

Quality in Higher Education: Perspectives from Front-Line Faculty in the United States

Molly Reas Hall

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
In  
Educational Research and Evaluation

Penny L. Burge, Chair  
David J. Kniola  
Gary E. Skaggs  
Laura E. Welfare

March 24, 2015  
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Quality, Higher Education, Faculty, Assessment, Accreditation

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of front-line faculty members in the United States related to quality and quality management in higher education. The study's three research questions were: (1) How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education? (2) How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured? and (3) Assuming that quality management activities will continue to be mandated by external and internal entities, what do front-line faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?

The research design for this study was a basic qualitative study with a constructivist interpretive framework. Maximum variation sampling was utilized and data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with 20 front-line faculty members who worked at three different types of higher education institutions located in Virginia: (1) a public, research-extensive university; (2) a public, comprehensive university; and (3) a private, liberal arts college. The constant comparative method was utilized throughout the data analysis process and served as the basis for the study's thematic analysis.

The primary finding for Research Question 1 was all 20 faculty participants defined quality in higher education either partially or solely in terms of student outcomes. These outcomes included student learning outcomes, vocational outcomes, and contribution to society outcomes. In regards to Research Question 2, many participants believed that student growth should be a primary indicator of quality in higher education; measuring quality in higher

education is difficult; and measuring quality in higher education is necessary or important. Multiple participants expressed dissatisfaction with the indicators currently used to measure quality in higher education. For Research Question 3, participants shared 24 specific barriers they believed prevented quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members. Participants also shared 24 specific implementation strategies for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members. These results have multiple implications for future quality management policy, practice, and research.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Robert and Deanna Reas, who supported me in more ways than I can count during the 25 years of my life that I was a full-time student.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to everyone who supported me in pursuit of my goal to earn a Ph.D. First of all, I would like to thank the front-line faculty members who participated in this study. I literally could not have completed this dissertation without you. I sincerely appreciate your time and your willingness to share your thoughts and experiences. Conducting interviews for this study was the highlight of my dissertation experience. I would also like to recognize my key informants. Recruitment for this study exceeded all of my expectations and I have you to thank for this.

For supporting me since day one of my doctoral program, I would like to extend a huge thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Penny Burge. Thank you for all of the time and energy you invested in me, and for standing by me during this journey. It has been a pleasure to work with you. I would also like to extend a big thank you to my committee members—Dr. David Kniola, Dr. Gary Skaggs, and Dr. Laura Welfare—for your support in creating and defending this dissertation.

I would like to thank my family—Ralph, Simon, and Charlotte Hall—for both your love and support and for helping me to keep things in perspective during challenging times. My parents—Robert and Deanna Reas—traveled to Blacksburg on many, many occasions to help with the kids so that I could work, and I am so grateful for this gift.

I was very fortunate to have had two outstanding graduate assistantships during my time as a doctoral student/candidate at Virginia Tech, one with *AdvanceVT* and one with the Office of Assessment and Evaluation. I would like to thank my supervisors—Peggy Layne and Dr. Steve Culver—for not only providing me with valuable work experiences to build my assessment and evaluation skills, but flexibility when I needed it. It was a pleasure working with you.

To all of my colleagues in the Office of Assessment and Evaluation, especially my fellow GAs, thank you for your support and good cheer. I would especially like to thank my officemates during the past two years—Maria Stack, Ryan Cook, and Brock Mutcherson—for making our office a place that I enjoyed coming to every single day.

Several friends and colleagues successfully defended their dissertations while I was in the process of completing my degree. Thank you to Dr. Anamaria Bukvic, Dr. Tim Burrows, Dr. Kristy Drobney, Dr. Anne Laughlin, and Dr. Carrie Sanders for both commiserating with me and providing me with extra motivation to finish my degree. I am fortunate to have many friends who were extremely supportive of my quest to earn my Ph.D. and I would like to thank Dr. Marcia Baxter Magolda, Dr. Peter Magolda, and Laura McFarland for their support and for never doubting that I would reach my goal.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past few decades numerous processes have been designed for higher education institutions to demonstrate their effectiveness as “quality has evolved from a marginal position to being the foremost concern in higher education alongside funding issues” (Harvey, 1998, p. 237). Quality assurance and enhancement processes such as institutional accreditation and internal and external program review—collectively referred to in this document as “quality management” activities—have become commonplace and widespread. Nearly every country in the world currently utilizes some type of external quality assurance process to measure and document quality in higher education (van Kemenade, Pupius, & Hardjono, 2008). Koslowski (2006) writes that “increased competitive pressure, finite individual and institutional resources, and increased demand for universal access, have made assessing the quality of higher education a major public, private, and international concern” (p. 277).

Accountability is the primary driver of quality management activities in higher education whereby institutions must respond to the needs of competing stakeholders such as governments, taxpayers, students, and employers. As Kristensen (2010) explains, “democratic societies expect governments and those using public funding, such as higher education institutions, to ensure and to give evidence of optimum use of public funds” (p. 153). The two major conceptions of quality utilized by contemporary quality management systems are (1) meeting established standards (i.e., quality assurance), and (2) improving performance (i.e., quality enhancement). While quality management systems frequently aim to meet standards *and* improve performance (Kristensen, 2010; Wergin, 2005), many authors contributing to the body of literature on quality in higher education believe that quality management systems have not been able to successfully balance quality assurance and quality enhancement (e.g., Houston, 2008; Knight & Trowler,

2000; Newton, 2010). In practice, meeting standards has been emphasized over continuous improvement. Although many educators, administrators, and authors dispute the efficacy of quality management activities in higher education, they have become institutionalized and will most likely be an integral part of higher education in the foreseeable future (Hoecht, 2006; Mertova & Webster, 2009).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem underlying this study is that quality management activities are currently not fulfilling stated goals to improve the quality of higher education. Most quality management activities in higher education require a great deal of time and resources to complete. In countries such as the United States, quality management requirements are both extensive and mandated by multiple entities (e.g., regional accrediting bodies, professional accrediting bodies, states, and university administrators). This results in reporting requirements that are disjointed and repetitive as well as labor- and resource-intensive. Morest (2009) notes, “most of the funding available to colleges and universities today comes with some kind of reporting requirement” (p. 17). Thus, even a process such as institutional accreditation in the United States that is technically voluntary is in reality obligatory for higher education institutions since institutions are not eligible to receive federal funding for student financial aid unless they successfully meet the standards set by one of six regional accrediting bodies. The “soaring costs of quality assurance” (Amaral & Rosa, 2010, p. 60) are well documented in the quality literature by authors both in the United States and abroad (e.g., Laughton, 2003; Leef & Burris, 2002; Lomas, 2004). These costs not only represent financial resources and faculty/administrator time and energy, but opportunity costs. Writing about quality management in the United Kingdom, Lomas (2004) shares:

Subject review, the Research Assessment Exercise, bidding for special funds, continuation audits and data collection cost the higher education sector in England approximately £250 million per year. Calculations vary in terms of the alternative uses for the money. Sally Hunt, General Secretary of the Association of University Teachers, argues that this amount of money could be used for employing 8,300 new lecturers or providing an additional 50,000 higher education student places (Association of University Teachers, 2002). Prickett (2002), making the point that the obsession with monitoring is destroying higher education, has different calculations, saying that the money would pay the fees of 250,000 students, the annual cost of five universities or the salaries of 10,000 lecturers. Clearly, perceptions of opportunity costs vary and there is no one precise, reliable figure. (p. 159)

However, even though perceptions related to the costs associated with quality management vary, the perception that many quality management activities do not add value to an institution or program, and consequently are not worth the costs associated with them, is held by many (Dill, 2003). Dew and Nearing (2004) write that “few schools that undergo the rigors of a quality assurance-oriented self-study and assessment are in any risk of not being reaccredited and are not often motivated by this process to make improvements” (p. 11). For example, a study of the United Kingdom’s Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) exercise, completed by more than 2,000 academic departments over a seven-year period, calculated the cost of the TQA to be over £300 million even though just one of the departments (0.05% of those reviewed) was determined to be “permanently failing” (Harvey & Newton, 2004, p. 158).

Of particular interest and concern in recent years is that quality management activities do not appear to positively impact teaching and student learning (Askling, 1997; Brunetto & Farr-

Wharton, 2005; Ezer & Horin, 2013; Horsburgh, 1999; Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2001; Lillis, 2012; Shah, 2012; Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, & Westerheijden, 2011), even though the improvement of educational outcomes is often cited as the primary reason for engaging in quality management activities. The literature on quality in higher education suggests that there is a significant gap between the “rhetoric of quality” (i.e., the espoused emphasis on improvement) and the “reality of quality” (i.e., the actual emphasis on accountability) (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Cartwright, 2007; Hoecht, 2006; Jones & de Saram, 2005; Laughton, 2003; Lomas, 2007; McInnis, Powles, & Anwyl, 1995; Newton, 2000, 2002b). While multiple studies have found faculty participants to be more supportive of quality management that focuses on improvement rather than accountability (Cardoso, Rosa, & Santos, 2013; Ezer & Horin, 2013; Lomas & Ursin, 2009; Rosa, Sarrico, & Amaral, 2012), the primary focus of quality management work to date has been on quality assurance rather than quality enhancement. This state of affairs is captured by Harvey and Newton’s (2004) statement that “the rhetoric and documentary preambles in many countries refer to quality evaluation as a process of improvement, yet all the emphases are on accountability, compliance and, in some cases, control of the sector” (p. 151).

The literature on quality in higher education also suggests that there is a gap between how faculty and administrators view quality and quality management processes (Anderson, 2006; Askling, 1997; Barandiaran-Galdós, Ayesta, Cardona-Rodríguez, Mijangos del Campo, & Olaskoaga-Larrauri, 2012; Newton, 1999, 2000; Rosa, Tavares, & Amaral, 2006; Scott, 1991; Stensaker et al., 2011; Telford & Masson, 2005; Watty, 2006). The overarching theme linking these studies is that administrators tend to view quality management processes and the effects of quality management more positively than faculty members. Many of the faculty members who

participated in the quality management studies reviewed for the present study shared negative views of quality management (Anderson, 2006; Cartwright, 2007; Hoecht, 2006; Jones & de Saram, 2005; Laughton, 2003; McInnis et al., 1995; Newton, 2000). Numerous faculty members reported participating in quality management activities because they were required to do so rather than because they wanted to. The empirical studies reviewed for the present study suggest that many faculty members “go through the motions” of quality management activities or even actively resist them (Anderson, 2006; Cartwright, 2007; Ezer & Horin, 2013). In general, “little headway seems to have been made in gaining meaningful involvement in quality improvement from academic staff (Dill, 1999; Harvey, 2005)” (Houston, 2008, p. 67).

### **Significance of the Study**

The data presented in previously published literature related to quality in higher education points to the conclusion that quality management is currently not meeting its goals to improve the quality of higher education, most notably in terms of enhancing student learning. Thus, the literature suggests that many quality management activities are missed opportunities since they require precious time and resources but do not positively impact students. Several authors contend that one reason why quality management activities to date have not resulted in meaningful improvement is front-line faculty members have not been actively engaged in the process (Anderson, 2006; Coates & Seifert, 2011; Newton, 2000; Stanley & Patrick, 1998; Watty, 2006). These authors believe that engaging front-line faculty in quality work is key to the success of quality management activities in higher education since faculty are the “main agents of change” (Coates & Seifert, 2011, p. 185) who “have the most direct influence on the quality of education” (Westerheijden, Hulpiau, & Waeytens, 2007, p. 308).

Given that front-line faculty members are often considered to be in the best position to positively impact student learning, several studies suggest that learning more about the perspectives of front-line faculty members in relation to quality and quality management could help to bridge the gap between what quality management hopes to achieve (i.e., improvement) and what it actually does (i.e., serves as an accountability mechanism) (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Watty, 2003; Watty, 2006). Learning more about what faculty value in terms of quality in higher education may result in more active engagement of front-line faculty members in quality management processes. Since some authors believe that quality improvement will not happen without the support of front-line faculty (e.g., Newton, 2000; McInnis et al., 1995), learning more about how front-line faculty define quality is a critical question. Watty (2006) contends that “academics are more likely to participate effectively in quality assurance systems that are designed to ensure the attributes of quality they deem important (Giertz, 2000)” (p. 297). Similarly, Laughton (2003) argues that in order for quality management activities to result in meaningful assessments that facilitate improvement, faculty must support how quality is defined and measured by quality management activities.

Unfortunately, little research to date has examined how front-line faculty define or measure quality in higher education. Instead, much of the available literature examines how faculty *experience* quality management. Barandiaran-Galdós et al. (2012) state that the “quality of education at universities, and indeed elsewhere, is not sufficiently well defined as a concept” (p. 92). The small amount of information that the research literature provides on the topic of how faculty define quality in higher education suggests that there are disconnects between what faculty think about quality and how quality management activities are currently structured. Watty (2003) states that if:

academics do not agree that quality assurance systems currently measure what they regard as ‘quality in higher education’, then there is a need to first recognise that differences exist and then identify these differences in conceptions. ... It may be that academics conceive quality differently to ... other stakeholders, valuing different aspects to those measured and monitored under the current quality regime. If this is the case, there exists an urgent need for academics to articulate how they conceive quality in higher education. (p. 213, 219)

Studies published since Watty (2003) suggest that academics do indeed have different notions of quality than those on which quality management activities are frequently based. For example, some of Anderson’s (2006) participants “noted that their notions of quality were essentially incompatible with the quality mechanisms currently in place” (p. 20). Mertova and Webster (2009) argue that “the academic voice has been missing from ... quality mechanisms and systems employed in higher education” (p. 141).

While the number of empirical studies on faculty and administrators’ views on quality in higher education has been growing, a dearth of studies has presented data from faculty members in the United States. Rather, most of the literature addresses quality in European Union countries, Australia, and New Zealand. Even though Cardoso et al. (2013) found that faculty perceptions of quality management differed based on gender, type of educational institution, and academic discipline, only a handful of existing studies have addressed disciplinary differences in terms of how faculty view quality; even fewer have addressed differences across institutional types. Research by Scott (1991) and Cardoso et al. (2013) suggest that individuals’ prior experience with quality work also influences their attitudes towards quality management. Many of the studies available in the body of literature on quality in higher education focus on the

perspectives of administrators, senior faculty in leadership roles (e.g., department chairs), quality managers, and/or assessment professionals rather than the perspectives of “front-line faculty” who are closer to the learner-teacher interface and generally have more opportunities to directly impact student learning. Thus, the major gap in terms of study participants appears to be front-line faculty members who do not hold significant administrative responsibilities and have not been responsible for overseeing quality management processes. Since quality authors suggest that front-line faculty hold more negative views of quality management activities than their administrator colleagues, front-line faculty are an important group to study. The present study strives to shed light on this gap.

The primary audience for this study is individuals who design, conduct, or oversee quality management activities in higher education. This group includes assessment professionals, faculty and staff members who work with and for accrediting bodies, administrators who mandate quality activities such as academic program reviews, and full-time quality professionals such as quality managers and staff members at state agencies that collect and review performance indicator data from higher education institutions. Results from this study will influence future directions for both practice (e.g., how participating in quality work can be a more meaningful activity for faculty members) and policy (e.g., how quality management activities may be structured to facilitate improvement).

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

Given the gaps in the existing literature on quality in higher education, the purpose of the present study was to explore perceptions of front-line faculty members in the United States related to quality and quality management in higher education. I collected data from faculty members working at three different types of higher education institutions in a broad range of

academic disciplines. The study's three primary research questions were: (1) How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education? (2) How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured? and (3) Assuming that quality management activities will continue to be mandated by external and internal entities (e.g., regional accrediting bodies and university provosts), what do front-line faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?

### **Definition of Terms**

Quality in higher education is a highly contested topic and there is nearly universal consensus that quality in higher education is not well defined. Given the many different ideas regarding quality and quality management, I have provided a few definitions for terms that are used throughout this document in order to provide clarity for readers. Below are definitions for the following four terms: quality management, quality assurance, quality enhancement, and front-line faculty.

**Quality management.** In the literature reviewed for the present study, Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems, and van Hout (2011) provide the most comprehensive definition of quality management. Their version is:

Quality management within departments comprises all activities and processes that are deliberately carried out to design, assure, evaluate and improve teaching and learning (Grant et al., 2004). It implies developing missions and strategies, setting standards for professionals in teaching, administration and support. It comprises internal quality assessments, periodic self-evaluations, external accreditation procedures, external

consultations with the field (professionals and their employers) and benchmarking. (p. 142)

However, my review of the body of literature on quality in higher education suggests that this definition is too narrow in referencing only departments and teaching and learning. For the present study, quality management refers to activities within higher education *institutions* (including programs and departments) designed to ensure, assess, evaluate, and/or improve *all aspects of the higher education enterprise related to quality* (e.g., research, outreach, and resources in addition to teaching and learning). This broader definition should more accurately reflect practice and allow for faculty conceptions of quality in higher education that go beyond teaching and learning. The use of the term “management” here does not refer to top-down quality processes, but is intended to encompass a broad spectrum of potential quality activities.

**Quality assurance.** The present study utilizes Harvey and Green’s (1993) definition of quality assurance that states “quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered” (p. 19). Quality assurance is retrospective, concerned with whether established standards have been met (Biggs, 2003).

**Quality enhancement.** Unlike quality assurance, quality enhancement is prospective (Biggs, 2003), and focuses on “consciously and consistently improving the quality performance of any process” (Doherty, 1994, p. 11). While quality assurance is fundamentally about meeting standards, quality enhancement is about improvement.

**Front-line faculty.** Newton (2000b) described front-line faculty as “those [faculty] engaged at the learner-teacher interface in higher education” (p. 39). Front-line faculty members in the present study are defined as faculty who have significant interaction with students and do

not have significant administrative responsibilities (i.e., they spend more time teaching and advising students than performing administrative tasks).

### **Summary with Overview of Study Method and Document Organization**

There are currently no signs that concerns about quality in higher education are diminishing. Hoecht (2006) states that “quality management is now an integral part of academic life and will not go away” (p. 556). Thus, it is worthwhile to look at how quality management could be more effective in enhancing quality in higher education. A subset of quality authors contends that the perspectives of front-line faculty have not been sufficiently incorporated into quality management activities and this has served as a barrier to quality management activities enhancing quality in higher education. Since little is currently known regarding how front-line faculty members define quality and perceive quality management in higher education, the present study aims to provide additional insights on this topic.

Due to the exploratory nature of the present study and my desire to obtain rich information, qualitative methods were utilized. In-depth interviews were conducted with front-line faculty members at three different types of not-for-profit educational institutions in the United States: (1) a public, research-extensive university that grants doctoral degrees; (2) a public, comprehensive university that primarily awards bachelor and master’s degrees; and (3) a private, liberal arts college that focuses on undergraduate education. Invited participants worked in a variety of academic disciplines and held significant teaching and advising responsibilities but not significant administrative responsibilities. Data collected for this study was analyzed in accordance with the initial stages of Charmaz’s (2006) data analysis framework for constructivist grounded theory research and study findings are presented in the form of a thematic analysis.

