P10	Doctorate	Full-Time	25	25	Beginning	Nursing
P11	Doctorate	Full-Time	14	14	Middle	Health Administration
P12	Doctorate	Full-Time	10	10	Throughout	Health Administration

First, the researcher provides a detailed summary of the findings in response to each research question of this case study. Then, a general overview of the main themes identified across all research questions. The central question for this qualitative research case study was what common perceptions faculty have concerning online healthcare graduate students' writing challenges and what techniques faculty use to improve these skills. Bair and Mader (2013) emphasized the importance of faculty and all stakeholders understanding the gaps in student writing in order to successfully collaborate and

implement improvement.

An analysis of data from online graduate healthcare faculty transcribed interviews, archival data, and reflective journals produced four main themes that were common to the participants and sites utilized in this study. Each theme identified was also directly related to each specific research question in the study. The themes of this research included (a) students' lacking writing organization and structure, grammar, and APA skills at the graduate level; (b) higher level communication expectations of students in the healthcare field upon completing a graduate level healthcare degree program with the subcategories of its implications to patients healthcare and communicating their knowledge and experience to others through publications; (c) completing a detailed review of the first assignment and overview of consistent and repetitive errors in written submissions as a means of intervening to improve online healthcare graduate student writing; and (d) that feedback was the most common pedagogical intervention utilized by online graduate faculty but in more problematic writing cases, one-on-one synchronous sessions need to be held with students. The presentation of these themes is highlighted from the participants' responses.

Question 1: What do online faculty members identify as the deficiencies of online graduate healthcare students' writing skills?

Participants in the research study mentioned writing organization and structure, American Psychological Association format (APA), and grammar as the most frequent deficiencies identified in their online graduate healthcare students. This finding is corroborated by archival data collected in the study that reflected APA and writing mechanics which satisfied the minimum program learning outcomes of graduate public health and health administration programs, but still had the lowest percentage value

overall in program learning outcome. Faculty concern for the frequency of these writing deficiencies identified was primarily based on their entering students' inability to communicate effectively in written form and formulate their ideas.

Most participants stated that they identified this through the submission of assignments and discussion posts in the online classroom. The collection of writing center activity reports reflected online graduate students predominantly received writing assistance related to grammar issues. P1 stated,

> What's really surprising is the grammar. Grammar, punctuation especially with tense; present, past, future tenses, I see a lot of issues with that. Also, plural you know plural versus singular it's really surprising that there are a lot of grammatical errors and punctuation errors in the writing. That to me is the thing that stands out the most right off the bat and then in other areas it's just a matter of depth of content whatever the subject matter is they don't necessarily dive as deep as you would think a master level student would be doing.

P2 offered specific examples of deficiencies with students writing skills:

> So, some of the writing deficiencies I've noticed is with grammar which could consist of lacking organization, paragraph structure meaning sometimes you look at a paragraph and it's one sentence, mechanical errors with quotations, the opening or closing, spelling errors, capitalization error, definitely sentence structure errors; either run-on sentences or incomplete sentence fragments.

While P3 said that, "I see a big, big problem with understanding APA format and following the APA." P4 stated the following:

> If I see a high percentage of matching, I get a little bit more conscious about the paper and start to checking it out a little bit more, because that mean that the

students really didn't do too much work… information to the paper from other sources but that synthesis part is missing in the whole paper.

Comments from P5 included,

What I see is, lack of basic understanding of APA …they don't know how to apply the different level headings of APA, they may use a level heading 1 or they attempt higher heading 2, 3, 4, 5 and use them inappropriately, so APA and not knowing how to use in-text citations, quoting excessively and, utilizing non-scholarly resources. Those are the major deficiencies.

P6 stated,

One of them is proper use of APA formatting… it can affect the flow when not used appropriately. But the biggest like writing issue I see is the ability to read evidence-based research and translate it in their own thoughts and to synthesize it in their own words. That critical piece of reading it and deciding how they can interpret it to demonstrate their thinking oftentimes is missing.

P8 responded,

They have got an idea, but they haven't put their thoughts together so that it can really be understood. To say this is what it means just to turn this sentence into active voice rather than making it all passive, because when I read all of those passive sentences, it kind of weighs me down. I think it takes away from what they're good thoughts are too by doing that. After a while it gets annoying, if you have every sentence that starts with although and however, you know, and there wasn't really a consequence that it's going into next, then it's annoying. It's annoying.

According to P10, "They do what they're supposed to, but they're just not able to fix

their grammar and sentence structure." P11 said,

> If the thoughts or their points flow in a logical format, if they use paragraphs and
> headings and things of that nature versus just writing with a stream of
> consciousness… and so I think there's order and flow to the good writer, and a lot
> of students actually lack that ability. Again, it goes back to grammar, sentence
> structure, just very clearly stated the inability to communicate. I think at the
> graduate level it's very troublesome.

P12 postulated that student writing deficiencies included:

> Being able to formulate an argument. Because it's something so rare for a
> healthcare professional to have to do, but it's absolutely important for a manager
> to do. And because I teach in healthcare administration, it's a skill that we want
> them to have.