Although this research utilized qualitative methods, I anticipate that the present study will inform future research that utilizes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides context for the present study, a statement of the research problem, the significance of the study, the study purpose and research questions, definition of terms, and an overview of the research methods. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on quality and quality management in higher education, including information on the history of quality management, how quality is currently defined and measured, and faculty and administrator perspectives on quality and quality management activities. Chapter 3 provides details on the study's methodology including a description of the research design, participants, data analysis procedures, data quality procedures, and limitations. Chapter 4 presents results from the in-depth interviews conducted with front-line faculty members for this study, organized by research question. Finally, Chapter 5 links the results of the present study to findings from the body of literature on quality in higher education and presents implications for future quality management policy, practice, and research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is currently a substantial body of literature related to quality in higher education. One of the few points that contributors to this body of literature appear to agree upon is that quality in higher education is a controversial topic (Law, 2010). Much of this controversy stems from the fact that quality management influences the distribution of power within higher education (Anderson, 2006; Brennan & Shah, 2000). As noted by Giertz (2001), “what is regarded as quality in higher education is fundamentally a political question and a question of power” (p. 2). Authors contributing to the body of literature on academic quality suggest that the controversy surrounding quality in academe is also about values, language, and change (Brennan, 1997; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Morley, 2003).

Many researchers in the academic quality community also agree that different higher education stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, administrators, parents, employers, and alumni) tend to view quality differently (Watty, 2006). This perspective is commonly referred to as the “stakeholder-relative” view of quality. Complicating the meaning of quality further, Harvey and Green (1993) contend that stakeholders do not just have different perspectives “on the same thing but different perspectives on different things with the same label” (p. 10). Consequently, the study of quality in higher education is a complex endeavor.

In the 1980s and 1990s (i.e., the early days of the quality movement), much of the literature on quality was conceptual, focusing on different definitions of quality and types of quality management systems (Newton, 2010). However, over the past 15 years, research on how faculty and administrators perceive and respond to quality management activities has become more prominent as quality management systems have been widely implemented around the world. During the 1990s, some members of the quality community agreed to define quality as

stakeholder-relative and moved on to exploring questions concerning the impact of quality management processes, including whether quality management work has improved the student experience (Newton, 2010). Researchers began to interview and survey professionals engaged in quality management processes, often administrators and senior faculty. Findings resulting from this line of inquiry have provided “a better understanding of quality, quality policy and quality systems, as practiced, used and experienced” (Newton, 2010, p. 52). However, most of the existing literature related to how faculty perceive academic quality and/or quality management processes pertains to how faculty *experience* quality management rather than how they *define* quality. Many existing studies either do not include front-line faculty members in their participant pools or do not report the views of front-line faculty separately from administrators and faculty members whose work includes significant management responsibilities.

As argued in Chapter 1, gaining a better understanding of how front-line faculty define quality in higher education will lead to important insights regarding current and future quality management activities. The purpose of the present study was to explore perceptions of front-line faculty members in the United States related to quality and quality management in higher education. I collected data from faculty members working in a variety of academic disciplines. The study’s three research questions were: (1) How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education? (2) How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured? and (3) Assuming that quality management activities will continue to be mandated by external and internal entities, what do front-line faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?

## **History of Quality Management in Higher Education**

**The quality revolution.** Over the past few decades, “quality has evolved from a marginal position to being the foremost concern in higher education alongside funding issues” (Harvey, 1998, p. 237). Beginning in the 1980s and gaining prominence in the 1990s, external quality assurance has become a “world-wide phenomenon” (Woodhouse, 2004). While the 1990s were deemed “the decade of quality” (Frazer, 1992), the 2000s were dubbed “the decade of international quality” (Woodhouse, 2000b). The speed at which formal quality mechanisms were created and adopted by countries and higher education institutions around the world has led some authors to refer to the development of quality management processes worldwide as the “quality revolution” (Gaither, 1998; Kristensen, 2010; Newton, 2002b). However, as Saarinen (2010) points out:

Of course, the ‘quality revolution’ (Newton, 2002) was not really a revolution; at least, if by revolution we mean something that takes place intrinsically, bottom up. It is difficult to imagine the academic community rushing to barricades to demand European-wide quality assurance techniques or national, funding-related accountability schemes (Saarinen & Välimaa, 2010). This was a revolution of the administration and the policy-makers, and—as it seems—something the academic community reacted to, rather than acted to achieve. (p. 56)

In contrast to industry where quality concerns generally came from within (e.g., from a company’s desire to improve its performance in the marketplace), requirements for higher education institutions to document and demonstrate quality have mostly come from external entities such as accreditation commissions and government-funded quality agencies (Houston, 2008).

**The need to demonstrate accountability.** Another area of agreement among contributors to the body of literature on academic quality is that the concern for quality in higher education has primarily been driven by the need to demonstrate accountability. Whereas higher education institutions have long considered quality to be important (Baldwin, 1997; Harvey & Green, 1993), historically it was often taken for granted (Harvey & Green, 1993). Many current requirements for higher education institutions to document the quality of their programs arose during the 1980s and 1990s as demonstrating accountability became a key concern around the world. Most external quality agencies related to higher education “emerged in response to government pressure or legislation for the higher education institutions to demonstrate that they are achieving what the government and/or society requires of them” (Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995, p. 257). The majority of higher education institutions in the United States and abroad receive at least some public funding and societies expect that these funds will be used wisely for the maximum benefit of higher education stakeholders (Kristensen, 2010). There is also “substantial agreement that the quality imperative in higher education was based on pressure from the market and from government to adapt to external political agendas (Dill, 2000; Harvey, 1998; Salter & Tapper, 2000)” (Houston, 2010, p. 178).

The research literature suggests that there are numerous factors underlying the increased scrutiny of higher education and emphasis on accountability. One of the most frequently cited drivers of the concern for quality in higher education is massification, a term used to reflect the shift from a higher education system that historically served a small number of elite students to a much larger system tasked with serving students from all sectors of society (e.g., Brennan & Shah, 2000; Henkel, 2000; Hodson & Thomas, 2003; Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995; Woodhouse, 2004). While massification first occurred in the United States in the mid-20<sup>th</sup>

century, it is now an international phenomenon (Dill & Sporn, 1995). Massification has led to the creation of many new institutions of higher education as well as the growth of existing institutions in order to accommodate increasing numbers of students.

The tremendous growth in the higher education sector resulting from massification has required increased funding, which in turn has intensified pressures to control public spending and meet accountability demands (Henkel, 2000). In general, increased funding has led to an increase in demands for evidence that higher education funds are being spent wisely. However, it is important to note that as more and more students enroll in higher education today, the amount of funding per student has generally decreased (Harvey, 2002; Peters, 2007). This has created a situation in which many higher education professionals are tasked with maintaining or improving academic quality at a time in which the amount of funding per student is declining.

Another factor frequently referenced alongside massification is diversification (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Hodson & Thomas, 2003; Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). As the higher education sector has grown, the amount of diversity in the system has increased substantially in terms of the types of institutions and programs available. Contemporary higher education students have also become much more varied in terms of characteristics such as race/ethnicity, family background, age, and amount of previous academic preparation. This has led to an increasing number of questions about whether a high level of quality can be maintained across such diverse institutions, providing fuel for the international quality debate.

Two additional drivers of the increase in accountability demands in higher education are a loss of trust and the rise of managerialism. Some quality authors suggest that the increased emphasis on accountability in higher education is at least partially due to a breakdown in mutual trust between the government and higher education (Elton, 1992; Henkel, 2000). Henkel (2000)

writes that quality management “grew out of a decline in trust of universities on the part of government to meet society’s needs for higher education” (p. 68). In many places, this loss of trust has been coupled with the rise of “the new managerialism,” described as a “movement that sought to expose higher education to increasingly international market forces and to improve the internal management and accountability of universities (Sachs, 1994; Vidovich, 2002; Harvey & Newton, 2004)” (Rowlands, 2012, p. 99). Underlying managerialism is the belief that education should be managed in the same way as any other public service or economic enterprise.

Managerialism has been an influential factor in quality management systems in a variety of countries around the world, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (Milliken & Colohan, 2004).

The literature on quality in higher education also cites a few additional factors as contributing to the increased emphasis on accountability. Perhaps the most significant of these factors is globalization. As higher education students are becoming increasingly mobile, institutions need to be able to compete in the worldwide marketplace (Rowlands, 2012; Woodhouse, 2000a). In the United States, higher education institutions are not only facing increased competition from institutions in other countries, but from domestic for-profit institutions (Koslowski, 2006). Finally, because many students are paying more for higher education tuition and fees than ever before, they are placing more “customer-like” demands on institutions, further increasing the emphasis on accountability requirements (Woodhouse, 2000a).

In summary, at the core of most quality management processes is:

the belief that these efforts will help the academy meet the strident demands of the public and various external agencies for more accountability, better performance, and greater efficiency and effectiveness. It has thus largely been a series of external interventions

and policymakers' actions—pressures such as mass higher education and rapid enrollment growth, a perceived erosion of quality accompanying diminished resources, public demand for greater value for investments made, and government encouragement of universities to operate under more competitive market principles, among others—that has helped to bring this international movement to various nations and their institutions. (Gaither, 1998, p. 87)

Over the past few decades, the world has become a more complex place. In many countries, higher education is tasked with serving more people while receiving less funding per student. The result has been an increased level of scrutiny and emphasis on accountability. However, it is important to note that “the increased public scrutiny of higher education today comes not because it is less valued but because it has become *more important*” (Fife & Janosik, 1999, p. 1). It is also important to recognize that:

Current notions of accountability have broadened beyond the 1980s perspective of accounting for the use of public funds and demonstrating efficiency in the allocation of financial resources, to accountability to students in the quality of teaching and accountability to industry for the knowledge and skills base of new graduates. (Milliken & Colohan, 2004, p. 383)

Thus, even the concept of accountability has changed during the higher education quality revolution.

**Quality management in the United States and as a global phenomenon.** Even though factors underlying the quality movement in higher education are similar throughout the world, the United States has a unique history in terms of quality management in higher education. The principal quality mechanism in the United States has been, and still is, accreditation (Ewell,

2010). The primary aim of accreditation processes is to establish that institutions or programs are meeting acceptable levels of quality by comparing institutional or program performance against a set of predetermined standards. Accreditation systems in the United States were created as early as the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to “the impossibility of institutions and individuals in different parts of a large country knowing about the standards being used elsewhere” (Woodhouse, 2004, p. 77). Although higher education has changed a great deal since the formation of the first accrediting agencies, accreditation in the United States remains a “voluntary” process administered by independent agencies.

In contrast, quality management concerns in many other countries did not become widespread until the 1980s (e.g., the United Kingdom), the 1990s (e.g., Australia), or later (Mertova & Webster, 2009; Rowlands, 2012). Also in contrast to the United States, many of the quality management processes created in other countries have required higher education institutions to participate in mandatory activities overseen by government-run and/or government-funded quality agencies. Although quality management processes in many other countries were developed much later than in the United States, they have developed rapidly (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004). The result is that nearly every country in the world now has some type of external quality assurance process for documenting and/or measuring quality in higher education (van Kemenade et al., 2008).

Many recent developments in quality management in Europe can be tied to the Bologna Process. The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 by the education ministers of 29 European countries, and there are currently 49 member nations (European Higher Education Area, 2014). The core of the Bologna Process is the creation of a European Higher Education Area in which students in all participating nations can move freely between countries, using

coursework and degrees obtained in one country to pursue advanced coursework or degrees in other member countries. Quality assurance is a major component of the Bologna Process and participating countries have been encouraged to cooperate with each other to develop comparable quality criteria and methodologies (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2013).

Partly due to the Bologna Process's emphasis on quality assurance, quality management in higher education has become transnational (Ewell, 2010; Vaira, 2007). Since the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, regional quality assurance networks have been established and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has experienced tremendous growth. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was formed in 2000, and similar regional networks have been created in Central America, South America, and Asia (Ewell, 2010). Although the INQAAHE was established in 1991 by eight member institutions, there were more than 250 INQAAHE members as of 2014 (INQAAHE, 2014). The supranational nature of quality assurance is also demonstrated by the fact that accrediting agencies in the United States have recently been examining and accrediting higher education institutions outside of the United States more frequently than in the past (Ewell, 2010).

Quality assurance work has become so prevalent worldwide that quality assurance is now considered to be a profession. Quality assurance was formally recognized as a profession in 2002 by the INQAAHE Board (Woodhouse, 2004). The INQAAHE currently offers a professional qualification in quality assurance, while the University of Melbourne offers a one-year graduate certificate program in quality assurance in higher education. Similar to many other professions, there are quality assurance-related "Guidelines of Good Practice" for external

quality agencies and their staff members. Aelterman (2006) found that “there appears to be considerable transparency and comparability between the codes of the major international networks of quality assurance agencies” (p. 227), suggesting that quality assurance standards are similar across much of the world. Even though the United States has a different history in terms of the development of quality management processes, “according to Harvey (2002), there has been increasing uniformity of practice for quality monitoring in higher education” (Houston, 2008, p. 61). Thus, quality management systems tend to be similar in many parts of the world.

### **What is Quality in Higher Education?**

In response to the question “what *is* quality in higher education?” Doherty (2008) states that “there is no simple answer to this question, since ‘quality,’ like ‘beauty’ is subjective—a matter of personal judgment” (p. 256). While reviewing the body of literature on quality in higher education I was struck by the fact that there is nearly universal consensus that quality in higher education is not well defined. While some authors have suggested that “it is a waste of time to try to define quality (Green, 1994; Bowden & Marton, 1998)” (Giertz, 2001, p. 1), other academic quality authors advocate that it is important to learn more about how different stakeholders view quality (e.g., Mertova, 2008; Watty, 2003, 2006). Doherty (1994) contends that “conventional wisdom and common sense demand some discussion of what is meant by ‘quality’ before considering quality systems” (p. 7). Although there are many more conceptions of quality in higher education than can be included in this literature review, a variety of different viewpoints are presented here to serve as a foundation for interpreting quality management work.

One of the most widely cited definitions of quality in general is from Robert Pirsig’s (1974) book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*. Pirsig (1974) writes:

Quality ... you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things *are* better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes *poof!* ... But if you can't say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes it really *does* exist. ... Obviously some things are better than others ... but what's the "betterness"? (p. 184)

Pirsig's conception of quality appears to be similar to the "I know it when I see it" approach to quality, also known as the apodictic approach, or the belief that people instinctively know quality (Harvey & Green, 1993). Although Pirsig did not write directly about quality in higher education, his work is referenced in multiple pieces of literature that were reviewed for the present study.

**Proposed definitions of quality in higher education.** A seminal work written specifically about quality in higher education is Harvey and Green's (1993) article entitled "Defining Quality." In this piece, Harvey and Green present five different ways of thinking about quality that were part of the higher education debate at the time the article was written. The five different definitions of quality discussed in the article are (1) quality as *exceptional*, (2) quality as *perfection (or consistency)*, (3) quality as *fitness for purpose*, (4) quality as *value for money*, and (5) quality as *transformative*. The first notion of quality, quality as exceptional, encompasses a few different variations. These are (1) that quality equals distinctiveness (i.e., something special), (2) quality equals excellence, and (3) quality equals achieving a set of minimum standards. The second approach to quality, quality as perfection or consistency, refers to the idea that quality equals zero defects. In this approach, quality is primarily about the

process and delivering a product consistently. Harvey and Green's third approach to quality, quality as fitness for purpose, is determined by the degree to which a product fits its purpose. Although this definition may on the surface appear to be straightforward, it raises questions such as who defines the purpose and the criteria that are used to determine the level of fit. A fourth definition of quality, quality as value for money, is often demonstrated through the use of performance indicators. At the core of this approach is accountability. Finally, quality as transformation defines a quality education as "one that effects changes in the participants and, thereby, presumably enhances them" (p. 24). This fifth approach is often associated with value-added measures that attempt to show how participants have changed over time. In later publications, Harvey (1998) argues that "transformation is a meta-quality concept and that other concepts such as perfection, high standards, fitness for purpose and value for money are *possible operationalisations* of the transformative process rather than ends in themselves (Harvey, 1994b; Harvey & Knight, 1996)" (p. 244). Harvey and Green's original framework for defining quality is still in use two decades later, providing the foundation for many different works on quality in higher education published since 1993 (e.g., Lomas, 2002; Watty, 2006).

However, even though Harvey and Green's (1993) framework for defining quality is still referenced today, there have been a few significant shifts in terms of how quality in higher education is commonly defined since "Defining Quality" was published. Whereas in the early days of the quality movement in higher education quality was often determined by quantifying inputs such as the number of faculty, the number of books in the library, and the size of an institution's endowment, there is now a much greater focus on outcomes such as student learning (Wergin, 2005). Wergin (2005) states that while "'quality' was once defined in terms of inputs and resources—what the institution *has*—it's now defined in terms of processes and outcomes—

what the institution *does* with what it has” (p. 36). In the United States, the increased emphasis on student learning outcomes started with the assessment movement in the 1980s and was reinforced by the authorization of the Higher Education Act in 1998 which mandated that greater attention be paid to student learning outcomes (Wergin, 2005).

Another shift is an increased tendency to define quality in higher education as “fitness for purpose” rather than “excellence.” A few decades ago, quality was often used synonymously with excellence (Doherty, 1994; Harvey 1998). Jacobs and Du Toit (2006) write that “traditionally, quality at universities has been associated with excellence and high, often internationally acclaimed, standards” (p. 303). Over the past couple of decades, however, many governments, higher education institutions, and quality agencies have chosen to emphasize “fitness for purpose” rather than “excellence” (Lomas, 2002; Watty, 2003, 2006). Lomas (2002) contends that “any one of the definitions of quality is not mutually exclusive. Quality is often viewed as a blend of two or more of the definitions” (p. 72).

Giertz (2001) offers an alternative framework for understanding quality in higher education in her discussion of intrinsic, extrinsic, and politically correct quality. She defines intrinsic quality as “traditional academic quality” that is primarily concerned with knowledge creation and student learning (p. 3). In contrast, extrinsic quality is concerned with the ability of higher education institutions to respond to the demands placed on them by society. Giertz (2001) describes politically correct quality as:

a new term to describe the role of the State authorities in relation to quality in higher education today. It refers both to the well-known fact that the state has the power to prescribe what kind of quality higher education should deliver (what kind of quality will be considered correct), and to the less recognized fact that many of the quality aspects

proposed by the state are politically and ideologically motivated: quality is used to disguise other motives. Quality is a word with strong positive connotations; no one would say, “we do not care about quality.” Therefore, if something is presented as an important quality aspect, it is hard to argue against it. Calling something a quality factor is a smart way of introducing demands that it would otherwise be difficult to get acceptance for (cf. Laske & Meister Scheytt, 2000). (p. 4)

Giertz (2001) suggests that while these three conceptions of quality differ, they are not mutually exclusive.