Question 2: What do online faculty report about their beliefs and motivations underlying their decision to engage online healthcare students in the improvement of their writing skills? The common motivation underlying the decision of online graduate healthcare faculty to engage their students in improving their writing skills was intricately connected to faculty perceptions of what would be expected of their students in the healthcare field upon completion of a graduate healthcare degree program. The two most common beliefs associated with this expectation theme reflected faculty perceptions of the healthcare industry expectations of their students' ability to communicate at a certain level after graduating because of the implications to the standard of care provided to patients. The second common belief was that graduate students would be expected to also communicate their knowledge and experience to others through publications. P4 stated,

The writing I think is important because when they (students) want to publish in the future, hopefully, some of them will publish…. If they want to write an article, they want to do anything, that's a skill and I think they need to learn it now, they can't learn it later when they graduate and school it's a nice place to pick up all these skills. I think it's a very positive effect on the healthcare students that they are able to write and understand what they need to do and also, they need to learn articles, journal articles and about research.

Also, they need to be at a certain level to understand the articles and really judging 'really this is what I want to translate, these findings to my practice or not.' Their writing should be very supportive. In healthcare, the writing is very important because it has lots of legal application. Nurse practitioner and physicians are getting lots, of you know legal problems. They can be sued, and the chart needs to be very supporting if they go to the court that they really documented everything that really happened at the patient visit.

P5 asserted,

[Writing is] proof of their learning what they need to learn because they write about it. So, for me, that's why it's important because then that gives us reassurance that they know the content and they can apply it and they can analyze it and therefore help when they're you know reading journals and furthering their education.

P6 compared writing skills to practical applications in the health profession:

Our standard, we cannot practice medicine without research and standards of care, it's integral to our practice. And if graduate students cannot look at that and extract what they need to then they're at risk for not providing good care. So being

able to write it is really an assessment of how they understood it because it has a practical application on the other end.

We have to be safe, and I think ethically you know as our faculty we're putting primary care providers out there and we have to have these stop gaps in our curriculum so that we know our students you know.

P8 posited,

If they're going to be a researcher or if they're going to do anything else with their work and go and continue in academia, and remember I'm dealing with master's level students, so I would love to see some of them decide that they're going to move forward and do their doctoral work. But they need to be able to write, they need to be able to consider sharing their experience with the rest of the world. And I think that's real important to be able to express that in writing.

I would kind of like to see, not all students but some students, decide that they see their value and that they know that if they have something that they can share, and I'd like to impart that the idea that they do have value. And that the only way to be able to express that is going to be through their writing. I mean unless they're gonna give TED talks.

P9 said,

They're going to have to write, to communicate with others. If they are at this graduate level, they need to be able to communicate at the graduate level with others outside of school. That's an expectation in the professional area. Although, maybe in 10, 15 years that might change a little …[but] as of this date, they need to write professionally and that is an expectation at that level.

P12 stated the importance of good writing skills:

If you're trying to get a graduate degree in healthcare, it means that you're trying to move up the ranks. And if you're trying to move up the ranks, then your ability to write is going to become more and more important. It means that it's a skill that you're going to have to start practicing. The skills that you learn there are skills that you're going to use in the boardroom when you're making a presentation, or in an email to your superior after they've asked you to look into something. You're going to write a mini research paper in your email response or in your memo of response. So, the tools that we're teaching you in terms of how to research and write, are tools that you need more and more as you work your way up the healthcare ladder.

Question 3: What are online faculty processes for identifying which pedagogical approaches to use to improve the writing skills of online healthcare graduate students? The common faculty process of identifying which pedagogical approach to utilize to improve the writing skills of online graduate healthcare students was based on two methods discussed by the research participants and as identified within archival data utilized within this study. The two common methods described included detail review through the repetitive reading of online written submissions and overview of consistent and repetitive errors in these submissions. P3 stated,

If there are spelling errors, grammatical errors, typos. When those things show up, that is what alerts me to referring people to seek additional resources. I mean some people just write beautifully and you know…and others just have a few minor things here and there. So, like I said it's when there are quite a few issues within one paper that's when I refer people [to the writing center].

P4 posited,

I like to read even at this level with the NP (Nurse Practitioner) level, I like to read the papers first before I grade them. So, I just read the paper, I go through over the papers. Usually, I take like a day or so, I just kind of think about the whole thing and I just kind of let everything sink in and after I go back, and I read again. Usually, at that time I'm starting to making comments and starting to make suggestions and recommendations.

P5 commented, "As I am reading their posts and reviewing the work, they are submitting that when I can see that they may have some issue." P6 said that

When the assignment instructions for the writing have not been met, critical pieces have been left out, competencies haven't been conveyed, there's not any congruency between the assignment instructions and what they've turned in. And definitely like I said I think that 83% threshold if we were in that realm or below its definitely needing writing intervention.

According to P7,

The instructor needs to be able to read the paper, I mean I can't put it more clearly than that. If an instructor is doing their job and reading their paper; sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, page by page, they will determine where the deficiencies are.

P10 said,

So, the only way that I, if I really think that there's a problem, what you'll see is a consistent pattern from document to document that they submit to you and you'll see areas that they tend to fall out on whether it's writing convention or APA. Routinely, they miss the same exact points.

P11 discussed student grades: "Yeah, I think for me it's by looking at their grades and

looking at where they're losing points. If it's because of writing issues and it's a repetitive loss of points across multiple assignments." P12 stated,

> The difference will be when you step in as a professor. Because sometimes the writing can be so bad on the very first assignment that you go, "Okay. Let's pull this student aside." But usually, you give them another assignment or two to work it out. And if by assignment two or assignment three they haven't pulled it together, then you might want to step in and say, "Look, we've been pointing this out to you, and yet it's still coming back the same way. Maybe we need to have a chat about this."

Question 4: What pedagogical interventions do individual faculty members use to aid an online healthcare graduate student in improving their writing skills? The theme identified within the data collected for this study highlighted that feedback provided to students in response to discussion posts or assignment submissions online was the primary online pedagogical intervention utilized to improve the writing skills of online healthcare graduate students. However, in severe problematic or unresolved continuous writing issues identified, students attended one-on-one virtual sessions either with faculty or writing center staff referral. P2 stated,

> I begin with feedback. I mean feedback both verbal and written is essential. Now feedback being positive and areas for improvement because you cannot just comment on a paper for all their areas they need to improve because that decreases their confidence. So, what I tend to do is tell them in advance before they submit their first paper that I am an instructor that likes to put a lot of comments on their paper so they're expecting comments. Because if you don't tell them this and they see a bunch of comments, they automatically think they're not

doing well. So mainly it is setting these expectations, so they know comments are

coming as feedback.

I think to help them improve is the instructor strategies, just getting a

grade is not going make a student improve. I think it's how you approach it, how

you're giving them feedback, that is really important. Positive feedback must be

present as well to maintain their confidence… I get a lot of comments back stating

it has helped them improve, they were able to actually see what was wrong

instead of just getting a grade in the area in writing skills. They were able to see

which words were misspelled etc., because I also put examples or options to help

them understand the errors made. If there are multiple errors, then I will offer a

time to discuss things with the student. I have an open schedule for them, so they

can contact me at any time. So feedback, feedback, feedback, communication is

so important with an online program.

P3 also spoke about instructor feedback to students:

Well like I mentioned I will give them feedback you know in the paper itself

when they submit it, so I will I will give them a correct spelling forward or a

correct verb change so things like that. So, I will provide corrections to them as

I'm reading and grading the paper so that they have that information that you

know I would hope that they would learn from that and sometimes I see

improvements on the following papers based on that and sometimes they don't.

Generally speaking, if I see more than like three to five errors then I'd probably

refer them (to the writing center). If I see three to five consistently you know over

several weeks, then I might refer them (to the writing center).

P4 emphasized the importance of feedback:

When I am reading papers for my student, I put a lot of feedback to them. So always every kind of APA problems I put like a note what they need to do and how they can correct and I see as the class is progressing the students learning from even from the APA comment because they starting to correcting them… seems to be that when they reaching towards the end they are really improving because they are getting constant feedback 'that please do this way or correct the mistakes'… if I'm really concerned… I really kind of reach out to the students because we need to have a talk about what really is happened and explaining how it really works. How the paper should be written that they need to rephrasing things not like you know they don't need to copy you know certain stuff because will show up in the paper and that's really doesn't look good for students.

P5 stated,

Usually my papers when I turn them back to the students has lots of comments, probably they don't like it, but I marked up almost everything what I think should be improved. I think probably that's the most effective way at this point at this university. If you want to improve the papers, you give really constant feedback with the comments. I would say just very detailed feedback very specific detailed feedback on papers that they turn in, instead of a general statement. One of the things I do is first I just try visual strategies like highlighting areas on their paper you know I use tracking which lets them know what needs to be fixed. I give specific feedback. I provide sample exemplary papers for the visual learners, so they could kind of just see how it should look like. Most recently I was struggling with a student who wasn't getting it, so I just tried calling her, I thought well maybe she just needs to hear it so telephone calls you know and visual examples

and just very specific feedback.

P6 discussed the methods used for constructive feedback:

Typically, the first point involves really robust feedback and then an invitation to have a phone call with faculty to discuss it, it's to have them look at our feedback in writing and then set up a phone conference. I think going through grading comments with the student on the phone has the most impact. Reviewing grading comments on the phone with a student, going through it piece by piece.

P7 said,

I instruct the students at the beginning they have to be able to take my feedback and the information I give to them and start using it to improve their writing. But when I start seeing errors within their in-text citation formats or their references over and over and over again the same error, they're just not either understanding or they're choosing not to take it in.

I have had students that have had difficulty in writing that I have contacted on the weekend and we set aside 30 minutes to an hour and I've held collaborate sessions with them one-on-one and they have made the adjustment and have improved over the course. They're engaged as much as I am and improving their written communication. It is not uncommon for me to have a one on one with a student just to go over the information that I've seen in their paper within in regards to their written communication, not just content but in regards to the written communication.

P8 stated,

I will proofread sometimes, and I will tell them when they need to change it. Let them know when there isn't verb, noun verb agreement. Let them know how they

can organize their work a little bit better, you know, to be able to I think I even

suggest words every once in a while, if they're not quite making that and making

the sentence as effective as it could be, I will write out a sentence say they

consider this is this what you're wanting to say or I'll ask them questions about it.

And leave it up to them and see what happens. You know, that's like throwing it

up in the air I'll tell you whatever you want. And then the other thing that I do is,

I do that one-on-one thing with them. Particularly with people who are having

difficulty with organizing their work or saying what they really want to say.