A different conceptualization of quality in higher education related to “excellence” is the Harvard Model in which “the quality of an institution is measured against that of the most prestigious institution” (Fife & Janosik, 1999, p. 4). However, Gibbs (2011) has argued that instead of quality being associated with the achievement of world-class standards, it should be associated with being “good enough.” Gibbs states that “the literal imposition of notions of world-class quality ... is unrealistic and therefore oppressive as it keeps institutions seeking something that is unachievable for almost all” (p. 145). Thus, Gibbs contends that replacing the world-class conception of quality with being good enough is “not a lowering of standards but a realization of how much an institution is capable” (p. 145).

In keeping with the notion that quality is controversial, for every definition of quality that is proposed, there are arguments in the literature against applying it to higher education. For example, one problem associated with using “excellence” to define quality is that the “concept [excellence] is just as subjective as ‘quality’” (Doherty, 2008, p. 256). In terms of defining quality as “fitness for purpose,” Harvey (1998) cautions that “just what purpose and what constitutes fitness is rarely clearly identified” (p. 244). Issues with the Harvard Model include

concerns that using one common standard to make judgments about many different types of institutions does not facilitate serving stakeholders with different needs. While the concerns raised here are just a few of the many different issues addressed in the body of literature on quality in higher education, they help to illustrate how defining quality in higher education is a difficult and complex endeavor.

**Quality assurance vs. quality enhancement.** Despite a plethora of perspectives on what quality in higher education actually means, there are two major conceptions of quality utilized by contemporary quality management systems: (1) meeting established standards (i.e., quality assurance) and (2) continuous improvement (i.e., quality enhancement). Quality assurance is also sometimes referred to as quality control in the literature on quality in higher education, while quality enhancement is also referred to as quality improvement. Knight and Trowler (2000) collapsed several different definitions of quality in higher education into two major types—Type I and Type II—that correspond to quality assurance and quality enhancement, respectively. Type I quality emphasizes compliance, accountability, and extrinsic motivation, whereas Type II quality emphasizes creativity, enhancement, and intrinsic motivation. According to Ezer and Horin (2013), “in general, quality assurance and quality enhancement represent different values and serve different goals. As a whole, they are complementary and reflect the ongoing attempts of higher education institutions to achieve quality (Harvey, 2005; Massy, 2003)” (p. 249).

However, viewing quality assurance and quality enhancement as complementary processes is not a perspective that is shared by all. While many quality management systems do aim to meet standards *and* improve performance (Wergin, 2005; Kristensen, 2010), tensions between these goals are well documented in the research literature (e.g., Sachs, 1994; Vidovich,

2001). For example, Meade and Woodhouse (2000) note that quality agencies “are expected to fulfil two barely compatible roles, namely, to assist the institutions to improve their operations and to report to the government or society on the current state of those operations” (p. 20).

Finding an appropriate balance between accountability and improvement has historically been a common theme in the debate on quality in higher education. Multiple quality authors recognize that assuring quality and improving quality at the same time is a difficult task (e.g., Newton, 2002a; Wergin, 2005). Wergin (2005) writes that “too heavy a focus on the former leads to a compliance mentality—that is, meeting the letter of the requirements without internalizing change—while too much emphasis on the latter leads to charges that the foxes are guarding the henhouse” (p. 35).

Many authors contributing to the body of literature on quality in higher education believe that quality management systems have not been able to successfully balance quality assurance and quality enhancement (e.g., Houston, 2008; Knight & Trowler, 2000; Newton, 2010). While these authors argue that quality enhancement should take precedence over quality assurance demands since the ultimate goal of quality work should be continuous improvement, in practice quality assurance has been emphasized. According to this group of authors, emphasizing accountability over improvement has not only had negative consequences for institutional performance, but for faculty participating in quality management processes. For example, Knight and Trowler (2000) write that “creativity and conscientiousness are compromised by giving priority to Type I quality” (p. 112), while Harvey and Knight (1996) note that:

accountability approaches tend to demotivate staff who are already involved in innovation and quality initiatives. Not only do they face the added burden of responding

to external scrutiny there is also a feeling of being manipulated, of not being trusted and valued, by managers and outside agencies. (p. 100)

When governments and individual higher education institutions emphasize accountability over improvement, quality management can become a form of governance (Rowlands, 2012), leading to quality management activities being perceived as a form of control.

A smaller group of authors believes that higher education institutions can successfully conduct assessment that achieves both quality assurance and quality enhancement purposes at the same time. Middlehurst and Woodhouse (1995) contend that “while it is possible to specialize a system towards *improvement*, it is not possible to have a separate system solely for *accountability*, as it will inevitably overlap into improvement” (p. 266). Coates and Seifert (2011) go even further with this argument in stating that there are synergies between accountability and improvement exercises. For these authors, quality assurance and quality enhancement cannot be separated.

**Total quality management applied to higher education.** The emphasis on quality in higher education either “migrated or was imported from its more familiar industrial and commercial settings of the 1980s” (Newton, 2002b, p. 44). One quality management tool from the corporate sector that has, in the view of some authors, been successfully applied to higher education is Malcolm Baldrige Criteria, which is representative of the total quality management (TQM) philosophy (Grant, Mergen, & Widrick, 2004; Lehr & Ruben, 1999). An example of how Malcolm Baldrige Criteria have specifically been adapted for use in higher education institutions is the Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) framework developed by Rutgers University. The EHE framework has seven categories: leadership; planning; service orientation; information and analysis; faculty, staff, and workplace climate; process management; and

excellence levels and trends. However, while a variety of higher education institutions around the world have adopted TQM processes due to their successful implementation at companies such as Toyota, Ford, and Motorola (Grant, Mergen, & Widrick, 2004), Smith and MacGregor (2009) state that “quality improvement models from business have not been widely embraced” in higher education in the United States (p. 118).

Koch (2003) supports Smith and MacGregor’s assessment in writing that “TQM’s time has come and passed in higher education” (p. 325). According to Koch (2003), most of the higher education institutions practicing TQM in 1991 had discontinued it by 1996. Koch offers multiple reasons for why TQM has not been effective in higher education. While the most successful applications of TQM have been in service areas such as financial aid and facilities (i.e., areas that have well-defined customers), TQM has not generally led to improvements associated with more complex and overarching educational issues such as curricula and student learning. This is partly because complex issues such as student learning involve questions about values, not just performance. In addition, Koch contends that in order for TQM to be effective, the customer must be clearly defined, and this is a difficult task in higher education. After a few decades of applying TQM to higher education and debating its use, the majority view is that conceptions of quality from industry are not an appropriate fit for higher education (Becket & Brookes, 1996; Houston, 2008; Koch, 2003). According to Law (2010):

Houston (2007) suggests that the application of TQM in higher education involves a clash of metaphors, as TQM in its common practice is an instrument for enacting the machine metaphor of the organization, which has fundamental differences with the nature of academic culture that is underpinned by values such as academic freedom, collegiality and professionalism (Koch, 2003). ... Overall, while some researchers are still interested

in the application of TQM in education ... it seems highly probable that TQM and other business-oriented approaches ... will not have significant influence on the mainstream concepts and practices of educational quality. (p. 68)

### **How is Quality in Higher Education Measured?**

Just as there is no universal consensus on what quality in higher education actually means, there is a corresponding lack of agreement on how quality in higher education should be measured. As Becket and Brookes (2006) state, “as a result of the difficulty in defining quality, the measurement of quality has also proved to be contentious” (p. 123). While Koch (2003) contends that quality in higher education cannot be measured effectively unless it has been defined, or “one has a defined notion of what [the institution] is doing and who is being served” (p. 331), in practice people make judgments about the quality of higher education and higher education institutions every day. When students choose which college or university to attend or prospective faculty members decide where to submit job applications, they are making quality assessments (Astin, 1982). Whether making formal or informal judgments, people routinely “measure” the quality of higher education.

There is currently a great deal of overlap between how quality is defined and how it is measured. Since quality in higher education is not well-defined, measures of quality are frequently used to denote quality itself. For example, if the amount of resources an institution possesses is used to measure quality, then quality may be perceived as having a substantial amount of resources. Two of the biggest problems with measuring quality in higher education are that (1) what gets measured tends to get done (Dew & Nearing, 2004) and (2) quality measurements frequently consist of what is easily measured rather than what is most important to

measure (Jones & de Saram, 2005; Kleijnen et al., 2011). Thus, the process of measuring quality in higher education is often as complex and confusing as defining quality.

**Common processes for measuring quality.** Back in 1982, Astin identified five traditional approaches to measuring quality in higher education that are still used today. These five approaches are (1) the nihilist view, (2) reputational measures, (3) resource measures, (4) outcome measures, and (5) value-added measures. Astin describes the first approach, the nihilist view, as the belief that it is impossible to make valid assessments of quality since education is extremely complex, higher education institutions have different missions, and methodological problems associated with measuring quality in higher education are so prevalent. The second approach, reputational measures, allows a consensus of opinion regarding a college or university's institutional reputation to determine academic quality. Thus, if many people view an institution to be prestigious, then the education offered to students attending the institution must be of high quality. The third approach to measuring quality in higher education is resource measures. This approach examines the amounts and types of institutional resources such as the number of faculty members holding terminal degrees, the number of students achieving high SAT scores, and the amount of research funds as measures of quality. A fourth approach is outcome measures, which seek to gauge the quality of a higher education institution's products rather than an institution's reputation or resources. Examples of outcome measures are student graduation rates and alumni earnings. A fifth and final approach is value-added measures. Instead of being concerned with final student outcomes, this approach is concerned with the amount of change that occurs from when students enter an institution to when they leave the institution. Astin (1982) writes that "in this view, the highest-quality institutions are those that

have the greatest impact on or add the most value to the student's knowledge, personality, and career development" (p. 11).

**Measuring quality in the United States.** Accreditation is the principal mechanism for measuring the quality of higher education in the United States (Ewell, 2010; Volkwein, 2010). Although accreditation in the United States is technically voluntary in that higher education institutions are not required by law to participate, in order to receive government funding for student financial aid institutions must successfully meet standards set by one of six regional accrediting bodies. Accreditation is also required for institutions to receive certain types of external research funding. In addition to institutional accreditation, many academic fields such as business, medicine, and engineering also participate in professional accreditation processes known as "specialized" or "programmatic" accreditation. With the decline in public funding for higher education, both student financial aid and external research funding are providing larger percentages of college and university operating budgets. In some disciplines, students cannot become licensed professionals and advance in their chosen fields unless they have graduated from an accredited program. These examples illustrate that while institutional and programmatic accreditation may be voluntary in name, they are in most cases obligatory in practice.

Although institutional and programmatic accreditation processes are overseen by many different accrediting bodies (all of which are recognized by the United States Department of Education through the Council for Higher Education Accreditation), they usually involve a similar process. After standards are set by an accrediting body, an institution or program seeking accreditation typically conducts an in-depth self-study in which the institution or program's strengths and weaknesses are examined. The self-study is usually followed by a visit from an external team of peer reviewers identified by the accrediting agency that reviews evidence

related to whether or not the institution or program is meeting established standards. The review team then creates a report detailing the results of the site visit including recommendations for the institution or program. Based on this report, the accrediting agency then makes a decision regarding whether the institution or program will be accredited, reaccredited, placed on probationary status, or denied accreditation. The institution or program is expected to utilize recommendations made by the site visit team when making improvements in between accreditation reports, and the entire process is repeated after a specified time period (often a period of several years).

Accreditation in the United States currently aims to be both a quality assurance and a quality enhancement process as it requires accredited members to demonstrate that they are meeting established standards *and* working to improve quality. While accreditation has historically been a quality assurance process, emphasis on quality enhancement has been growing (Dew & Nearing, 2004; Volkwein, 2010). Over the past couple of decades there has also been an increased emphasis on student outcomes (Ewell, 2010; Volkwein, 2010). In 1990, the federal Department of Education began requiring regional accrediting agencies to assess student learning outcomes in their reviews of institutional performance. Ewell (2010) notes that:

Quality review processes in the US ... focused largely on resources and processes 20 years ago. Now they are dominated by the need for institutions to directly assess and provide concrete evidence of student learning outcomes instead. Furthermore, they are beginning to move beyond inspection of assessment as a process to examining actual levels of student performance. (pp. 173-174)

However, these trends may be leading to unintended consequences. Lomas (2007) writes that “with increased imposition from funding agencies in higher education, learning and teaching

strategies are increasingly becoming tools of quality assurance rather than tools for quality enhancement” (p. 405).

In addition to participating in institutional and programmatic accreditation processes, most institutions in the United States have their own internal academic program review activities [which may also include academic audit; for more information on academic audit refer to Massy, Graham, & Short, 2007] (Volkwein, 2010). Internal academic program reviews tend to be similar to accreditation in that both processes usually involve a self-study, peer review, and a final report with recommendations for program improvement. The main difference between the two activities is that internal academic program reviews are designed and administered by the college or university itself rather than being externally mandated and/or administered. Other major quality management mechanisms in the United States are performance indicator systems mandated by university governing boards or state agencies (e.g., higher education institutions in Virginia submit reports to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia [SCHEV]), increased federal reporting requirements, student outcomes assessment, a national study of research doctorate programs, and publishers’ institutional rankings in magazines and college guides such as *U.S. News & World Report*, *Money* magazine, and the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* (Stanley & Patrick, 1998; Volkwein, 2010). Thus, quality management in the United States tends to be multilayered and complex.

**Measuring quality abroad.** Although quality management systems vary throughout the world, most countries employ similar processes for measuring quality in higher education (Askling, 1997). Hodson and Thomas (2003) note that “the process of globalization of higher education is ensuring a degree of isomorphism, with systems mimicking various features of each other (Stensaker and Norgard, 2001)” (p. 377). Harvey (1998) writes that “approaches to quality

in higher education have been characterized by a growing uniformity of methodology which incorporates various combinations of three basic elements: self-assessment; peer evaluation; [and] statistical or performance indicators” (p. 241). However, even among European Union countries which are bound by the Bologna Process, “there are important differences in political discourses (Neave, 1998, 2004), in the ownership of the system and in the consequences of quality assessment, with or without direct consequences to funding” (Amaral & Rosa, 2010, p. 59).

**Problems with measuring quality in higher education.** For each mechanism put forth in the research literature to measure quality, there are well-constructed arguments for why the approach is not appropriate or sufficient. Astin wrote in 1982 that “none of the traditional assessments of quality is really adequate. We academics must be prepared to revise our notions about quality measurement if we are to cope effectively with problems we will face in the next two decades” (p. 10). Unfortunately, more than 30 years after these words were published, most people are still using—and complaining about—the same traditional measures of quality described by Astin. Thus, while there is no consensus on how best to measure quality in higher education, there is widespread agreement that current processes are woefully inadequate (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Law, 2010).

Two common quality management mechanisms that are frequently criticized in the quality management literature are performance indicators and institutional rankings, which are known as “league tables” in many countries abroad. According to Fitz-Gibbon (1996), a performance indicator is “an item of information collected at regular intervals to track the performance of a system” (p. 5). One of the many issues associated with performance indicators is that they reflect what has been done in the past rather than what is happening in the present

and/or will happen in the future (Barnett, 1994; Doherty, 2008). Another issue is that performance indicators only highlight aspects of higher education that can be represented with quantitative data; they disregard qualitative indicators of quality even when qualitative indicators would be more meaningful (Jones & de Saram, 2005). Barnett (1994) argues that “to believe that we can say something of real insight about the quality of an educational process by describing it in numerical terms is an illusion. Qualities and quantities are different kinds of entities” (p. 75). League tables ranking higher education institutions are considered to be controversial by many quality authors since they are typically based in part on opinions regarding an institution’s reputation rather than more objective criteria (Dill, 1997). Furthermore, “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that institutional diversity seriously undermines the production of ‘league tables’ based upon the simplistic mathematical manipulation of a small number of raw performance data-sets” (Yorke, 1995, p. 17).

Strangely, there is little discussion of research activities in the body of literature on quality in higher education even though these are frequently a primary factor used to measure the quality of faculty members. When quality management activities do address research activities, they often appear to be conducted separately to teaching and learning activities. For example, the United Kingdom conducted separate assessments for teaching and research in the 1990s. While teaching and learning is front and center in the quality in higher education literature, some research suggests that faculty attention to teaching and learning is decreasing while attention to research is increasing. Suggested reasons underlying this trend are research drift and changes in higher education funding (Dill, 1997; Massy, 2003). Faculty today are under increasing pressure to secure research funds in order to offset decreases in public funding for higher education. Dill (1997) explains the increasing importance of research in higher education as follows:

In the United States, the effect that market competition among institutions of higher education has on the quality of teaching and learning is becoming more discernible. In a national system which features competitive funding for academic research, but not clear, valid, or reliable measures of academic program quality, research reputation becomes a proxy for academic quality. Consequently there is increasing competition among all four-year institutions of higher education in the [United States] for faculty members of high research reputation, which has the further effect of lessening professorial commitment to teaching. (pp. 38-39)

This suggests that there may be a disconnect between how the quality of individual faculty members is measured (i.e., research productivity) and how quality in higher education in general is measured.

Quality measurements can and do significantly impact higher education institutions, even leading to instances where the proverbial tail wags the dog. Dew and Nearing (2004) write:

Whenever an institution establishes a structured approach to defining and obtaining performance measures, it runs the risk of creating an engine that pulls the entire organization, like cars on a train, in a certain direction. Once the organization is hitched to the measurement engine, it may be hard to decouple, even when concerns arise about unexpected consequences of the measurement system. (p. 143)

In summary:

Common approaches to quality assurance (QA), as practiced by most post-secondary education institutions for internal quality monitoring and most QA authorities for external quality monitoring (EQM), have been considered by many researchers as having largely failed to address the essence of educational quality. (Law, 2010, p. 64)

## **Faculty and Administrator Perspectives on Quality and Quality Management**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the present study builds upon previous research suggesting that how faculty view quality and quality management activities is important to the success of quality management work. While much of the early literature on quality in higher education is conceptual, there is a growing body of empirical research related to faculty and administrator perspectives on quality and quality management in higher education. Forty-two empirical studies that address how faculty and/or administrators define quality and/or experience quality management in higher education were located and reviewed to provide context for the present study. Most of these empirical studies either interviewed or surveyed faculty members and/or administrators. The remaining studies utilized focus groups, document analysis, or participant observation; multiple studies employed multiple research methods. The majority of the 42 empirical studies were written by authors from European Union countries (most notably the United Kingdom), followed by authors from Australia and New Zealand. Only three of the studies in this group present data from faculty and/or administrators in the United States. This section of the literature review will emphasize findings from these 42 empirical studies.

Before presenting previous findings related to faculty members' perceptions of quality in higher education, it is important to address the question of "who exactly does the term 'faculty' refer to?" Unfortunately, many of the empirical studies that were examined do not provide enough detailed information on their study participants to enable readers to confidently answer this question. Multiple studies simply refer to participants as "faculty," "academics," or "lecturers," and do not provide demographic information or important characteristics such as administrative responsibilities that would allow readers to make accurate determinations regarding whether or not faculty members can be classified as front-line faculty members.

Faculty members are a diverse group of individuals, and without information on characteristics such as rank, discipline, and previous involvement with quality management activities, the generalizability or transferability of these empirical studies is limited. While attempting to determine who exactly participated in the 42 empirical studies, I separated the reviewed studies into three different groups: (1) studies that provide few details regarding the type of faculty or administrators who participated (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Askling, 1997; Blythman, 2001; Carmichael, 2001; Hoecht, 2006; Houston, 2008; Jacobs & Du Toit, 2006; Jones & de Saram, 2005; Laughton, 2003; Lomas & Ursin, 2009); (2) studies that appear to present data mostly or only from senior academics and/or administrators as opposed to front-line faculty (e.g., Ezer & Horin, 2013; Lillis, 2012; Lomas, 2002; Mertova & Webster, 2009; Mets, 1995; Rosa et al., 2006; Wahlén, 2004); and (3) studies that appear to present data mostly or at least partially from front-line faculty (e.g., Barandiaran-Galdós et al., 2012; Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Cardoso et al., 2013; Henkel, 2000; Kleijnen et al., 2011; Lomas, 2007; Massy, 2003; McInnis et al., 1995; Newton, 1999, 2000, 2002b; Rosa et al., 2012; Sandmaung & Khang, 2013; Stensaker et al., 2011; Telford & Masson, 2005).

Complicating matters further is that while some studies collected data from both faculty members and administrators, or faculty members from different groups, the findings for these distinct groups are often presented together rather than being disaggregated. Thus, it is difficult to know exactly how certain types of faculty members perceive or experience quality management. It is also important to note that many of the individuals who participated in these studies were selected due to their substantial involvement in quality management work, holding positions such as assessment coordinators, quality managers, and department chairs. Research by Scott (1991) and Cardoso et al. (2013) suggest that an individual's prior experience with

quality work influences his/her attitudes towards quality management. Cardoso et al. (2013) also found that faculty perceptions of quality management differed based on gender, type of educational institution, and academic discipline. Consequently, details on participants' past experiences with quality management and demographic information may be significant. The current lack of participant details in many empirical studies suggests that more research is needed that clearly describes who "faculty participants" are.

**Faculty and administrator views on quality.** With these limitations in mind, what exactly does the literature tell us about how faculty members *define* quality in higher education? Or, since defining and measuring quality are frequently intertwined, what does the literature tell us about how faculty members prefer to *measure* quality? Little is currently known. In one study of 231 accounting faculty members in Australia, Watty (2006) found that participants were more supportive of using Harvey and Green's (1993) transformative definition of quality to define quality in accounting education than defining quality as fitness for purpose, excellence, or value for money. In a similar study, Rosa et al. (2006) found that academics in Portugal who were responsible for coordinating quality management self-evaluation reports emphasized student development over client satisfaction in defining quality. This was in contrast to the responses of university rectors who participated in the study and "emphasized definitions of quality linked to efficiency, effectiveness and customer satisfaction" (Rosa et al., 2006, p. 152). For both the Watty (2006) and Rosa et al. (2006) studies, participants were asked to respond to different definitions of quality that were provided to them on questionnaires rather than to provide their own unique definition of quality in higher education.

A small subset of empirical studies suggests that faculty members' conceptions of quality tend to be discipline-specific (Cardoso et al., 2013; Henkel, 2000; Kleijnen et al., 2011), while a

study conducted by Lomas (2007) may shed light on how faculty in the United Kingdom (and possibly elsewhere) believe quality should be measured. Lomas (2007) found that:

In general, lecturers wanted a “hands off” approach to quality initiatives that acknowledged their professionalism. The government and universities could provide appropriate external and internal frameworks, but academics should have far greater say in the indicators of quality chosen. They should be consulted over what are the indicators of quality and what, therefore, should be measured. It was vital that the important should be made measurable rather than the measurable made important. (p. 409)

Unfortunately, no specifics are provided in the Lomas (2007) study regarding faculty members’ ideal “indicators of quality.” Little detailed information is available in the research literature regarding the indicators that faculty members would prefer to use when measuring quality in higher education.

However, there is a clear association in the research literature between quality in higher education and the quality of teaching and learning (e.g., the Watty (2006) and Rosa et al. (2006) studies described previously). In 1997, Askling found that faculty members at a university in Sweden believed that the focus of quality management work should be on how to improve teaching. Similarly, in Houston’s (2008) research on an academic department at a public university in New Zealand, the staff members he interviewed framed their discussions of quality around teaching and learning outcomes. Most of the staff in Houston’s (2008) study “acknowledged that research is also important but not as important as teaching and serving students” (p. 71).

A more recent study conducted by Barandiaran-Galdós et al. (2012) that analyzed data from 1,033 online questionnaires submitted by lecturers at multiple universities in Spain found

that “university lecturers see quality in education as linked mainly to those stakeholders that stand at the core of the learning process, i.e. lecturers and students, and to their capacities and attitudes” (p. 100). Study participants identified the top ten most important factors for facilitating quality (out of 26 different factors provided) as: “(1) expertise of lecturers in the subjects taught; (2) motivation of lecturers; (3) communication skills of lecturers; (4) active participation of students in the learning process at university; (5) co-ordination between lecturers teaching the same subject; (6) attitude of students to learning on entering university; (7) vocation of students for studies chosen; (8) rigour in teaching staff selection; (9) self-training and self-learning skills of lecturers; and (10) capacity for autonomous learning of students on entering university” (p. 97). It is important to note that the 26 factors provided to participants in this study focused solely on topics such as lecturers, students, and teaching assessments. The only research-related factor in the list was “dedication of lecturers to research.”

In contrast, a different subset of empirical studies suggests that research is also a central component of faculty members’ views on quality in higher education (Massy, 2003; Mertova, 2008; Rosa et al., 2012). For example, research conducted by Mertova (2008) that included participants from the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic concluded that teaching and research should be valued equally in quality management work. Massy (2003) and his research team at the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI) in the United States conducted a study that primarily asked faculty members about their views on productivity but also yielded information on how faculty view educational quality. For this study, Massy’s colleagues conducted interviews with 378 faculty members from 19 different higher education institutions, including eight research universities, three doctoral-granting universities, four comprehensive universities, and four liberal arts colleges. One major finding from the study was

that “most professors believe that research is a necessary condition for educational quality, and many believe that it’s a sufficient condition as well” (Massy, 2003, p. 93). When faculty participants were asked what “educational quality means to them,” many faculty members shared the belief that both research and teaching significantly impact quality in higher education. More specifically, many faculty members believed that a strong research program was needed to ensure strong course content. In turn, strong course content was thought to result in educational quality. Participant views in the Massy (2003) study were found to be similar across different types of institutions.

**Faculty and administrator views on quality management.** Much more information is currently available in the research literature on how faculty *experience* quality management activities in higher education than on how faculty view quality itself. This leads to the question, “What exactly do we know about how faculty experience quality management?” One of the first researchers to publish extensively on this topic was Jethro Newton. In 1999 and 2000, Newton published articles presenting results from a five-year ethnographic study of a higher education institution in the United Kingdom. These articles were among the first to suggest that how faculty experience quality management activities in practice is often different than how quality management activities are conceptualized. A primary finding from Newton’s 2000 publication is that many of the front-line academics he studied experienced quality management work as a burden that resulted in game playing. Newton (2000) argues that:

If academics are to remain pivotal in efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning, then more attention needs to be paid, by institutions and external quality bodies, to the importance of the conditions and context of academics’ work. Otherwise, quality

monitoring is liable to be invested by a ‘beast-like’ presence requiring to be ‘fed’ by ritualistic practices by academics seeking to meet accountability requirements. (p. 153)

Results from the second phase of Newton’s research on this topic is presented in a third article (2002b). This work is one of the first pieces of quality literature to focus on “front-line academics,” a term that appears to have been coined by Newton. Newton’s (2002b) paper provides “evidence that staff, especially front-line academics, do not mutely accept change or the particular demands of quality assurance policy or systems” (p. 59). Although faculty members react to quality management activities in different ways, many of the faculty members in Newton’s studies were skeptical of, or resistant to, quality management processes. They did not embrace quality management activities.

**The implementation gap.** Major themes found in Newton’s work are evident in other empirical studies reviewed for the present study. The literature on quality in higher education suggests that there are major gaps regarding faculty perspectives on quality in higher education. The first of these gaps is the “implementation gap” (described in Newton’s 2000 paper) which represents the difference between what quality management purports to achieve and what it actually does. While quality management activities frequently tout themselves as either ensuring quality, improving quality, or both, multiple studies suggest that quality management work does not actually have much impact on quality in higher education (see the “impact of quality management” section below). Rather, it appears that many faculty members and administrators have simply gotten better at playing the quality management game and reporting what external and internal evaluators want to hear (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Newton, 2002b). As one faculty member argued, “you can’t confuse improvement with getting better at filling in the forms” (Newton, 2002b, p. 54). Additional studies that provide evidence for an implementation gap in

quality management include Brunetto and Farr-Wharton (2005), Cartwright (2007), Hoecht (2006), Jones and de Saram (2005), Laughton (2003), Lomas (2007), and McInnis et al. (1995).

Cartwright (2007) refers to the implementation gap as the gap between the “rhetoric” and the “reality” of quality. This gap is also represented by differences in what faculty think quality management currently emphasizes and what they believe it should be accomplishing (Lomas, 2007; Lomas & Ursin, 2009; Watty, 2006). The accounting educators who participated in Watty’s (2006) study indicated that while they believed quality was most commonly promoted as fitness for purpose, it should primarily be concerned with transformation. Lomas and Ursin’s (2009) study of conceptions of quality in higher education in the United Kingdom and Finland found that while the quality management system in the United Kingdom was viewed by participants as emphasizing quality assurance over quality enhancement, study participants in the United Kingdom were more supportive of quality management processes that focused on improvement rather than accountability. Thus, there was a gap between the quality management system that currently existed in the United Kingdom and the quality management system that participants wanted. Other studies that found faculty participants to be more supportive of quality management that focuses on improvement rather than accountability are Cardoso et al. (2013), Ezer and Horin (2013), and Rosa et al. (2012). As far back as 1992, Elton advocated shifting from all of the “Quality A’s” (i.e., Quality Assurance, Accountability, Audit, and Assessment) to the “Quality E’s” (i.e., Empowerment, Enthusiasm, Expertise, and Excellence). While the quality movement has been working to increase the emphasis on improvement, the empirical research reviewed here suggests that the primary focus of quality management work has been on quality assurance rather than quality enhancement.

**Impact of quality management.** Additional support for the implementation gap is found in studies that address the impact of quality management activities and conclude that quality management has had minimal to no impact on educational outcomes (Askling, 1997; Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005; Ezer & Horin, 2013; Horsburgh, 1999; Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2001; Lillis, 2012; Shah, 2012; Stensaker et al., 2011). The literature reviewed for the present study that was most positive about the impacts of quality management (e.g., Kristensen, 2010; Martin, Manning, & Ramaley, 2001) was not empirical in nature. While assessing the impact of quality management activities is an extremely difficult task, some researchers have tried to address this issue despite the challenges. Rosa et al. (2006) discuss the two biggest difficulties commonly associated with measuring the impact of quality management activities:

Measuring the impact of quality assessment presents methodological problems due to the difficulty of isolating the effects of assessment from those of other processes impinging on higher education (Stensaker, 2003; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Carr et al., 2005), the task being further complicated by the complex nature of higher education institutions (Weusthof, 1995; Askling, 1997; Brennan, 1997; Stensaker, 2003). (p. 146)

In terms of impact, while there is little evidence that teaching and learning have improved as a result of quality management work, there is evidence that quality management systems and processes, as well as the internal management of higher education institutions, have improved (e.g., Ezer & Horin, 2013; Shah, 2012; Stensaker et al., 2011; Wahlén, 2004). For example, Ewell (2010) contends that “growing familiarity with quality review has unquestionably heightened institutional attention to documenting internal quality processes, conscious planning and establishing and assessing academic goals. This is clearly an advance for an enterprise where muddled processes are both common and notorious” (p. 174). Quality management work

has also sparked debate on issues related to quality and improved collegiality and communication in some contexts where faculty members have been required to work closely with colleagues in order to complete quality management reports or other requirements (Ezer & Horin, 2013; Hoecht, 2006; Stensaker et al., 2011).

However, multiple empirical studies have found that there are also negative impacts associated with quality management, most of which relate to how quality management activities negatively impact the work of faculty members (Anderson, 2006; Hoecht, 2006; Jones & de Saram, 2005; Laughton, 2003; Newton, 2002b). This subset of literature suggests that quality management activities hinder faculty efforts to improve quality rather than facilitate them since quality management work consumes valuable time and energy that faculty would likely have spent on activities such as teaching and research. Thus, it is not surprising that multiple studies found faculty participants to hold negative views of quality management (Anderson, 2006; Cartwright, 2007; Hoecht, 2006; Jones & de Saram, 2005; Laughton, 2003; McInnis et al., 1995; Newton, 2000). For example, Jones and de Saram (2005) found:

Frequently staff describe the demands of quality processes and procedures to which they are subjected as too onerous and time consuming. Furthermore, they often see the particular procedures to be peripheral to what is really important and, in fact, to damage the real work of quality in teaching and learning. (pp. 52-53)

In Cartwright's (2007) study of six academics in the United Kingdom, he found that most of his interviewees "went along" with quality management activities but did not actively engage in them. All of his participants were skeptical about the quality management processes currently in place at their universities.

Empirical research on quality in higher education also suggests that not only do some faculty members “go along with” quality management activities, other faculty members actively resist engaging in quality management work. A study conducted by Anderson (2006) found that “academics, although committed to quality in research and teaching, continue to resist quality assurance processes within their universities” (p. 161). For this study, Anderson interviewed 30 academics from 10 different universities in Australia. Anderson (2006) also found that participants viewed complying with quality management requirements to be a burden that “failed to assure quality in any meaningful way” (p. 171). With many faculty members viewing quality management negatively, it is not surprising that some studies have found engaging faculty members in quality management work to be problematic (Ezer & Horin, 2013). Houston (2008) contends that “the political agenda of others outside higher education has contributed to the negative view of quality amongst academics (Harvey, 2005)” (p. 62), while Brennan and Shah (2000) argue that a reason behind faculty viewing quality management negatively is that quality management activities are generally mandatory rather than voluntary.

**Gap between faculty and administrators.** A second major theme in the empirical research literature related to faculty and quality in higher education is that there is a gap between how faculty and administrators view quality management (Anderson, 2006; Askling, 1997; Barandiaran-Galdós et al., 2012; Newton, 1999, 2000; Rosa et al., 2006; Scott, 1991; Stensaker et al., 2011; Telford & Masson, 2005; Watty, 2006). One of the key findings from Newton’s 1999 article is that there is a gap between how “managers” and those who are “managed” view quality assurance, with faculty expressing less positive views of quality and quality management processes than administrators. The overarching theme linking all of the studies cited above is that administrators are more positive about quality management processes and the effects of this

work than faculty members. One concrete example of this gap is cited in Stensaker et al. (2011). Stensaker et al. (2011) found that “while 40% of the administrative staff see clearly improved cooperation between administrative and academic staff as a result of the [quality] evaluations, only 15% of the academic staff agree” (p. 473).

One of the first studies to highlight the gap between faculty and administrator views on quality was Scott’s (1991) research on administrator and faculty perspectives of state-mandated student outcomes assessment, a common quality management activity. Scott surveyed 1,101 administrators and faculty from 37 of 39 public colleges and universities in Virginia (six doctoral universities, eight comprehensive colleges, and 23 community colleges), and conducted follow-up interviews with 67 participants. Of all the groups who participated in this study (i.e., chief academic officers, assessment coordinators, department heads, and faculty-in-general), faculty-in-general were found to be the least supportive of assessment activities. More specifically, faculty at doctoral institutions were found to be less supportive of assessment activities than their counterparts in comprehensive and community colleges. This suggests that the type of institution a faculty member works at matters in respect to views on quality management.

### **Summary of the Literature**

The central conclusion of this literature review is that quality in higher education remains a contentious issue. However, there appears to be a consensus on the origins of this issue, namely that the emphasis on quality comes from the need to demonstrate accountability. Other points that most quality authors appear to agree upon are that (1) the way quality is measured in higher education is problematic, and (2) quality management systems do not positively impact teaching and learning. Empirical evidence also indicates that there are gaps between (1) how administrators and front-line faculty members perceive quality and quality management

activities, and (2) what quality management hopes or purports to achieve (i.e., improvement) and what it actually achieves (i.e., serves as an accountability mechanism).

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Given the gaps in the existing literature on quality in higher education described in the previous two chapters, the purpose of the present study was to explore perceptions of front-line faculty members in the United States related to quality and quality management in higher education. The study's three research questions were: (1) How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education? (2) How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured? and (3) Assuming that quality management activities will continue to be mandated by external and internal entities, what do front-line faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members? Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the study's research design, sampling procedures, participants, data collection procedures, researcher stance, data analysis procedures, data quality procedures, and limitations.

#### **Research Design**

The interpretive framework underlying this study is constructivism, which acknowledges multiple realities and viewpoints and assumes that individuals play an active role in making meaning from their experiences and interactions with others (Creswell, 2013; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Due to the exploratory nature of this research and the need for rich, in-depth data related to how front-line faculty members perceive quality and quality management in higher education, the research design was a basic qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). Although I followed the first few steps of the data analysis process outlined by Charmaz (2006) for use in constructivist grounded theory research, the purpose of the present study was not to develop

theory. Instead, this study was designed to capture some of the multiple realities related to front-line faculty members' views on quality in higher education. Patton (2002) contends:

not all questions are theory based. ... [T]here is a very practical side to qualitative methods that simply involves asking open-ended questions of people and observing matters of interest in real-world settings in order to solve problems, improve programs, or develop policies. (pp. 135-136)

These words reflect my aims for the completed study.

Patton (2002) also notes that qualitative methods are particularly well suited for research on quality. He (2002) writes:

Understanding what people value [is a] major inquiry arena for qualitative inquiry. This is especially true when making judgments about quality, or *valuing*. ... It turns out that one of the particular strengths of qualitative inquiry ... is illuminating the nature and meaning of *quality* in particular contexts. (p. 147 and p. 150)

Additional reasons why qualitative research methods were the most appropriate fit for the present study's purpose and research questions include the fact that quality in higher education is not easily measured and a more comprehensive understanding of this concept is needed (Creswell, 2013). For this research I conducted in-depth interviews with front-line faculty members from three different types of higher education institutions in the United States who worked in a variety of academic disciplines. Interviews were selected as the principal research method in this study since:

the primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the 'others' who make up the organization or carry out the process. Social abstractions like 'education' [and quality]

are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the abstractions are built (Ferrarotti, 1981). (Seidman, 2013, p. 9)

### **Sampling Procedures**

Purposeful sampling was used in this study to facilitate the selection of information-rich cases. More specifically, I employed maximum variation sampling. Patton (2002) describes maximum variation sampling as “purposefully picking a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest” in order to “identify important common patterns that cut across variations” (p. 243). Maximum variation sampling is a well-established sampling strategy that is recommended by multiple qualitative methodologists such as Creswell (2013) and Seidman (2013). Since faculty members in the United States are an extremely diverse group, maximum variation sampling was ideal for the present study.