P9 said,

It's more immediate feedback on that initial submission, so when they put their

draft in to get feedback to them within 24 to 48 hours. Then following up with a

message in the messaging system that the assignments have been sent back,

please look at them, and let me know if you have any questions so that we can get

things cleared up before the final assessment is due. Then also getting into the

conference capability where we can talk through the computer. At the same time,

I can open up documents, so we can be looking at things, reviewing guidelines,

going over concepts, and kind of doing a little bit of a one on one.

P10 said,

Probably for me, it's been setting the expectation upfront exactly what I'm

looking for, being consistent with my feedback to them. So, if I see a student that

just continues to have problems when they do a big paper, I will usually formally

refer them to the writing center and require them to submit their documents to

them and have the writing center submit back to me that they actually met with

them. The writing center will email you back and tell you that they met and what

> they talked about, that kind of thing. I use our learning management system
> Canvas to mark up their papers, you know circle things that they need to be aware
> of, I leave feedback and at that point, it's in a student's court.

P11 posited, "Some students will respond to my feedback; other students just leave it there and if I'm noticing that students struggle every time they submit an assignment I will offer to meet with them and to talk about some writing strategies."

Themes of Research Study Summary

Table 2 reflects the common faculty perceptions by participants' criteria of online graduate students' writings issues aligned with the research findings for each research question. At least 50% of participants from both sites affirmed all common themes identified within this study through their interview responses.

Table 2

Common Faculty Perceptions Aligned with Research Themes by Participant Criteria

Theme	Healthcare discipline			Status		Where most courses are taught in the program			
Research Questions	Nursing	Health Admin-istration	Public Health	Adjunct	Full Time	Start	End	Through-out	Mid-point
RQ1	4	3	1	5	3	2	2	4	0
RQ2	6	1	0	3	4	1	1	5	0
RQ3	4	4	0	2	6	1	1	5	1
RQ4	6	2	1	5	4	3	2	4	0

Summary

This chapter presented data collected during the Fall 2018 terms at two universities predominantly offering healthcare degrees including graduate programs in an online learning modality. The data collected resulted in several themes of common

faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students writing challenges and techniques used by these faculty that has helped to improve this. The identified themes in this research included: (a) online graduate healthcare writing issues identified online – students lacking writing organization and structure, grammar, and APA skills at the graduate level; (b) higher level communication expectations of students in the healthcare industry after completing a graduate healthcare degree (e.g., implications to patients healthcare and communicating knowledge and experience through publications); (c) completing a detailed review of the first assignment and overview of consistent and repetitive errors in written submissions; and, (d) consistent detailed feedback including one-on-one synchronous sessions for severe or unresolved continuous writing issues identified.

The identified themes discussed in this chapter also led to the discovery of pockets of perceptions that exists within some faculty that may negatively impact their ability to aid improving their student writing skills. While a common perception is that writing overall can be improved, the implications of negative pockets of underlying beliefs and motivations of faculty that are not positive about healthcare learning in an online modality could potentially impact the improvement of student writing. Grossman and Johnson (2015) suggested that despite the growth of online learning at most institutions, accounting faculty did not reflect confidence in online learning to help students achieve interpersonal or written communication skills because of the inability to interact physically when compared to traditional courses. This perception, however, was varied between faculty who frequently taught online compared to those who did not and was consistent in this study where this perception was found with faculty teaching lesser years online in comparison to the those with more years of service teaching online.

The results of this research study reflected consistency in the themes of common faculty perceptions across the sites, healthcare disciplines, status, and where faculty courses were taught in healthcare programs as shown in Table 2. Except for one participant in the research study, none of the participants interviewed directly acknowledged the assumption that students will enter their courses not knowing how to write. There was not a theme reflecting a common perception of faculty surprise to the writing issues of their students, but a secondary theme did reflect disappointment and frustration of faculty that online graduate healthcare students have writing challenges. This type of frustration is consistent with research by Bair and Mader (2013) which found that many graduate faculty expressed frustration and concern for students' inability to synthesize literature effectively that they perceived was to due students' lack of critical thinking skills. However, this research study did not include interviews with students. In the study by Bair and Mader, students perceived that they need more assistance on how to locate literature related to their theoretical perspectives and be provided with opportunity to understand and practice writing what was expected of them.

Several archival data pieces reviewed reflected intent to increase percentage points or modifying assignments as a means to improve graduate healthcare writing skills. However, the findings of this research provided more consideration for identifying a pedagogical approach that would increase students to review the feedback they receive from their faculty and schedule one on one follow-up meetings as needed to improve.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of the Research

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore common faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students with writing deficiencies, why some online faculty engage these students to improve their writing skills, and what interventions they use. The research utilized interview transcripts of 12 graduate online healthcare faculty from two universities, reflective notes taken throughout the dissertation collection phase, archival data that included writing center reports, program learning outcomes data containing faculty contributions, and email communications to triangulate the data collected that converged evidence to the findings in this study.

A pilot study was conducted to validate the instrument used for interviewing research participants. The pilot study was completed with an expert panel that exceeds seven years of exclusive teaching primarily in healthcare courses in an online modality at various degree levels. Feedback from the expert panel resulted in the revision of one question in the instrument related to how faculty perceptions of student writing issues at the various points in the program are adjusted (if applicable) based on the feedback provided during the interview.