While sample size in qualitative research is often determined by the number of participants required for the data to reach saturation, meaning the point at which no new ideas are shared by study participants, reaching saturation would likely have been extremely difficult if not impossible in the present study given the highly contested nature of quality in higher education and the diversity of existing viewpoints. Therefore, I followed Patton’s (2002) recommendation that “qualitative sampling designs specify *minimum samples* based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and stakeholder interests” (p. 246). Given that this research was conducted for a dissertation, the minimum sample size was set at three participants for each of the three institutional types included in the study. Thus, the minimum number of participants in this study was nine.

## **Participants**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from Virginia Tech (see Appendix A). In addition, each educational institution included in this study granted me permission to invite faculty members from the institution to participate in this study. I followed established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of human subjects. Research protocol information was submitted to Virginia Tech's IRB in April 2014 that included the email sent to potential key informants asking for their assistance in recruiting faculty participants (see Appendix B), the invitation email used to contact potential participants (see Appendix C), the informed consent form participants were required to sign in order to participate in the study (see Appendix D), the demographic questionnaire completed by each faculty participant (see Appendix E), and my interview guide (see Appendix F). I created additional documents to follow up with key informants and potential participants in the event that I was not able to recruit enough participants to meet my minimum sample. These documents were a script for a follow up telephone call to invited key informants (see Appendix G), a script for a follow up telephone call to invited participants (see Appendix H), and a second recruitment email to invited participants (see Appendix I). Although these documents were also approved by the IRB, they were not utilized during the study.

Study participants consisted of front-line faculty members at three different types of not-for-profit educational institutions in the United States: (1) a public, research-extensive university that grants doctoral degrees; (2) a public, comprehensive university that primarily awards bachelor and master's degrees; and (3) a private, liberal arts college that focuses on undergraduate education. All three educational institutions were located in Virginia. This enabled me to speak with faculty members from institutions that are required to meet the same

regional accreditation and state standards (in this case, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges [SACSCOC] and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia [SCHEV], respectively)—two of the primary drivers behind quality management activities in Virginia. This study focused on tenured faculty members who had significant teaching responsibilities but did not currently hold significant administrative responsibilities (i.e., they spent more time teaching and advising students than performing administrative tasks, and were not serving as department chairs). In this study, “faculty with significant teaching responsibilities” was defined as faculty members who typically carry a full teaching load (however this was defined by their specific institution). This definition aimed to mitigate the fact that faculty at different types of institutions often have different teaching loads (e.g., some faculty members may be required to teach one or two courses per semester while others may be assigned to teach four courses per semester).

I focused on tenure-line faculty only since this group of instructors tends to be impacted the most by quality management activities (e.g., adjunct faculty often do not participate in the creation of written reports for quality management purposes or meet with external site visit teams). Tenured faculty (with the rank of Associate Professor or Professor) were selected instead of untenured faculty (Assistant Professors) due to the fact that tenured faculty have had more time on the job to potentially consider the concept of quality in higher education and to participate in quality management activities such as academic program review. Invited participants also worked in a variety of academic disciplines. In order to maintain participant confidentiality and keep distinctions between disciplines manageable, faculty are designated in this document as either STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) faculty or non-STEM faculty. My aim here was not to select a specific number of faculty from particular

academic disciplines, but to recruit an inclusive sample. Thus, participant criteria for this study were as follows:

- 1) Participants worked at one of three different types of not-for-profit educational institutions in Virginia (i.e., a public, research-extensive university that grants doctoral degrees; a public, comprehensive university that primarily awards bachelor and master's degrees; or a private, liberal arts college that focuses on undergraduate education);
- 2) Participants were tenured faculty members;
- 3) Participants held significant teaching responsibilities;
- 4) Participants did not hold significant administrative responsibilities; and
- 5) As a group, participants worked in a variety of academic disciplines.

**Participant recruitment.** I utilized key informants at each type of institution to identify potential faculty participants for this study. As described by Jones et al. (2014):

Key informants are integral to identifying the most suitable participants for a study because of their insider status. Key informants may also help researchers understand the politics at a particular setting, cultural considerations, or other dynamics that might impact the researcher's request for access. (p. 118)

Three assessment professionals (one from each of the three institutions selected for this study) served as key informants by providing contact information for 10-15 front-line faculty members that met all of the participant criteria described previously. Key informants were initially contacted by email (see Appendix B). Interactions with key informants yielded 39 potential faculty participants: 15 from the public, research-extensive university; 12 from the public, comprehensive university; and 12 from the private, liberal arts college.

All potential faculty participants identified by the key informants were invited to participate in this study via an email message (see Appendix C). Potential participants were asked to contact me either by email or telephone if they were interested in participating and/or had questions about the study. A total of 22 faculty members responded that they were interested in participating in the study. Due to scheduling conflicts and my desire to interview all faculty participants in person, I conducted interviews with 20 of these 22 faculty members: eight faculty members from the public, research-extensive university; six faculty members from the public, comprehensive university; and six faculty members from the private, liberal arts college.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Interviews were scheduled at times and locations that were convenient for the participants and conducive to obtaining high quality data. Each interview was conducted in person and was approximately one hour in length. Once interviews were scheduled, I sent participants a copy of my interview guide (see Appendix F) to enable participants to begin thinking about questions in advance of the interview. An informed consent form (see Appendix D) and brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E) were also sent to study participants in advance of the interview. Interviews for this study were conducted between May 2014 and October 2014.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with all research participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with two digital recorders. At the beginning of each interview, participants were given two hard copies of the consent form (one to sign and return, the other to keep) and a hard copy demographic questionnaire that included items such as the faculty member's rank, academic discipline, and average teaching load per semester. Questions on the interview guide were pilot tested with two faculty members prior to the start of participant interviews to help

ensure that the wording, order, and pacing of the interview questions would facilitate the acquisition of rich, in-depth information from participants.

All digital recordings from the interviews were stripped of personal identifiers, labeled with pseudonyms suggested by participants in their demographic questionnaires (or assigned by me if they did not indicate a pseudonym preference), and sent to a local transcription service. The transcriber was instructed to transcribe each interview verbatim and to number each line of text. Any details shared during the interviews that could potentially lead to the identification of participants, other individuals, or institutions have been altered in written documents related to this study. The final interview transcripts were sent to participants for review and comment in order to ensure accuracy and to capture as much information as possible. Data for this study was also collected in the form of field notes that I took before, during, and/or after my interviews with study participants. These field notes included details related to the interview settings, the participants, and the participants' nonverbal actions and behaviors.

### **Researcher Stance**

In conducting qualitative research, researchers must “recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation ... [and] ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). In positioning myself in the present research study it is important to note that I first became interested in conducting research related to quality in higher education a decade ago while I was co-coordinating the reaccreditation process at a private medical school in the United States and discovered firsthand how difficult it can be to meaningfully engage faculty members in a quality management process. During the course of my professional career, I have worked with faculty members in a wide range of contexts at a

variety of educational institutions in the United States. For example, I have worked with faculty at a public, research-extensive university that grants doctoral degrees; a public, comprehensive university that primarily awards bachelor and master's degrees; and a private, Jesuit university in addition to working with medical school faculty.

In my personal life, I have had meaningful interactions with faculty members since I was a child. Both of my parents are retired faculty members, my brother is a faculty member, and many of my friends are faculty members. Perhaps most importantly, my husband is a faculty member. This means that although I am not a faculty member myself, I have intimate knowledge of the many responsibilities and freedoms as well as the intense work load that are commonly associated with faculty life. Even though I bring my own assumptions and biases regarding faculty and faculty work into the present study, I have never had an in-depth conversation with any of my faculty friends or family members related to how they view quality in higher education and would define and/or measure it. Since quality in higher education is a nebulous concept, I anticipated that my participants would share many different conceptions of quality in higher education with me, but did not have many preconceived notions as to what these conceptions would include. However, my prior experiences working with faculty did predispose me to expect that faculty perceptions of quality management activities such as accreditation and academic program review would be more negative than positive. During the course of this research, I strove to remain mindful of my personal biases and assumptions as I conducted the work and to remain open to all of the perceptions that my study participants shared with me.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

A hallmark of qualitative research is that the data analysis process is inductive rather than deductive. Data collected during this study was analyzed in accordance with the initial stages of Charmaz's (2006) data analysis framework for constructivist grounded theory research. Strauss and Corbin (1998) note that researchers may use a truncated version of grounded theory analysis techniques if they are interested solely in concept development or thematic analysis. Initial data analysis consisted of open coding using a line-by-line approach. Charmaz (2006) defines coding as "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data" (p. 43). The constant comparative method was utilized throughout the coding process as data was continually compared within and among the interview transcripts as well as with the study's emerging codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This analysis led to the creation of a smaller number of focused codes that synthesized larger segments of data and informed the development of categories. These categories then served as the basis for the study's thematic analysis. Throughout the data analysis process, I wrote analytic memos to help me remain grounded in, and make sense of, the data collected for this study. Memo writing also helped me to practice reflexivity as I reflected on how my own personal experiences and perceptions may have impacted how I made sense of the perceptions and experiences of my participants. I utilized the qualitative software tool NVivo during the data analysis process for this study.

## **Data Quality Procedures**

"A survey of introductory texts on qualitative interviewing reveals that there is no consistency in the terms used in relation to the assessment of 'quality' of qualitative interview research" (Roulston, 2010, p. 201). Thus, it is important for researchers to clarify the quality

terminology and procedures that will be used in their studies. While there were several differences among the multiple texts reviewed for the present study regarding quality criteria for qualitative research, trustworthiness was a concept described by all (albeit using slightly different definitions). Back in 1985, Lincoln and Guba proposed that the term “trustworthiness” be used to indicate quality in qualitative research in place of the more quantitative research-based term “rigor.” Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four different trustworthiness criteria that are still found in contemporary literature. These four criteria are transferability (used in place of external validity), credibility (used in place of internal validity), dependability (used in place of reliability), and confirmability (used in place of objectivity). Using lay terminology, a qualitative study that is deemed “trustworthy” is systematic, rigorous, and credible. Jones et al. (2014) state that “essentially, trustworthiness is associated with confidence in the research findings” (p. 36).

Strategies frequently used to ensure trustworthiness that were utilized in the present study were an audit trail, peer review, member checking, and reflexivity (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The audit trail for the present study [used to ensure dependability] included my research journal, field notes, and analytic memos and was facilitated by NVivo. Using NVivo enabled me to increase transparency by creating a detailed and comprehensive audit trail through documenting the data analysis process and showing the progression from codes to categories to themes. My dissertation committee chair served as the principal peer reviewer for this study [used to ensure credibility and dependability] by reviewing the data analysis categories and themes and providing feedback during the data analysis process. The strategy of member checking [used to ensure credibility] was utilized both after the interviews were transcribed and once the results section was drafted. Individual interview

transcripts and an executive summary of the study findings were sent to participants for review to ensure accuracy and provide opportunities for additions, changes, and deletions to be made. Finally, I practiced reflexivity [a strategy used to ensure confirmability] throughout the study as I examined how my experiences working and interacting with faculty may have influenced my understanding of my participants' perceptions of quality and quality management in higher education. This process was facilitated by writing field notes and analytic memos.

### **Summary of Research Methods**

This research was designed as a basic qualitative study with a constructivist interpretive framework. Using maximum variation sampling, potential faculty participants were identified by key informants at three different types of higher education institutions located in Virginia. I interviewed a total of 20 faculty members: eight faculty members at a public, research-extensive university; six faculty members at a public, comprehensive university; and six faculty members at a private, liberal arts college. Data collected via semi-structured interviews was analyzed in accordance with the first few stages of Charmaz's (2006) framework for constructivist grounded theory research. I utilized NVivo throughout the data analysis process.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The purpose of this research study was to explore perceptions of front-line faculty members in the United States related to quality and quality management in higher education. The study's three research questions were: (1) How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education? (2) How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured? and (3) Assuming that quality management activities will continue to be mandated by external and internal entities, what do front-line faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?

This chapter provides a discussion of participant characteristics and study findings. The results are presented by research question and organized around the central themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Both common themes and negative cases are presented to provide the reader with a more complete picture of the data collected from study participants. In order to more fully answer the study's three research questions, this discussion of results includes both "big picture" themes and specific details shared by faculty participants.

The process of recruiting participants for this study was easier than anticipated. I was able to conduct interviews with slightly more than half of the front-line faculty members who were invited to participate in the study without sending multiple invitations to potential participants. These faculty participants were forthcoming in their responses to my questions and shared many personal details with me regarding their families and their own educational experiences in addition to their experiences working with students and participating in quality management activities. Interviews were limited to one hour, and most lasted the full 60 minutes. Several participants shared that they had not specifically thought about "quality" in higher

education prior to participating in this research and had found their involvement in the study to be a worthwhile experience.

### **Participant Characteristics**

A total of 20 faculty members who met the participant criteria described in Chapter 3 participated in this research study. Demographic characteristics for each participant are provided in Table 1 and include study pseudonym, type of institution, type of academic discipline (i.e., STEM or non-STEM), academic rank (i.e., Associate Professor or Professor), and gender. Eight participants were employed at a public, research-extensive university; six participants were employed at a public, comprehensive university; and six participants were employed at a private, liberal arts college. Eight faculty participants worked in STEM disciplines and 12 worked in non-STEM disciplines. In terms of academic rank, 12 participants were Associate Professors and eight were Professors. The gender of participants was evenly split with 10 females and 10 males.

In order to keep the identities of the faculty participants confidential, I have opted to present more detailed information related to participant demographic characteristics for the faculty members as a group rather than to provide individual participant profiles. The 20 faculty members who participated in this study worked in a wide variety of academic disciplines in the humanities, performing arts, social sciences, life sciences, and physical sciences as well as in professional disciplines such as education, design, business, and engineering. A typical full course load for participants ranged from one course per semester to four courses per semester in accordance with different disciplinary and institutional expectations.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Pseudonym	Type of Institution	Academic Discipline	Rank	Gender
Anne	Public, Research-Extensive	non-STEM	Associate Professor	Female
Stephen	Public, Research-Extensive	non-STEM	Associate Professor	Male
Harrison	Public, Research-Extensive	non-STEM	Professor	Male
John	Public, Research-Extensive	non-STEM	Professor	Male
Jennifer	Public, Research-Extensive	STEM	Associate Professor	Female
Julia	Public, Research-Extensive	STEM	Associate Professor	Female
Gene	Public, Research-Extensive	STEM	Professor	Male
Miller	Public, Research-Extensive	STEM	Professor	Male
Leigh	Public, Comprehensive	non-STEM	Associate Professor	Female
Doug	Public, Comprehensive	non-STEM	Associate Professor	Male
Monica	Public, Comprehensive	non-STEM	Professor	Female
Wendy	Public, Comprehensive	non-STEM	Professor	Female
Scott	Public, Comprehensive	non-STEM	Professor	Male
Craig	Public, Comprehensive	STEM	Associate Professor	Male
Elizabeth	Private, Liberal Arts	non-STEM	Associate Professor	Female
Kevin	Private, Liberal Arts	non-STEM	Associate Professor	Male
Ed	Private, Liberal Arts	non-STEM	Professor	Male
Heather	Private, Liberal Arts	STEM	Associate Professor	Female
Leslie	Private, Liberal Arts	STEM	Associate Professor	Female
Sarah	Private, Liberal Arts	STEM	Associate Professor	Female

Eleven participants reported working at other colleges and universities prior to joining the institution that employed them at the time of their interview, and three participants shared experiences attending, working at, or interacting with a son or daughter while their child attended a higher education institution outside of the United States. The total number of years that faculty participants had worked in higher education ranged from 7 to 44, with a mean of 20 years of experience. Seven faculty participants had worked in higher education for 10 years or fewer; five participants had worked in higher education for 11-20 years; four participants had worked in higher education for 21-30 years; and four participants had worked in higher education for 31 or more years. There was also a great deal of variation in terms of the amount of time that participants had spent participating in quality management activities. While the majority of participants had played, or were currently playing, a significant role in programmatic accreditation, institutional accreditation, academic program review, and/or departmental assessment activities, other participants had only been peripherally involved in such activities.

### **Research Question 1**

While exploring the research question “How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education?” each faculty participant was asked “How do you define quality in higher education?” and “What do you think are the major components of a quality higher education?” Two different themes emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts for Research Question 1: *quality was defined in terms of student outcomes* (theme 1.1) and *quality was defined in terms **other than** student outcomes* (theme 1.2).<sup>1</sup> For theme 1.1, three

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<sup>1</sup> In order to help readers navigate the themes that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts, I have utilized a numbering system for the study’s themes and subthemes. The first number after the word “theme” specifies the research question, and the second number specifies the theme. For example, theme 1.1 refers to the first theme identified for Research Question 1. For “subthemes,” the first number specifies the research question, the second number specifies the theme, and the third number specifies the subtheme. For example, subtheme 2.2.1 refers to the first subtheme of the second theme identified for Research Question 2.

subthemes emerged that described three types of student outcomes discussed by participants. These subthemes were: *student learning outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.1); *vocational outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.2); and *contribution to society outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.3). A complete listing of themes and subthemes for all three research questions is provided in Table 2.

The most prevalent theme for Research Question 1 was *quality was defined in terms of student outcomes* (theme 1.1). The most common way that faculty participants in this study defined quality in higher education was in relation to students. More specifically, they equated quality with what students should know, be able to do, and/or accomplish either at the end of their degree programs or post-graduation. This definition of quality was so prevalent that each of the faculty members I interviewed discussed student outcomes when defining quality in higher education. For example, Kevin (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)<sup>2</sup> shared:

For me at least what I think sort of defines quality of the education is in fact more tied to student outcomes. And at least for us in terms of the broad liberal arts sort of thing, for me that's not discipline-specific. For me, a well-educated student that is able to think, and the whole idea of a lifelong learner and able to make connections across disciplines...

Rather than emphasizing institutional factors (e.g., institutional prestige) or focusing on faculty member characteristics or contributions (e.g., equating quality with the number of publications generated by faculty members), faculty participants at each type of institution placed students at the center of a quality higher education.

*Student learning outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.1) traditionally refer to the knowledge, skills, and abilities that faculty members want students to know and possess by the time they graduate.

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<sup>2</sup> In order to provide context for readers, each participant excerpt includes the participant's type of institution and discipline.

Table 2

*Themes and Subthemes for All Research Questions*

Research Question	Themes	Subthemes
1. How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education?	1.1. Quality was defined in terms of student outcomes	1.1.1. Student learning outcomes 1.1.2. Vocational outcomes 1.1.3. Contribution to society outcomes
	1.2. Quality was defined in terms <i>other than</i> student outcomes	
2. How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured?	2.1. Student growth should be a primary indicator of quality	2.1.1. Students need to be assessed longitudinally
	2.2. Measuring quality is difficult	2.2.1. Recognition of specific measurement issues
	2.3. Dissatisfaction with current measures of quality	2.3.1. Current measures of quality place too much emphasis on numbers
	2.4. Measuring quality is necessary or important	
3. Assuming that quality management activities will continue to be mandated by external and internal entities, what do front-line faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?	3.1. Barriers that prevent quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members	3.1.1. Issues with quality management measures
		3.1.2. Issues related to the process or implementation of quality management
		3.1.3. Front-line faculty members' perceptions of quality management
		3.1.4. Divide between front-line faculty and administrators

Research Question	Themes	Subthemes
	3.2. Suggestions for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members	3.2.1. Use outcomes and measures that are meaningful to front-line faculty 3.2.2. Improve communications related to quality management activities 3.2.3. Provide front-line faculty with incentives, compensation for quality management work 3.2.4. Provide more assistance to front-line faculty engaging in quality management activities 3.2.5. Increase front-line faculty members' involvement in quality management 3.2.6. Decrease the fear factor associated with quality management activities

Student learning outcomes were the type of outcome most frequently discussed by participants as multiple faculty members described a quality education as one in which students gained both knowledge and skills. Specific skills identified by several faculty members were: analytical skills; problem-solving skills; communication skills; the ability to think critically, creatively, and/or independently; the ability to apply knowledge; the ability to make connections across disciplines; and engagement in lifelong learning. Doug (Comprehensive, non-STEM) included several different student learning outcomes in his definition of quality in higher education as he shared that if faculty are successful:

[students] are getting better at reading. They're getting better at writing. They're getting better at differentiating what is more important from what is less important, and they are getting better at analyzing what they are reading so that they can differentiate what's a valid argument from what's hogwash. And then, finally, better at expressing themselves.

The types of skills listed previously are traditionally associated with a "liberal arts education," and more than half of the faculty members who participated in this study specifically used the term "liberal arts" when discussing quality in higher education. This group of participants included faculty members from all three institutional types and a wide variety of disciplines (both STEM and non-STEM).

The student learning outcome discussed by the greatest number of faculty participants was knowledge. Julia (Research-Extensive, STEM) shared "So what is quality? Um, knowledge, I think to me. It's knowledge. It's having the information and being able to use it." A key component of a traditional "liberal arts" education is that students are exposed to a broad range of knowledge, and many faculty participants believed this to be an important component of a quality higher education. Scott (Comprehensive, non-STEM) commented "I think that's one of

the critical components of a quality education is that students would get exposed to a broad range of subjects with which they were not previously familiar.” Some faculty members believed that both depth and breadth of knowledge was important. When defining quality in higher education Stephen (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) remarked “Well, I think it’s a blend where the students come out with ... this broad base of knowledge and then an area of specific knowledge in a field that they hope to pursue a career in.”

*Vocational outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.2) were also discussed by many participants during their interviews and refer to student outcomes specifically related to job or career preparation and success. Specific vocational outcomes identified by participants in defining quality in higher education were: students have the skills needed to obtain jobs; student success and/or satisfaction in their chosen profession; job placement rate; type of jobs obtained by students post-graduation; and placement and/or success in graduate school or professional school. Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) described one type of vocational outcome in stating that “I think we’re realistic about we need to give students skills that will help them gain jobs rather than just be good thinkers about things.” Leigh (Comprehensive, non-STEM) also believed vocational outcomes to be important as she described a quality higher education as one that “result[s] in well prepared students for whatever their field.”

*Contribution to society outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.3) are defined as outcomes specifically related to students’ ability to make the world a better place. Multiple participants discussed how a quality higher education should prepare students to be good citizens and engage in meaningful work post-graduation. For example, Craig (Comprehensive, STEM) defined quality in higher education as “the extent that students come away with things that they can actually use in later life. Not necessarily career things but things that enrich their lives or make them better persons,

better citizens, healthier, smarter.” In discussing contribution to society outcomes, Gene (Research-Extensive, STEM) shared the importance of students being able to use the tools they have acquired during their university education “to advance in some sense the wellbeing of human nature. And while they’re doing that, deriving some satisfaction from this and living what might be called useful lives.”

A majority of participants discussed both student learning outcomes and vocational outcomes during their interviews. While the majority of individuals in this group of faculty members stated that student learning outcomes were ultimately more important than preparing students for jobs, a couple of faculty members believed that student learning outcomes and vocational outcomes were equally important. Leslie (Liberal Arts, STEM) discussed this belief in the following excerpt:

And certainly because a lot of students in [my discipline] are pre-health, and so clearly them being successful and getting on to graduate school, in a professional school, they’re able to get to med school or PA school or nursing school—that tells us something that maybe we’ve done a good job, and more so not just getting in with their record but doing well in a professional program. So that tells us that they’ve had a quality education here. ... I call that being skilled vocationally to do something. But there’s also on the flip side of quality—being are these students that we graduate—are they able to go out and be able to be thinkers, to be thoughtful citizens of the world if you will. Can they listen to what’s going on in the Middle East and being able to form an informed opinion about it and know how to get information about it and then sway how they think and how they vote and what actions they actually take. So quality—it’s like two things.

Leslie also communicated the importance of students being able to contribute to society in this excerpt, demonstrating how she incorporated student learning outcomes, vocational outcomes, and contribution to society outcomes into her personal definition of quality in higher education. In contrast, several study participants only discussed student learning outcomes or student learning and contribution to society outcomes while describing quality in higher education; this group did not talk about vocational outcomes. Only one faculty participant appeared to place vocational outcomes ahead of the other two types of student outcomes in terms of importance.

Although all 20 participants discussed student outcomes when defining quality in higher education, only five participants offered definitions of quality that did not relate to student outcomes. Thus, the second theme for Research Question 1—*quality was defined in terms other than student outcomes* (theme 1.2)—should be considered as an additional theme rather than a second major theme. Theme 1.2 refers to all of the definitions of quality suggested by faculty participants that did not directly relate to students. Specific definitions of quality suggested by participants for theme 1.2 were: rigor; the extent that the institution has achieved its mission; the amount of research produced by faculty at an institution (i.e., more research equals improved educational quality); the extent that faculty are making a difference; and good teaching. For example, Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) shared “I also see quality in the research level of the school. For me personally, I think a Research I university is higher quality than a Research II.”

In summary, two themes emerged for Research Question 1. The most prevalent theme was *quality was defined in terms of student outcomes* (theme 1.1). During their interviews, participants discussed three different types of student outcomes that became subthemes for theme 1.1: *student learning outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.1); *vocational outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.2); and

*contribution to society outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.3). The second, additional theme that emerged was *quality was defined in terms other than student outcomes* (theme 1.2). Thus, the predominant answer to the research question “How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education?” for this study is that front-line faculty members defined quality in higher education in terms of student outcomes. This suggests that in front-line faculty members’ minds, student learning is at the heart of a quality higher education.

## **Research Question 2**

In exploring the research question “How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured?” four major themes and three subthemes emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts. The four major themes for Research Question 2 were: *student growth should be a primary indicator of quality* (theme 2.1); *measuring quality is difficult* (theme 2.2); *dissatisfaction with current measures of quality* (theme 2.3); and *measuring quality is necessary or important* (theme 2.4). Subthemes also emerged for theme 2.1, theme 2.2, and theme 2.3. The subtheme for theme 2.1 was *students need to be assessed longitudinally* (subtheme 2.1.1); for theme 2.2, *recognition of specific measurement issues* (subtheme 2.2.1); and for theme 2.3, *current measures of quality place too much emphasis on numbers* (subtheme 2.3.1).

The first major theme and subtheme—*student growth should be a primary indicator of quality* (theme 2.1) and *students need to be assessed longitudinally* (subtheme 2.1.1)—provide the most direct answers to Research Question 2. Theme 2.1 refers to the belief shared by multiple faculty participants that the amount of progress made by a student during his or her degree program should serve as a major measure of quality in higher education. Subtheme 2.1.1 refers to participants’ belief that in order to effectively measure student growth multiple

measurements must be made, either during different semesters of a student's degree program or at points before and after graduation. The only indicator that more than a few participants in this study advocated using to measure quality in higher education was student growth, with half of the study's faculty participants sharing that they either use, or would like to use, student progress as a primary measure of quality in higher education. Scott (Comprehensive, non-STEM) shared his preference for measuring student growth as he remarked:

But I think what we tend to do when we measure is we think here's this level that [students] need to achieve. I sort of look at it a little bit differently. It seems to me that we have to start with the level that we're working with and hope that we can make a certain amount of progress rather than that reaches a particular preordained level or not. We always want to see substantial progress with every student.

In terms of measuring student growth over time (subtheme 2.1.1), some participants appeared to be interested in measuring student growth solely during students' college or university experience while others appeared to be more interested in assessing students after graduation. The following excerpt from Doug (Comprehensive, non-STEM) exemplifies the former group:

We have a sophomore-level course that's required of all students; we have a senior-level course that's required of all students. We want to compare student-by-student when they're in the one and in the other. We want to be able to see that the goals we have—knowledge, comprehension, and analytical skills—are superior here at the senior level than they were at the sophomore level. Quality in higher education.

In contrast, Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) expressed her desire to measure engagement in lifelong learning after students had been out of school for several years. She shared:

I think the issue, part of it, is ... if we really want to measure did we do our job and achieve our goal, I don't think that that's something we can study in measuring four years. ... I would be hesitant to ask a student a month before graduation [about their motivation to learn] because they're just *so done* with school at that point. The concept of doing more for many of them is not on their radar screen. Yeah, I think that's something you'd have to go back in five and ten years and have a conversation with them about.

Multiple participants recognized that longitudinal measures add complexity to the already difficult task of measuring quality in higher education, but they were interested in utilizing longitudinal measures anyway—even if they were not quite sure how to successfully implement them.

Participants also shared a variety of measures other than student growth that they had found to be either useful or not useful in measuring quality, but there was no consensus on any of these other indicators. For example, a measure that received mixed reviews from faculty members was using job placement rates as an indicator of quality in higher education. While a few faculty members believed that the percentage of students employed after graduation should be a primary measure of quality in higher education, a few other faculty members were opposed to using this type of vocational outcome as a measure of quality. As a representative of the former group, Julia (Research-Extensive, STEM) commented “I would like to see assessment to be on student placement. If we place 100% of our students in jobs continuously year-after-year, I think that speaks to the quality of our program.” Representing the latter group, Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) shared “Well, it's the old idea of how many students get jobs when they graduate. I'm [in a non-STEM discipline], so that metric is ridiculous.”

Faculty members also suggested indicators that are not commonly used now to measure quality in higher education but they would like to see utilized in the future. There was no consensus on any of these additional measures proposed by participants. Most of the measures in this group of indicators were related to either student learning outcomes or contribution to society outcomes. Examples of specific measures suggested by participants were quality of life, happiness, healthiness, the ability to live in a community, and self-efficacy. For example, Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) remarked that for her a quality higher education was “more of a quality of life question. How happy are [students]? How is their health? Are they making sensible decisions about their life?” Thus, she proposed using students’ quality of life post-graduation as a measure of a quality higher education.

While discussing specific indicators of quality in higher education, participants shared a range of personal beliefs related to measuring quality. A few of these beliefs were held by large numbers of participants, and consequently serve as additional major themes and subthemes for Research Question 2. The belief that *measuring quality is difficult* (theme 2.2) was expressed by 15 of the 20 participants. A considerable majority of faculty members who participated in this study shared the opinion that measuring quality in higher education is a challenging task that often requires a great deal of thought, time, and effort. When asked “How do you think quality in higher education should be measured?” only a few participants appeared to answer this question without difficulty. Instead, the majority of participants appeared to wrestle with this question, with multiple faculty members remarking that they thought this question was difficult or they were not satisfied with their answers.

Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) captured the sentiment of participants who described measuring quality as difficult as she responded:

Yeah. [How to measure quality] is the \$64,000 question. I guess with inflation it's a lot more than that today. ... But I think it's tough because for me [quality is] more the conceptual, it's sometimes the more intangible. And when I think measurement I'm thinking scales and instruments and I'm not sure that those always match up well. ... But I think it's tough because if we don't all have a common notion of what quality is, how we think it could or should be measured, I'd imagine we'd all have a very different conceptualization of that.

A few faculty members suggested that measuring quality might not only be difficult, it might be impossible. For example, John (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) shared:

I'm not sure how much of that you can measure. And so, you have to come up with artificial measurements, and I'm aware of the necessity to assess, for a lot of reasons. You have to ... come up with the best template you can but I'm not sure anything can capture that kind of success.

In contrast, Miller (Research-Extensive, STEM) represented the minority of participants who appeared to have a ready answer to the question "How do you think quality in higher education should be measured?" as he replied:

Well, I think the only way to measure it is with artifacts of student learning that are collected systematically during the course of the student's education. So that means longitudinal tracking of individual student learning. It became: What did you come in here with and what changed over time?

The small number of participants who did not appear to struggle with this question had all played significant roles in quality management activities. However, other participants who reported

being heavily involved in quality management activities still found measuring quality, and answering this specific question, to be difficult.

One reason why some faculty members found measuring quality to be difficult was they *recognized specific measurement issues* (subtheme 2.2.1) associated with conducting high quality research and evaluation (e.g., the need for adequate sample sizes and survey response rates) that make creating or selecting appropriate and valid measures of quality in higher education even more challenging. Multiple faculty members discussed how complex a task it is to try and demonstrate that a particular course or program positively impacted student learning and how such efforts are complicated further by measurement issues. For example, Heather (Liberal Arts, STEM) shared issues with trying to determine an appropriate control group as she remarked:

And one of the things that when we were debating our first-year experience, which has gone through a lot of revisions, was what's your control group? Is it students in college who haven't taken our first-year program, or is it just 18-year-olds who aren't in college period? So what are you measuring against? And so having a proper control group and stuff like that is next to impossible it seems like.

Leigh (Comprehensive, non-STEM) also recognized specific measurement issues (in this case, challenges associated with having a small number of participants) as she shared: "We are figuring out how to assess our preparation. ... It's not easy to pinpoint that—particularly in [my discipline] because there's such a low N that you can't report numbers of ... students. And we keep trying to figure that out."

A majority of study participants also expressed *dissatisfaction with current measures of quality* (theme 2.3). This theme refers to faculty participants' belief that many current indicators

of quality do not effectively measure quality in higher education and are either inappropriate, inadequate, or both. Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) expressed her general dissatisfaction with current quality measures in sharing her belief that quality in higher education has “nothing to do with the metrics that I know in my head [currently] measure quality in higher education.” Heather (Liberal Arts, STEM) shared her frustration with a specific indicator commonly used to measure quality—student course evaluations—as she commented that “for the most part I think teaching evaluations, course evaluations, are pretty useless.” In discussing their dissatisfaction with current quality measures, a few faculty members remarked that it is easier to identify flaws in the current system than it is to say how quality *should* be measured. For example, Julia (Research-Extensive, STEM) shared that “[measuring quality] is something I really struggle with because it’s really easy to put down the systems we use and find faults in them, but it’s that much harder to pick a perfect system.”

A belief that appears to have contributed to some participants’ dissatisfaction with existing measures of quality was that *current measures of quality place too much emphasis on numbers* (subtheme 2.3.1). This subtheme relates to the fact that current quality management processes typically emphasize quantitative measures over qualitative measures even when faculty members find qualitative measures to be more meaningful. Multiple faculty members spoke about being required to provide numbers (e.g., numerical rubric scores) when submitting quality management data even when this practice did not align with disciplinary norms. An excerpt from Kevin’s (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) interview exemplifies subtheme 2.3.1 as he shared:

I know I’m mostly rather unhappy with a lot of the assessment things that I’ve seen—especially in [my discipline] I think—because they tend to want numbers. They tend to

want very concrete sorts of things that we don't usually measure ... success that way in [my discipline].

Jennifer (Research-Extensive, STEM) shared a different concern with quality management activities using a numbers-only or numbers-heavy approach as she commented:

It just seems like there's just so many numbers and they can be interpreted in so many different ways that ... I just don't know what they mean in the grand scheme of things because it seems like numbers can be used in a lot of different ways just based on how they're presented.

Thus, participants were concerned about numerical results not being meaningful to front-line faculty and not being trustworthy.

A final theme for Research Question 2 was the belief that *measuring quality is necessary or important* (theme 2.4). Even though many faculty participants reported struggling with how to measure quality (theme 2.2), half of the faculty participants in this study remarked that they personally understood why quality in higher education needs to be measured and/or that they viewed measuring quality as an important task (even if some of their colleagues did not). A few faculty members shared the belief that measuring quality in higher education was important since people tend to value what is measured. In Harrison's (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) words, "if we don't measure it, you ain't gonna get it."

Some of the participants who seemed to struggle the most with how to measure quality in higher education were those who believed that measuring quality was both important (theme 2.4) and difficult (theme 2.2). For example, Sarah (Liberal Arts, STEM) shared:

I think with assessment ... it's something I struggle with. We struggle in the department; we struggle with it on campus. It's something that's so important and I don't think

anybody would argue that it's *not* important—but to *really nail down* what you're trying to assess and how you will assess improvement is such a struggle.

The following excerpt from Craig's (Comprehensive, STEM) interview illustrates participants' belief that *measuring quality is difficult* (theme 2.2); *dissatisfaction with current measures of quality* (theme 2.3); and *measuring quality is necessary or important* (theme 2.4):

Measuring, putting metrics on this stuff—I can understand the importance of it. On the other hand, I have not found anything that across the board seems very satisfactory to me. So my [colleagues] and I here in this department, we work together to sort of try and measure student outcomes in lots of ways. But those are not easily integrated to measuring it at the university level or the college level or anything beyond that. And so that's depressing to say. I just don't have ... I don't see the best way to do it. Everything I've seen, at least at the high order where you want to do it at the college or university level, just all strikes me as terribly inadequate. Really not effective at all at measuring things that matter.

In summary, four major themes and three subthemes emerged for Research Question 2. The four major themes were: *student growth should be a primary indicator of quality* (theme 2.1); the belief that *measuring quality is difficult* (theme 2.2); *dissatisfaction with current measures of quality* (theme 2.3); and the belief that *measuring quality is necessary or important* (theme 2.4). The three subthemes were: *students need to be assessed longitudinally* (subtheme 2.1.1); *recognition of specific measurement issues* (subtheme 2.2.1); and *current measures of quality place too much emphasis on numbers* (subtheme 2.3.1). Although measuring quality in higher education was not an easy topic for the majority of participants to discuss, many of the front-line faculty members who participated in this study believed that quality in higher

education should be measured over time (subtheme 2.1.1) using student growth as a primary indicator (theme 2.1). Thus, theme 2.1 and subtheme 2.1.1 provide the most direct answers to the research question “How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured?” However, findings also indicated that the majority of participants were dissatisfied with quality measures currently used in higher education (theme 2.3). Further, multiple participants believed too much emphasis was placed on quantitative measures of quality (subtheme 2.3.1). Thus, there was also some consensus regarding the types of measures that participants did *not* believe should be used to measure quality in higher education.