Elaboration of findings and interpretations compared with existing literature. Before the start of the research study, the researcher had participated in several communications with university administrators and online healthcare graduate faculty who had expressed concerns of graduate students who were near the end of their degree program with writing issues. The primary common perceptions of online graduate healthcare faculty on the students' specific writing issues. The issues of writing organization and structure, grammar, and APA was consistent for faculty teaching in all

healthcare disciplines including full-time and adjunct faculty, and evident throughout and near the end of students' healthcare programs.

The participants in the study frequently discussed the challenges of students effectively organizing their thoughts and ideas in writing and lacking appropriate grammar and APA mechanics. These challenges described are supported by research that highlighted graduate students' lack of preparation for writing a master's thesis and general writing issues including grammar (Borglin & Fagerström, 2012; Friberg & Dahlborg, 2013; Mattson, 2016). The study's identification of the specific gaps in online graduate healthcare students writing challenges commonly perceived by their faculty presented the importance of faculty and all higher education stakeholders understanding the gaps in graduate students writing challenges (Bair & Mader, 2013). Identification of these gaps provide an opportunity to enhance targeting improvement efforts on the specific areas of concern.

Considerable research analyzed in the literature review concerned the writing challenges that exist within higher education and online learning (Badenhorst, Dyer, Moloney, Rosales, & Ruc, 2015; Bair & Mader, 2013; Grossman & Johnson, 2015). However, this study was unique in that it targeted the common faculty perceptions specifically of graduate healthcare students in an online learning modality. In comparing the literature with this study, it is evident that writing challenges are not unique to a discipline, learning modality, degree level, or specific point in a program. The common faculty perceptions of student writing issues in the research was identified as existing across the three healthcare disciplines of the study and throughout a graduate student's enrollment (beginning, middle, and end) while completing their online degree. The findings of this study highlighted four common themes.

Students lacking writing organization and structure, grammar, and APA skills at the graduate level. What is unique to this study is the rationale attached to the perception of the importance of improving the writing skills of graduate healthcare students. The findings of this study revealed that the common online graduate healthcare faculty perception on improving their students writing skills was connected to their perception of what would be expected of the student's communications in the healthcare industry as individuals with an advanced degree. The communications expectation in the healthcare industry discussed in this study by participants highlighted the negative implications of patient's healthcare and the expectation that graduated students at this level would share their knowledge and experience through publications.

Higher level communication expectations of students in the healthcare industry after completion of a graduate healthcare degree. According to several participants in the study: "they need to be able to communicate at the graduate level with others outside of school. That's an expectation in the professional area;" further, "they need to be able to write, they need to be able to consider sharing their experience with the rest of the world;" and "if graduate students cannot look at that and extract [in writing] what they need to, then they're at risk for not providing good care." Zumbrunn & Krause (2012) stated that writing is essential to students' success before and after school, and, therefore, writing must be addressed in education settings to aid students in achieving success in this necessary skill.

Completing a detailed review of the first assignment and overview of consistent and repetitive errors in written submissions. To identify which pedagogical approaches to use to improve writing skills of students, online graduate healthcare faculty perceive that engaging in a detailed review of students' online submissions and

identifying consistent and repetitive errors through thorough readings as the most effective process. According to one participant,

> The instructor needs to be able to read the paper, I mean I can't put it more clearly than that. If an instructor is doing their job and reading their paper sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, page by page, they will determine where the deficiencies are.

The connection between the perception of the importance of improving the student's writing skills and the processes online faculty perceive as most useful for identifying these deficiencies, reflect the need for faculty who are committed and passionate to addressing the issue because of the high stakes and time involved.

Consistent detailed feedback including one-on-one synchronous sessions for severe or unresolved continuous writing issues identified. The findings of the research study reflected a common theme of faculty perceiving that consistent and detailed feedback being utilized as an online pedagogical approach for improving student writing was very effective. This was layered with one-on-one synchronous sessions held with students that had severe or unresolved continuous writing issues identified. This online pedagogical and intervention approach was perceived as most effective by 75% of the participants and all nursing faculty in this study. According to two of the participants, "Typically, the first point involves really robust feedback and then an invitation to have a phone call with faculty to discuss it" and, "I would say just very detailed feedback very specific detailed feedback on papers that they turn in, instead of a general statement." Thomas et al. (2014), postulated that there was a lack of specific feedback on how to improve student writing, which was an unexpected finding of their study. However, this research study was not able to corroborate that finding.

Implications of the Findings

      The aim of the researcher was to investigate what common perceptions faculty have concerning online healthcare graduate students' writing challenges and what techniques faculty use to improve these skills. These central questions were addressed through the following research questions of this study.

      1. What do online faculty members identify as the deficiencies of online graduate healthcare students' writing skills?

      2. What do online faculty report about their beliefs and motivations underlying their decision to engage online healthcare students in the improvement of their writing skills?

      3. What are online faculty processes for identifying which pedagogical approaches to use to improve the writing skills of online healthcare graduate students?

      4. What pedagogical interventions do individual faculty members use to aid an online healthcare graduate student in improving their writing skills?

      These research questions were used to explore and understand common faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students writing challenges. Archival data and responses from a total of 12 research participants with varied scholastic backgrounds, healthcare disciplines, healthcare courses taught, and years of experience teaching in fully online courses and higher education, consistently implied that writing challenges do exist in online, but that there are processes for identifying them and pedagogical and intervention approaches that can be deployed as identified in the themes of this research.

      The identified themes in this research included faculty perceptions in response to each of the research questions and associated implications to consider.

- The results of research question one indicated that online graduate faculty

perceive their graduate healthcare students primary writing issues as lacking

organization, structure, grammar, and APA skills.

- The results of research question two indicated faculty perceived the importance

of graduate students' improving their writing skills because of the implications for

potential danger to patient healthcare when written communication is inadequate and

because of the need for post graduate students to communicate their knowledge and

experience through publications.

- The results of research question three indicated the need for online faculty to

identify how to work with students to improve their writing by completing a detailed

review of student online written submissions and conducting a thorough overview of

consistent and repetitive errors.

- The results of research question four indicated that faculty perceive the most

effective online pedagogical and intervention approach to improving graduate healthcare

students' writing skills as consistent, detailed feedback on written submissions, escalated

to one-on-one synchronous student meetings for severe or unresolved continuous writing

issues.

The findings of this study highlighted the underlying perceptions of online graduate

healthcare faculty that need to be understood by students as well as other discipline-

specific online graduate faculty. Ultimately, the findings of this study could assist them in

improving student writing skills.

Many faculty within this study presented the techniques that they used for

identifying and improving their student writing ranging from repetitive readings of

student submissions, providing extensive feedback, one-on-one synchronous virtual

sessions, and referrals to the writing center. Although these strategies were recognized

under the themes of research questions three and four, they also imply that faculty have specific reasons why they see the value and importance of students improving their writing skills.

Three participants in the study briefly alluded to recommendations on what could be done to support students entering the program that included early workshops, embedding additional writing requirements in the curriculum, or providing resources a student could engage in before or at the beginning of the program. According to one participant,

> It might be something that we need to do, something as a requirement when they come to graduate school. Maybe some videos or something that they should watch to prepare them for what they're going to do and maybe require some of the software, like the Grammarly, as part of their curriculum so that they have some tools that will help them with things that they know tend to be big issues because then you can use them when you graduate.

Walker and Tschanz (2013) deployed an academic writing early intervention approach developed by Hanson (2007). The researchers developed an abbreviated version of the intervention approach through a one-day workshop designed for new graduate nursing students. The intensive intervention applied storytelling as a starting point that provided a distinction between academic writing and other types of writing, connected the literature with their stories, and recognized common APA errors. The result of this intervention included students developing confidence in their writing; APA familiarity; a new meaning, use, and respect for understanding their stories about the literature; and an improved knowledge of how to exercise their academic writing skills (Walker & Tschanz, 2013).

Additionally, the pedagogical approach perceived by faculty as necessary for improving graduate healthcare students writing involved providing extensive feedback and one-on-one synchronous assistance to students with unresolved writing problems. This pedagogical approach implies the need for faculty to be patient with the process and time required. This approach requires the administration to consider faculty course and student load for them to be effective in providing detailed feedback if student writing improvement is a priority. The implications of improving persistent student writing problems through intervening one-on-one synchronous sessions perceived as useful by online faculty also need to be factored into the faculty workload. The writing center should be evaluated further by university administration as an intervening measure to support online faculty workload of students with consistent writing problems.

Finally, the implications of faculty perceptions in the theme of what they do to pedagogically improve online graduate healthcare student writing, merits students gaining an understanding of this as a benefit. Students need to take ownership and accountability of the feedback, synchronous sessions, and other writing resources provided to help them improve their writing. Participants in the research study consistently highlighted their offer of support to help students improve their writing skills. They also had an expectation that students would be accountable at this level to seek out assistance to improve their writing. According to several participants, "I think honestly the most effective approach is for students to take ownership and to want to improve in the areas where they can improve," "[And] to meet with me, because I'm happy to teach them grammar 101 but I can't always do that unless they take that initiative," and "[that] the ball is in the student's court."

Study Limitations

This dissertation study was limited by obtaining archival data from only one of the two sites used in this research because archival data was not able to be obtained from one of the locations. Additionally, the sample of participants and archival data used in the research came from only three healthcare online graduate degree programs; 50% from nursing, 42% from health administration, and 8% from public health. There was only one public health faculty research participant.

Research Findings Recommendations

Through understanding the perceptions of faculty teaching online graduate healthcare students, there are four significant recommendations from this research.

Recommendation 1. Student preparation for graduate writing requirements: It is recommended that universities educate students at the beginning of the program on the deficits previously found in online graduate student writing, the need and value of improving their writing skills early in the program, be educated on faculty expectations to help them improve, and reaffirm that they have the ability to be quality writers upon completion of their graduate healthcare degree within an online learning modality.

Recommendation 2. Faculty training and support on providing detailed feedback when grading student-written submissions and conducting synchronous sessions with students.

Recommendation 3. Creating additional one-on-one options for students to receive writing improvement assistance within the online classroom. These options could be provided through embedding a link to direct writing assistance within the course and faculty can add easy access for scheduling or live assistance within their grading response to students. Additionally, at the start of each course, faculty can specify office hours

dedicated to writing assistance.

Recommendation 4. Create an opportunity for student accountability by requesting students identify at least one area where they would improve on in their next writing assignment based on the feedback that was provided for additional credit. According to one participant,

> My concern is that I'm not sure that the students are reading the comments so that always was my question, that I am putting all these comments in…. Pretty much I can tell the students who read my comments, they improve. The students who probably didn't even open up and or maybe they just don't care, they are making the same mistakes.