### **Research Question 3**

In analyzing data from the interview transcripts related to the research question “Assuming that quality management activities will continue to be mandated by external and internal entities, what do front-line faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?” two major themes and 10 subthemes emerged. The two major themes for Research Question 3 were: *barriers that prevent quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members* (theme 3.1) and *suggestions for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members* (theme 3.2). The four subthemes related to theme 3.1 were: *issues with quality management measures* (subtheme 3.1.1); *issues related to the process or implementation of quality management* (subtheme 3.1.2); *front-line faculty members’ perceptions of quality management* (subtheme 3.1.3); and *the divide between front-line faculty and administrators* (subtheme 3.1.4). The six subthemes related to theme 3.2 were: *use outcomes and measures that are meaningful to front-line faculty* (subtheme 3.2.1); *improve*

*communications related to quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.2); *provide front-line faculty with incentives and/or compensation for quality management work* (subtheme 3.2.3); *provide more assistance to front-line faculty engaging in quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.4); *increase front-line faculty members' involvement in quality management* (subtheme 3.2.5); and *decrease the fear factor associated with quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.6).

**Barriers.** When faculty participants were asked “What do you think could be done to make quality activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?” many participants had an easier time discussing the obstacles that prevented quality management activities such as assessment, accreditation, and academic program review from being valuable or helpful to front-line faculty members. Thus, the first major theme for Research Question 3 was *barriers that prevent quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members* (theme 3.1). Study participants shared 24 specific barriers that have been categorized into four different barrier types. These barrier types serve as the four subthemes for theme 3.1. A complete list of specific barriers categorized by subtheme and presented alongside illustrative participant excerpts is provided in Table 3. In order to provide the reader with a more detailed discussion of specific barriers while remaining conscious of the length of this narrative, I have selected one or two specific barriers that are emblematic of each subtheme to serve as examples.

*Issues with quality management measures* (subtheme 3.1.1) emerged from the majority of faculty participants reporting that they did not find measures typically used to demonstrate quality in higher education to be meaningful. The specific barriers presented in this document for subtheme 3.1.1 provide the different reasons that faculty participants gave for why quality measures were frequently not meaningful to front-line faculty. These five specific barriers were:

Table 3

*Theme 3.1 Responses: Barriers That Prevent Quality Management (QM) Activities From Being Meaningful to Front-Line Faculty*

Subtheme / Type of Barrier	Specific Barrier	Participant Example
3.1.1. Issues with QM measures	1. Using the same measures across courses, disciplines, and/or academic colleges	“And we were being asked to try to all develop a similar approach to outcomes assessment, even though we had <i>very</i> different programs, very different degrees, ... just apples and oranges in my perception. And so when that was being introduced to us I don’t think any of us really had a favorable response to it.” –Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
	2. Forcing measures to align across levels in an institution	“When you aggregate data at [an institutional] level, it loses the ability to be personalized. So the more aggregation you do up the chain, I think the more you lose the personal variation, and the individual variation, of these students’ lives, right? And trying to find metrics that can aggregate 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 students into a number to present is difficult. Those are all individual trajectories that you’re trying to synthesize in a few variables.” –Jennifer (Research-Extensive, STEM)
	3. Front-line faculty do not have enough input in the development of outcomes and measures	“I think now with the questions we have to answer with assessment, that [the assessment director] has us going through, and I remember having to write them out the first time and going: This is just so crazy. Why do I have to assess with these questions? ... How do I assess it, use that question? And I understand why it has to be done, but I’m not sure that’s the way to do it either because I don’t think they are true assessments.” –Monica (Comprehensive, non-STEM)
	4. Measures used do not provide the information that front-line faculty want most	“And we end up spending a lot of time coming up with measures that then we have the data and we didn’t get at what we’re really trying to do. And I don’t know how to fix that. I think it’s about ... identifying outcomes that may be very different than how we’re thinking about it right now. I don’t think we’re always open to that.” –Sarah (Liberal Arts, STEM)

Subtheme / Type of Barrier	Specific Barrier	Participant Example
3.1.2. Issues related to the process or implementation of QM	5. Difficult for faculty members in a department to come to a consensus regarding student outcomes and/or measures	“One level up from faculty, when you’re talking about departmental-level program evaluation, it gives faculty a chance to say: ‘Well what are our common goals for our students?’ Which is very helpful. But again, there are some faculty who are like: ‘Well, I don’t agree.’ It’s hard to come to consensus because there’s this sense of academic freedom. I teach what I know to be right in my classroom.” –Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM)
	6. Lack of follow up/action from individuals who mandate or receive QM reports	“This constant reporting and writing things down with no feedback is a <i>huge</i> issue.” –Julia (Research-Extensive, STEM)
	7. Lack of time for front-line faculty to engage in QM activities	“For some faculty it’s very difficult to find that extra time—to go through and sit down and analyze: What am I doing? What are the goals? How do I measure that? They don’t know how to do any of that. It’s not part of your typical training as a faculty member. It’s fine for some people that have had assessment or measurement training. But a lot of folks haven’t had that.” –Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM)
	8. Lack of training for front-line faculty in how to conduct QM activities	“My concern with that was ... it was again something that was coming from ... a top-down perspective. This is something we have to do. And it wasn’t something that the faculty felt very involved in developing. And maybe that might have affected the buy-in for that.” –Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
	9. QM activities are externally-driven rather than internally-driven	“I remember that we turned [documents] into ... the assessment director and they just said ‘Well you can’t really assess that.’ And we’re thinking, yeah you can. But on a piece of paper with numbers ... it wasn’t quite enough. It didn’t work.” –Wendy (Comprehensive, non-STEM)
10. Requirements to present quantitative data in QM reports		

Subtheme / Type of Barrier	Specific Barrier	Participant Example
11. Standardization of reporting for QM activities across disciplines, academic colleges		“The issue is when it comes to something like SACS accreditation, the original accreditation resources, what you’re trying to do is identify your goals and prove that we’re meeting those goals in a variety of ways, but I know when those things get assembled there still tends to be at least some attempt to have some consistency about doing things the same way. Square pegs in round holds don’t always fit very well.” – Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
12. Using assessment jargon		“[Another] thing that I see is problematic about some of the quality practices that we employ is the jargon associated with it. The way in which it’s almost like we fixate too much on how outcomes are written and if the outcome is written right—Oh then it’s good. That doesn’t really, I think, necessarily mean it’s good. And if you have an outcome that’s poorly written, it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s bad. ... They come up with assessment programs and they have these assessment programs reviewed, and they get feedback like ‘Oh well I would change this verb.’ That just doesn’t create a positive atmosphere.” –Doug (Comprehensive, non-STEM)
13. Focusing too much on details at the expense of the big picture		“So overall, I think we’re doing a really good job. It’s just when we start nitpicking there’s always ways to get better and when we start piling on paperwork, I want to poke my eyes out.” –Julia (Research-Extensive, STEM)
14. Too much paperwork associated with QM		“For me I think [annual assessments are] too close. ... Let’s say you get a new teacher, a new faculty member. And they walk in and they have to teach this course, and they’re going to be assessed on it. Well, they’re still trying to figure out their teaching method on a college level because you don’t go through the education department. ... So it’s going to take them a little bit to flex their muscles, to feel, figure it out, find the rhythm of the class is what I usually refer to it as. Maybe once every 2-3 years, but every year just to me seems ... there’s not enough time to fix it.” –Monica (Comprehensive, non-STEM)
15. Not enough time between assessments for front-line faculty to make improvements		

Subtheme / Type of Barrier	Specific Barrier	Participant Example
3.1.3. Front-line faculty members' perceptions of QM	16. Assessing programs for the first time after they are already well-established	“The problem with a lot of assessment mechanisms now is that there’s the cart-put-before-the-horse issue where the program has been going on for eons and then suddenly somebody says: You need to figure out if your program is actually working or not. But the programs don’t even have an articulated goal.” –Leslie (Liberal Arts, STEM)
	17. Fear/concern that QM activities will make front-line faculty look bad	“And one semester, you know, the mean [for your final exam] might be 85, the next semester it might be 72, and you wonder, I don't want anybody to know this. Because does it mean I'm not doing my job?” –John (Research-Extensive, non-STEM)
	18. Fear/concern that QM activities will lead to front-line faculty being told what and/or how to teach	“I guarantee you from a faculty perspective, every time [QM] comes up and there is some discussion about it, [this is] what I hear faculty saying to each other. This is the first step towards the administration telling us how we're supposed to teach our classes. But I really haven't seen that happen, in my experience.” –Scott (Comprehensive, non-STEM)
	19. Front-line faculty not understanding why QM activities are needed, who they are for	“If I think it’s meaningful I’m willing to make the time; if I’m not really sure of its purpose and how valuable it is or how it’s going to be used—I might not be as comfortable giving up that time.” –Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
	20. Many QM activities do not help front-line faculty improve	“I think there’s a problem here, and the problem is that many faculty members don’t buy into the quality activities. So the question is why are faculty members not buying into the quality activities? And the answer to that is, at least in part, because many of them <i>don’t</i> really help the faculty member know how to improve his or teaching or his or her delivery of content, or assessing students, or quality.” –Doug (Comprehensive, non-STEM)

Subtheme / Type of Barrier	Specific Barrier	Participant Example
3.1.4. Divide between front-line faculty and administrators	21. Perception that QM requires change for change's sake	“I find things like with the SACS review process and with accreditation and things like that to be a little bit frustrating sometimes in that you always have to say what you're going to be doing differently. And sometimes you maybe don't necessarily want to do something different. There's always room for improvement and there's always room for change, but sometimes change for change's sake is not necessarily the right thing.” –Heather (Liberal Arts, STEM)
	22. QM activities are more about accountability than improvement	“I've never been involved with the committees that do university accreditation, but I know people who are. It's a tremendous amount of work, and I have heard from some of them that ultimately their sense was that the accreditation bodies just wanted boxes checked. They weren't really interested in using the process to improve anything. They just wanted to make it be done. If you've got that attitude, if people are believing that, then it's hard to move forward.” –Doug (Comprehensive, non-STEM)
	23. Lack of trust between front-line faculty and administrators	“So if we kind of know—oh, OK, this is happening because of this, or we had this faculty committee who helped work on this—then it's like, OK, maybe we're a little more trusting of it. Otherwise I think some of us are just kind of skeptical by nature that if it feels like something from an administrator it's not welcomed as it would be by peers.” –Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
	24. Differences in the compensation of QM professionals vs. front-line faculty	“When we at my university hire a [senior administrator focused on QM], and when faculty members learn how much that person is being paid, that's not productive. That immediately is counter-productive. I'll leave it at that.” –Doug (Comprehensive, non-STEM)

using the same measures across courses, disciplines, and/or academic colleges (specific barrier 1); forcing measures to align across levels in an institution (e.g., requiring departmental measures to fit institutional reporting requirements) (specific barrier 2); front-line faculty do not have enough input in the development of outcomes and measures (specific barrier 3); measures used do not provide the information that front-line faculty want most (specific barrier 4); and it is difficult for faculty members in a department to come to a consensus regarding the student outcomes and/or measures that everyone in the department should use (specific barrier 5).

Doug (Comprehensive, non-STEM) discussed issues with the standardization of quality measures across courses and disciplines (specific barrier 1) as he shared:

One thing that's a problem is sometimes they paint with too broad a brush. Meaning, the university is tremendously diverse, a lot of different disciplines. Even within a discipline a lot of different courses. Even within a course a lot of different ways of approaching that. And sometimes the formal assessment, the quality activities ... are generic. And so they don't really fit. You're trying to take one instrument, one measurement instrument and apply it to too many courses in too many disciplines.

While discussing the issue of forcing measures to align across institutional levels (specific barrier 2), Craig (Comprehensive, STEM) shared his experience with a quality management process that he perceived as placing more emphasis on fulfilling institutional requirements than on producing quality management work that was meaningful to front-line faculty members. He commented:

What we've gotten since then is the kind of data we were collecting was just simply not easily analyzed above our heads. And so we have been continually encouraged or sort of forced, I guess, to reduce these, to cut these down, to make them simpler, smaller, more

bite-sized so that they essentially fit into the reports better that have to go with other departments and programs above our heads. So we have scaled those down to feed the administrative requirement. That other process, though, that we started with was meaningful to us; it still is and we still use it. We just don't pass the data on anymore because nobody wants it; nobody can work with it.

Multiple faculty participants expressed the belief that one size does not fit all—both across disciplines and institutional levels—when it comes to measuring quality in higher education.

*Issues related to the process or implementation of quality management* (subtheme 3.1.2) was the second type of barrier that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts. This subtheme reflects issues related to the execution of quality management activities. The 11 specific barriers associated with subtheme 3.1.2 were: lack of follow up and/or action from individuals who mandate or receive quality management reports (specific barrier 6); lack of time for front-line faculty to engage in quality management activities (specific barrier 7); lack of training for front-line faculty in how to conduct quality management activities (specific barrier 8); quality management activities are externally-driven rather than internally-driven (specific barrier 9); requirements to present quantitative data in quality management reports (specific barrier 10); standardization of reporting for quality management activities across disciplines and academic colleges (specific barrier 11); using assessment jargon (specific barrier 12); focusing too much on details at the expense of the big picture (specific barrier 13); too much paperwork associated with quality management (specific barrier 14); not enough time between assessments for front-line faculty to make improvements (specific barrier 15); and assessing programs for the first time after they are already well-established (specific barrier 16).

In discussing specific barriers related to subtheme 3.1.2, Jennifer (Research-Extensive, STEM) shared her experience participating in an academic program review process for her department. Due to a lack of follow up from the university's senior administration regarding her department's program review report (specific barrier 6), Jennifer's first experience with quality management was a negative one, and she indicated that she had not played a significant role in quality management activities since then. She shared:

I mean I was involved in our [department's] external review, which we just asked our dean about a couple of weeks ago. So I think that happened eight years ago. It was one of my early years here and I don't think a single thing ever came of it—which again, we brought all these people in to review things. And I think any faculty in our department could have named what they were going to come up with as the issues. ... [But] nothing ever came of that, which I think pretty much soured me on the whole idea.

Another barrier shared by participants that prevents quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members is faculty not believing that they have enough time to actively participate (specific barrier 7). Quality management activities tend to be time- and labor-intensive, and faculty members already carry heavy workloads with multiple teaching, research, and service commitments. Although some individuals may see quality management work as part of a faculty member's standard set of responsibilities, front-line faculty members may not see it that way. Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) remarked that in order for quality management activities to be meaningful to front-line faculty members:

Faculty need time. ... That's what faculty need because all this accreditation stuff is on top of, it's an administrative task now on top of teaching, researching, and serving. It's

not—oh people say: Oh it's part of service. But it's not. Faculty don't see it that way.

Service is sitting on committees and, you know, being a good community member.

Monica (Comprehensive, non-STEM) also talked about the critical importance of faculty having enough time for quality management work as she shared:

If you are going to honestly—and I mean *honestly* report—and to report means to stop, look at, take in, what you're truly doing. If you're willing to look with open eyes at what you're really doing ... then I think you're doing it properly. But to do that, you have to have time. ... So it's funny, I'm just realizing so much of it just comes back to time. You just gotta have time so you can clear your head and take an honest look.

Thus, a lack of time for quality management work was described as a major barrier that prevented quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty.

*Front-line faculty members' perceptions of quality management* (subtheme 3.1.3) was the third type of barrier that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts. This subtheme refers to several different beliefs that appeared to lead front-line faculty to view quality management activities more negatively than positively. The six specific barriers associated with subtheme 3.1.3 were: fear/concern that quality management activities will make front-line faculty look bad (specific barrier 17); fear/concern that quality management activities will lead to front-line faculty being told what and/or how to teach (specific barrier 18); front-line faculty not understanding why quality management activities are needed and who they are for (specific barrier 19); the perception that many quality management activities do not help front-line faculty improve (specific barrier 20); the perception that quality management requires change for change's sake (specific barrier 21); and the perception that quality management activities are more about accountability than improvement (specific barrier 22). Doug (Comprehensive, non-

STEM) openly discussed the fear that quality management activities have been designed to show that faculty efforts are inadequate (specific barrier 17) in sharing:

There is a sense that these quality activities derive from an assumption that we're not doing our jobs well. And I'm at a public university and so a lot of the directives that we follow come from our state government. ... And there is this assumption, erroneous to some extent/true to some extent, that what's driving them is this impression that we're not really doing our jobs, that we're not working hard, that we're not really giving students anything that's helping them. And so, oh, what we're going to do then is we're going to make you do all these activities that really aren't designed to help you improve what you're doing; they're designed to demonstrate that you're not doing it well. A lot of faculty believe that, fear that.

Although only a handful of participants explicitly used words such as “fear” and “scary” while describing barriers that prevent quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty, participant comments suggest that a fear of quality management activities leading to front-line faculty being told what and/or how to teach (specific barrier 18) may be more prevalent than some faculty participants revealed. A total of 13 participants discussed concerns with K-12 education in Virginia with me—namely, the prevalence of standardized testing and the high level of importance placed on these exams—even though I did not reference or ask specific questions about K-12 education during my interviews. The situation faced by K-12 educators in Virginia in which they are required to follow state curriculum standards (known as Standards of Learning [SOLs]) and many educators are perceived to “teach to the test” appeared to weigh heavily on participants. Kevin (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) stated:

Another thing that ... It's nothing to do with us in particular but the whole SOL [Standards of Learning] idea in high schools and so forth. It just appalls me, where you're teaching to the test kind of situation. I'm often scared that that's the direction we're kind of headed.

Although most of the other faculty who discussed K-12 education did not explicitly connect their concerns related to K-12 education with concerns about their role as a faculty member working in higher education, I believe that their discussion of concerns related to K-12 education stemmed from a fear (or at least a concern) that higher education faculty will lose their academic freedom and be told what and how to teach much like their K-12 colleagues.

The *divide between front-line faculty and administrators* (subtheme 3.1.4) was the fourth type of barrier that emerged. This subtheme reflects multiple faculty participants' belief that there is a significant separation between front-line faculty members and administrators. This divide ranged from these two groups having different ideas and/or priorities when defining and measuring quality in higher education to these groups being openly adversarial. The two specific barriers associated with subtheme 3.1.4 were: a lack of trust between front-line faculty and administrators (specific barrier 23) and differences in the compensation of quality management professionals vs. front-line faculty (specific barrier 24). Scott (Comprehensive, non-STEM) described a lack of trust between front-line faculty and administrators (specific barrier 23) at his institution as he shared:

The faculty [at my institution] have ... seen things happen. [They've been told] 'well, if you do this, then this will happen,' [but] instead something else happened, and so they are really are very distrustful of administration, so you have to put assessment in that context.

The faculty will learn to trust certain people, they get used to them, but once you change people they go back to their basic distrust and paranoia I think.

Even at institutions where front-line faculty and administrators tend to work well together, this divide may still exist. During her interview, Sarah (Liberal Arts, STEM) shared:

And I will be very honest that the antagonism between faculty and administration here is *nothing* like it is at other campuses. I would say there's a lot of respect both ways; it's a very positive working environment. But it's still there, even in a very supportive and respectful environment.