Further Research Recommendations

For this study, the theme of the most effective online pedagogical approach to helping students improve their writing in the online healthcare programs was feedback. However, most faculty in the study across both sites expressed concern on how frequently students utilized the feedback that they had provided. Further research related to student perceptions of feedback provided by online graduate healthcare faculty should be considered with the intent of helping students identify self-improvement writing strategies from faculty feedback and other resources available. This should also include a closer look at the timing and type of feedback provided. Further research on this issue is recommended.

The increased usage of texting and social media resulted in several faculty from this study expressing concerns related to what may be the writing requirements or expectations in the professional healthcare field in the future. Further study on faculty perceptions related to the impact of the next generation of healthcare providers' writing

practices and their potential implications to healthcare should be considered. This type of additional research study could be further leveraged across various disciplines to explore in a qualitative study what type of writing may be required and whether it would require a change of higher education's view on writing styles in various student learning modalities. Finally, a mixed research study of postgraduate healthcare students writing experiences may yield new information that is beneficial to graduate faculty and administrators to compliment the theme of research question two that identified high-level communications as an expectation in the healthcare industry.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Recruitment Letter

Dear Interview Candidate,

My name is Latazia Stuart, and I am a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. I am conducting an applied dissertation study entitled: A Qualitative Study of Common Faculty Perceptions of Online Healthcare Graduate Students' Writing Challenges.

Online healthcare faculty continue to encounter unique challenges with graduate student writing issues. Currently, a lack of research exists from the perspective of current online graduate healthcare faculty. I am interested in your views on this topic and would like to invite you to participate in an interview for this study during the Fall 2018 term. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore common faculty perceptions of online graduate healthcare students with writing deficiencies, why online faculty engage these students in improving their writing skills, and what interventions they use.

Interview participants would be requested to provide approximately two hours for the study that would consist of the interview time (45 minutes), email communications (15 minutes), and a review of the transcribed interview for accuracy (one hour).

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse or withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences. There are no reasonably foreseen risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. Upon completion of the study, participants will receive a $20 Amazon gift card sent electronically. I hope that the results from participants in this study will add to the body of knowledge regarding online healthcare graduate students' writing challenges and interventions used to improve it.

Your input in this study will remain anonymous, and all the information from this study will be kept confidential. Your name, title, nor any other identifying items will not be linked to the data in the final written report. The completion of the consent form implies your consent to participate in an interview for this study.

If you are interested in learning more about this study or have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at lm494@mynsu.nova.edu or call xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Latazia Stuart, MSc.
Nova Southeastern University
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
Doctoral Student: Principal Investigator
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Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Research Question 1: What do online faculty members identify as the deficiencies of online graduate healthcare students' writing skills?

Q1. What are the deficiencies seen in the writing skills of online graduate healthcare students?"

Q2. How do you identify if a student has issues with their writing skills?

Q3. Where in the program are these issues identified?

Q4. What are the most concerning elements of a student entering graduate program writing skills?

Research Question 2: What do online faculty report about their beliefs and motivations underlying their decision to engage online healthcare students in the improvement of their writing skills?

Q5. What happens when students' writing deficiencies are identified? Can you walk me through that process?

Q6. Why do graduate healthcare students need to have good writing skills?

Q7. How are writing skills utilized in the healthcare field?

Research Question 3: What are online faculty processes for identifying which pedagogical approaches to use to improve the writing skills of online healthcare graduate students?

Q8. How does a student-written work influence the decision of what to use to assist the student in improving their writing?

Q9. How does a faculty recognize the need for intervention to improve the writing skills of their students?

Research Question 4: What pedagogical approaches do individual faculty members use to aid an online healthcare graduate student in improving their writing skills?

Q10.What teaching strategies do you use to improve the writing skills of healthcare graduate students?

Q11. What have you found to be the most effective approach in the online classroom to improve student writing?

Appendix C

Coding Table

Category	Themes identified	Participants Quotes
Writing Problems	Students lacking writing organization and structure, Grammar and APA skills at the graduate level	*"So, some of the writing deficiencies I've noticed is with grammar which could consist of lacking organization, paragraph structure meaning sometimes you look at a paragraph, and it's one sentence, mechanical errors with quotations, the opening or closing, spelling errors, capitalization error, definitely sentence structure errors; either run-on sentences or incomplete sentence fragments."* *"One of them is the proper use of APA formatting… it can affect the flow when not used appropriately. However, the biggest like writing issue I see is the ability to read evidence-based research and translate it in their own thoughts and to synthesize it in their own words. That critical piece of reading it and deciding how they can interpret it to demonstrate their thinking oftentimes is missing."* *"They have got an idea, but they haven't put their thoughts together so that it can really be understood."*
Expectations	Higher level communication expectations of students in the healthcare industry after completing a graduate healthcare degrees. • Implications to patients' healthcare • Communicating knowledge and experience through publications	*"They're going to have to write, to communicate with others. If they are at this graduate level, they need to be able to communicate at the graduate level with others outside of school. That's an expectation in the professional area."* *"Our standard, we cannot practice medicine without research and standards of care, it's integral to our practice. And if graduate students cannot look at that and extract what they need to then they're at risk for not providing good care. So being able to write it is really an assessment of how they understood it because it has a practical application on the other end."*

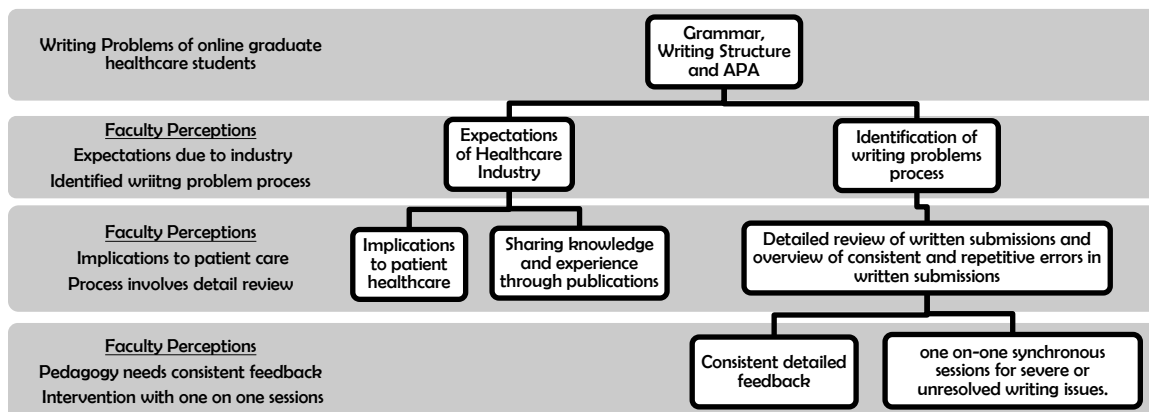| Category	Themes identified	Participants Quotes
		"…they need to be able to write, they need to be able to consider sharing their experience with the rest of the world. And I think that's real important to be able to express that in writing. I would kind of like to see, not all students but some students, decide that they see their value and that they know that if they have something that they can share. And that the only way to be able to express that is going to be through their writing. I mean unless they're gonna give TED talks." *"We have to be safe, and I think ethically you know as faculty we're putting primary care providers out there and we have to have these stopgaps in our curriculum so that we know our students you know…writing I would say is a small piece of it but an important piece [to be safe]."*
Writing problem identification Processes	Completing a detailed review of the first assignment and overview of consistent and repetitive errors in written submissions.	*"I like to read the papers first before I grade them. So, I just read the paper, I go through over the papers. Usually, I take like a day or so, I just kind of think about the whole thing and I just kind of let everything sink in and after I go back and I read again. Usually, at that time I start to making comments and starting to making suggestions and recommendations."* *"The instructor needs to be able to read the paper, I mean I can't put it more clearly than that. If an instructor is doing their job and reading their paper; sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, page by page, they will determine where the deficiencies are."*

Category	Themes identified	Participants Quotes
Online Pedagogy & Interventions	Consistent detailed feedback. One-on-one synchronous sessions for severe or unresolved continuous writing issues identified.	*"I will tell them when they need to change it. Let them know when there isn't a verb, noun-verb agreement. Let them know how they can organize their work a little bit better, you know, to be able to I think I even suggest words every once in a while if they're not quite making that and making the sentence as effective as it could be, I will write out a sentence say they consider this is this what you're wanting to say or I'll ask them questions about it. And leave it up to them and see what happens. You know, that's like throwing it up in the air I'll tell you whatever you want. And then the other thing that I do is, I do that one-on-one thing with them. Particularly with people who are having difficulty with organizing their work or saying what they really want to say."* *"I would say just very detailed feedback very specific detailed feedback on papers that they turn in, instead of a general statement. One of the things I do is first I just try visual strategies like highlighting areas on their paper you know I use tracking which lets them know what needs to be fixed. I give specific feedback. Most recently I was struggling with a student who wasn't getting it so I just tried calling her, I thought well maybe she just needs to hear it so telephone calls… visual examples and just very specific feedback."* *"I think to help them improve it is the instructor strategies, just getting a grade is not going make a student improve. I think it's how you approach it, how you're giving them feedback that is really important."* *"So feedback, feedback, feedback, communication is so important with an online program."*

Category	Themes identified	Participants Quotes
		"I begin with feedback. So, what I tend to do is tell them in advance before they submit their first paper that I am an instructor that likes to put a lot of comments on their paper so they're expecting comments. Because if you don't tell them this and they see a bunch of comments, they automatically think they're not doing well. So mainly it is setting these expectations so they know comments are coming as feedback."

Appendix D

Hierarchical Tree of Research Study Themes

Hierarchical Tree of Research Study Themes

Writing Problems of online graduate healthcare students	Grammar, Writing Structure and APA	

Faculty Perceptions
Expectations due to industry
Identified wriitng problem process

Expectations of Healthcare Industry

Identification of writing problems process

Faculty Perceptions
Implications to patient care
Process involves detail review

Implications to patient healthcare

Sharing knowledge and experience through publications

Detailed review of written submissions and overview of consistent and repetitive errors in written submissions

Faculty Perceptions
Pedagogy needs consistent feedback
Intervention with one on one sessions

Consistent detailed feedback

one on-one synchronous sessions for severe or unresolved writing issues.

This hierarchical tree of research study themes provides a visual illustration of the completed analysis of research data collected during this study and as recommended by Creswell (2015) to reflect information in the analysis.