Quality management activities are typically viewed by front-line faculty members as administrative tasks, but since faculty do not always believe they are on the same team as administrators at their institution, the divide between these groups can serve as another barrier to quality management activities being meaningful to front-line faculty members.

**Suggestions.** The second of the two major themes for Research Question 3 was *suggestions for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members* (theme 3.2). As discussed previously, it was easier for some faculty participants to discuss barriers that they believed prevented quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members than to offer suggestions for how quality management activities could be more meaningful for front-line faculty members. However, participants still had a great deal to offer in terms of suggestions for how quality management processes could be improved. Participant suggestions yielded six general strategies for making quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty, which serve as the six subthemes for theme 3.2. As a group, participants shared 24 specific strategies for implementing the six general strategies during their interviews. The six subthemes for theme 3.2 were: *use outcomes and measures that*

*are meaningful to front-line faculty* (subtheme 3.2.1); *improve communications related to quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.2); *provide front-line faculty with incentives and/or compensation for quality management work* (subtheme 3.2.3); *provide more assistance to front-line faculty engaging in quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.4); *increase front-line faculty members' involvement in quality management* (subtheme 3.2.5); and *decrease the fear factor associated with quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.6). A complete listing of all 24 specific implementation strategies categorized by subtheme and presented alongside illustrative participant excerpts is provided in Table 4. In order to provide the reader with a more detailed discussion of specific implementation strategies while remaining conscious of the length of this narrative, I have selected the specific strategies that are listed first for each subtheme to serve as examples of the 24 specific implementation strategies.

*Use outcomes and measures that are meaningful to front-line faculty* (subtheme 3.2.1) was the first general strategy for improving quality management activities that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts. This subtheme suggests that if the *measures* utilized in quality management activities were more meaningful to front-line faculty then quality management activities as a whole would be more meaningful. The three specific implementation strategies for subtheme 3.2.1 were: allow/encourage front-line faculty to develop their own outcomes and measures (specific strategy 1); give front-line faculty flexibility in utilizing outcomes and measures (specific strategy 2); and allow flexibility across disciplines when measuring quality (specific strategy 3). Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) suggested that faculty should have more input into the development of outcomes used by their department (specific strategy 1) as she commented:

Table 4

*Theme 3.2 Responses: Suggestions for How Quality Management (QM) Activities Could Be More Meaningful to Front-Line Faculty*

Subtheme / General Strategy	Specific Implementation Strategies	Participant Example
3.2.1. Use outcomes and measures that are meaningful to front-line faculty	1. Allow/encourage front-line faculty to develop their own outcomes and measures	“Our learning outcomes for our degree program, for instance, were developed by us. We actually designed them <i>into</i> our classes. ... So that to me is a model for how it could work if you want faculty more engaged.” –Craig (Comprehensive, STEM)
	2. Give front-line faculty flexibility in utilizing outcomes and measures	“I think the flexibility that we have here about what does the department want to look at, I think it makes it more valuable for us. ... I like the idea that we can kind of decide what our own targets are going to be that we want to work on and we want to understand.” –Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
	3. Allow flexibility across disciplines when measuring quality	“I don’t think it can be just kind of this one-shot, one instrument, one measure that works for everybody kind of thing. ... I’m just not sure across the disciplines—I don’t know that I could see some kind of one-size-fits-all kind of model.” –Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
3.2.2. Improve communications related to QM activities	4. Clearly communicate the purpose of QM activities and how data will be used	“Well, I think we have to ... be answering why. Why we do [QM], why it’s important, and until the faculty are on board with that, then any amount of training and programs will just ... always fail.” –Miller (Research-Extensive, STEM)
	5. Increase transparency of QM activities	“I think from a faculty’s perspective, if we have a sense of ... how [the assessment] will be used and what purposes will be gained from that, and if all of that is very transparent, I think the outcome from it can be a lot more valuable.” –Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
	6. Provide more feedback to front-line faculty on QM activities	“To really feel like somebody listened and heard, and not just looked at the numbers and said OK. I think that would get us going more.” –Leigh (Comprehensive, non-STEM)

Subtheme / General Strategy	Specific Implementation Strategies	Participant Example
3.2.3. Provide front-line faculty with incentives, compensation for QM work	7. Use QM as an opportunity to communicate with senior administrators	“Every time [a QM activity] happens though, it <i>was</i> an opportunity to get the ear of the dean and/or the provost. And so occasionally something came out of it that resonated.” –Miller (Research-Extensive, STEM)
	8. Present assessment as capturing what front-line faculty are already doing	“I think part of it is the way those things are brought up or are presented to the faculty. Because I know here, at least in my own department, it’s always something that’s on top of something else. And we’re teaching all day and I know when we first started I had to really say that we do [assessment] all the time. ... We’re not doing anything extra; we do it <i>all the time</i> .” –Wendy (Comprehensive, non-STEM)
	9. Give faculty time for QM work	“And right now maybe the thing that gets them to change is the stick because on an assessment report you have to report on what you do to try to tweak the curriculum. Whether it might be more carrots around sort of sticks might be helpful? Giving faculty time off, release time ... or grants, small stipends, small summer stipends for a month to work—that might help.” –Leslie (Liberal Arts, STEM)
	10. Give faculty money for QM work	“So I guess for it to be meaningful ... it almost has to count. It’s going to count in your raise, or it’s going to count in something or other.” –Harrison (Research-Extensive, non-STEM)
3.2.4. Provide more assistance to front-line faculty engaging in QM activities	11. Include participation in QM activities in decisions related to salary and promotion and tenure	“Make the training available as not an add-on, but as part of something that ... they’re already doing.” –Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM)
	12. Include assessment/evaluation training in mandatory faculty development requirements	“You’re writing up your grant to say: Here’s how all my stuff went. If someone could tailor that and say ‘Well look, when you’re writing up your grant, you could add this information on your program assessment for the work you’re doing, for how your program meets university guidelines.’ ... And I’m not sure they know those supports are there for them sometimes. They’re not like: ‘Who can help me with that? Hmmm ... [The University Assessment Office].’” –Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM)
13. Increase the level of interaction between QM professionals and front-line faculty		

Subtheme / General Strategy	Specific Implementation Strategies	Participant Example
	14. Provide front-line faculty with “real world” examples of best practices for QM	“I think some best practices guides in terms of how other departments are doing it would be helpful so that you could then ... have some good guidance on places where they’re doing it well and look at how it’s changed the way in which they teach. I think that’s very much needed because ... most of our college teaching faculty are not going to know how to do that. That’s not their background.” –Miller (Research-Extensive, STEM)
	15. Provide data to departments so they can spend time analyzing data rather than generating data	“But the last time we did program review it was made a lot easier because we now have an institutional research office that generates most of the numbers that they want rather than requiring the departments to generate it, and that’s really helped a lot. It reduced the amount of work for the department head to do and allows them to focus on the more important stuff rather than just spending time generating data.” –Scott (Comprehensive, non-STEM)
	16. Provide funds to departments to hire external reviewers to assess student work	“So at this point it’s become this joke because we have stacks of papers, but we ... haven’t been given the funds to have an outside person. ... I actually think it is really important that we have an outside person evaluate these because we’re all so close to our students and we all know about these projects.” –Sarah (Liberal Arts, STEM)
	17. Provide more administrative support for front-line faculty	“So there’s a lot of things that can be streamlined to help with that paperwork, whereas the numbers of secretaries have been decreased because they no longer have to type for us. They no longer have to make copies for us. But there’s other needs that they could be replacing to take the load off of some of these things that are going to increase with time to meet assessment requirements and regulation requirements.” –Julia (Research-Extensive, STEM)
3.2.5. Increase front-line faculty members’ involvement in QM	18. Increase front-line faculty members’ involvement in QM peer review	“I think that more faculty members ought to be involved in reading the assessment reports for other colleges, in helping them say: ‘Well did you think about this here? Or, gee, that’s a really good idea, I could take that back to <i>my</i> classroom.’ Going on visits, going to the accreditation conferences.” –Ed (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)

Subtheme / General Strategy	Specific Implementation Strategies	Participant Example
3.2.6. Decrease the fear factor associated with QM activities	19. Foster grass roots efforts from front-line faculty	“I do think more progress on [QM activities] might be made <i>if</i> faculty were more in charge of some of these initiatives. ... More grass roots efforts. I don’t think the top-down initiatives in general have been very successful at increasing quality.” –Jennifer (Research-Extensive, STEM)
	20. Engage new front-line faculty at the beginning of their careers	“I think the faculty that were not exposed to it when they started and have it thrown at them now are going to be very resistant. They’re going to complain, for lack of a better word. But the newer faculty that come in and this is part of the norm for them—are going to be more engaged.” –Julia (Research-Extensive, STEM)
	21. Engage front-line faculty through discussions about quality	“Well, it seems to me there needs to be an upfront discussion by the administration, whether local or university-wide about what a quality education means. And if that discussion takes place in a way which involves the faculty members rather than something that has been bureaucratically-decided. That should ensure the engagement of the faculty if there’s an opportunity to give input.” –Gene (Research-Extensive, STEM)
	22. Separate assessment from evaluation and clearly communicate how they are different	“A lot of faculty are very nervous about assessment. And I think in large part that’s because they confuse assessment with evaluation. They really think that—OK, if I didn’t reach all my curricular goals, then I’m going to get fired or I’m not going to get tenure. And I think ... you need administration that’s very clear with faculty as the faculty are developing. Assessment is not evaluation—it’s a different thing.” –Ed (Liberal Arts, non-STEM)
	23. Increase the quality of interactions between QM professionals and front-line faculty	“The reason we think [assessment] has not ended up being intrusive is because we trust [the assessment director]. If [the director] leaves and somebody else comes in, then I think all of the worry comes back, because it’s about personalities more than it is anything I think. And [the director] really tries to be helpful, and really just tries to be a resource, and not a dictator. And so that makes it much less threatening than it would be otherwise.” –Scott (Comprehensive, non-STEM)

Subtheme / General Strategy	Specific Implementation Strategies	Participant Example
	24. Clearly communicate that a focus on improvement does not mean that faculty work is not up to par	“I think it is important to get across the message that improvement ... is not threatening. Improvement does not necessarily mean that what you have been doing is wrong, or is not up to par. ... We're all in this together rather than we're looking at you to see how you're doing things and you're not doing them as well as [you should be].” –John (Research-Extensive, non-STEM)

And I think it's more productive if the department, faculty by different disciplines or divisions, can actually have some say on can we study how we assess students' success and the quality of education say in art history the same as we might do in mathematics in terms of what are the outcomes and how would we assess that I think are different.

This excerpt from Elizabeth also supports the strategy of allowing different disciplines to use different quality measures (specific strategy 3).

*Improve communications related to quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.2) was the second general strategy for improving quality management activities that emerged. This general strategy aims to respond to participant concerns that front-line faculty do not always have the information needed to make them *want* to engage in quality management activities. The five specific implementation strategies for subtheme 3.2.2 were: clearly communicate the purpose of quality management activities and how data will be used (specific strategy 4); increase transparency of quality management activities (specific strategy 5); provide more feedback to front-line faculty on quality management activities (specific strategy 6); use quality management as an opportunity to communicate with senior administrators (specific strategy 7); and present assessment as capturing what front-line faculty are already doing (specific strategy 8). As examples of specific strategy 4, Anne and Julia discussed the importance of front-line faculty understanding the purpose of quality management and how quality management data will be used before they are asked to invest time and energy in quality management activities. Anne (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) shared “[For some faculty] it's such a pain for them. They don't think that way. They don't see why they need to do it. It's really stressful for them. There's no support in teaching why it's important,” while Julia (Research-Extensive, STEM) commented:

Whether I've put in four measurements ... and then put in four papers for those measurements that in reality I don't think anybody has ever read, I'm not sure what that accomplishes. And I don't know who that's proving something to. I know it's proving something to somebody—but I don't know who that is and that makes me more reluctant to do it.

Thus, improved communications between individuals who direct quality management processes and front-line faculty may help quality management activities to be more meaningful for front-line faculty.

*Provide front-line faculty with incentives and/or compensation for quality management work* (subtheme 3.2.3) was the third general strategy for improving quality management activities that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts. This subtheme reflects many participants' belief that in order for front-line faculty to find quality management activities to be meaningful, they need to be rewarded for participating in quality management work. The four specific implementation strategies for subtheme 3.2.3 were: give faculty time for quality management work (specific strategy 9); give faculty money for quality management work (specific strategy 10); include participation in quality management activities in decisions related to salary and promotion and tenure (specific strategy 11); and include assessment/evaluation training in mandatory faculty development requirements (specific strategy 12).

One of the most common incentives suggested by faculty participants was providing faculty with more time to participate in quality management activities (specific strategy 9) by granting course releases for significant involvement in quality management work. This was a strategy that had worked well for Leslie (Liberal Arts, STEM) when she developed a new course, and she suggested that it could also be effective when applied to quality management activities.

Leslie shared “But there was an incentive for us to [develop the course] because they gave us a course release to do that. So I think that can really ... that might help change the landscape [for quality management].” Wendy (Comprehensive, non-STEM) also suggested providing front-line faculty with course releases for quality management work as she talked about her experiences preparing for programmatic accreditation:

You know, another thing too is that it might also help if the person or the people who are writing [the quality management report] got a course release to do it because you’re doing it on top—here we teach four courses each semester, so you’re doing that on top of that. ... So there isn’t really a lot of time to do the writing. So some of us are up—I know I’ve been up until 3:00, 4:00 in the morning trying to write stuff for this. So a course release would be nice.

Front-line faculty members frequently have multiple demands on their time, and many participants believed that providing faculty with more incentives or compensation for quality management work could help quality management activities to be more meaningful for front-line faculty.

*Provide more assistance to front-line faculty engaging in quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.4) was the fourth general strategy for improving quality management activities that emerged. Some participants suggested that receiving more assistance in completing quality management activities would help make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty. The five specific implementation strategies for subtheme 3.2.4 were: increase the level of interaction between quality management professionals and front-line faculty (specific strategy 13); provide front-line faculty with “real world” examples of best practices for quality management (specific strategy 14); provide data to departments so they can spend time analyzing

data rather than generating data (specific strategy 15); provide funds to departments to hire external reviewers to assess student work (specific strategy 16); and provide more administrative support for front-line faculty (specific strategy 17). John (Research-Extensive, non-STEM) discussed how working more closely with a quality management professional (specific strategy 13) would help him to be more invested in quality management activities as he shared:

If [someone] would come to me now and say here's something that I think will help your [students] make better grades and would also help you because it will give you certain measurements of certain things at certain times, I think I would be very open to that right now. ... Help me—is how to get me invested.

Feedback from faculty participants suggests that while some front-line faculty members would appreciate assistance, they may not be sure where to go and/or whom to ask for help.

*Increase front-line faculty members' involvement in quality management* (subtheme 3.2.5) was the fifth general strategy for improving quality management activities that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts. This subtheme reflects some participants' belief that quality management activities will not be meaningful to front-line faculty unless front-line faculty actively engage in them. For example, Elizabeth (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) remarked during her interview that “if we're not really giving the conversation and the assessment our full attention and support, how can we expect it to really be useful to improve things?” while Ed (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) shared that “being involved in the assessment process helps you understand not only how it's complex, but also how it's doable. ... There is no substitute for experience.” The four specific implementation strategies for subtheme 3.2.5 were: increase front-line faculty members' involvement in quality management peer review (specific strategy 18); foster grass roots efforts from front-line faculty (specific strategy 19); engage new front-line

faculty at the beginning of their careers (specific strategy 20); and engage front-line faculty through discussions about quality (specific strategy 21). Miller (Research Extensive-STEM) suggested that one way to get faculty members more involved in quality management activities for their own departments would be to encourage them to participate in peer review of quality management processes (specific strategy 18). He shared “I think faculty get engaged in their own scholarship by evaluating grant proposals and reviewing journal articles and going on panels and doing workshops. And I think we can model similar activities with regards to student learning assessment.”

*Decrease the fear factor associated with quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.6) was the sixth general strategy for improving quality management activities that emerged. This subtheme reflects some participants’ belief that removing or reducing faculty members’ fear of quality management activities could help quality management activities to be more meaningful to front-line faculty. The three specific implementation strategies for subtheme 3.2.6 were: separate assessment from evaluation and clearly communicate how they are different (specific strategy 22); increase the quality of interactions between quality management professionals and front-line faculty (specific strategy 23); and clearly communicate that a focus on improvement does not mean that faculty work is not up to par (specific strategy 24). For example, Ed (Liberal Arts, non-STEM) made the suggestion to separate assessment from evaluation (specific strategy 22) as he shared:

A lot of faculty are very nervous about assessment. And I think in large part that’s because they confuse assessment with evaluation. They really think that—OK, if I didn’t reach all my curricular goals, then I’m going to get fired or I’m not going to get tenure.

And I think ... you need administration that's very clear with faculty as the faculty are developing. Assessment is not evaluation—it's a different thing.

**Summary for Research Question 3.** The two major themes for Research Question 3 were *barriers that prevent quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members* (theme 3.1) and *suggestions for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members* (theme 3.2). Not surprisingly, many of the suggestions faculty participants made regarding how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty addressed barriers shared by either the participants themselves or other faculty participants. For example, to help overcome barriers related to fear (specific barriers 17 and 18), participants provided the three specific implementation strategies listed previously in the narrative for subtheme 3.2.6 (specific strategies 22, 23, and 24). While there was significant overlap between some barriers and suggestions, other barriers were presented without any suggestions for how to overcome them and some suggestions for improvement were made without specific barriers being identified. Thinking about how the barriers discussed by participants could be overcome provides additional suggestions for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty. The 24 specific barriers discussed as part of theme 3.1 (see Table 3) and the 24 specific implementation strategies suggested as part of theme 3.2 (see Table 4) serve as two sides of the same coin as they both provide specific answers to the research question “What do faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?”

## Summary of Findings

This chapter provides detailed information on participant demographic characteristics and findings related to the study's three research questions. A total of 24 different themes and subthemes were discussed in this chapter (see Table 2) along with 24 specific barriers that prevent quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty (see Table 3) and 24 specific strategies for how quality management activities could be improved (see Table 4). The predominant theme related to Research Question 1 was *quality was defined in terms of student outcomes* (theme 1.1), while a second, additional theme was *quality was defined in terms other than student outcomes* (theme 1.2). For theme 1.1, three subthemes also emerged that described the three different types of student outcomes discussed by participants. These three subthemes were: *student learning outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.1); *vocational outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.2); and *contribution to society outcomes* (subtheme 1.1.3). The four major themes for Research Question 2 were: *student growth should be a primary indicator of quality* (theme 2.1); *measuring quality is difficult* (theme 2.2); *dissatisfaction with current measures of quality* (theme 2.3); and *measuring quality is necessary or important* (theme 2.4). Subthemes also emerged for theme 2.1, theme 2.2, and theme 2.3. These were *students need to be assessed longitudinally* (subtheme 2.1.1); *recognition of specific measurement issues* (subtheme 2.2.1); and *current measures of quality place too much emphasis on numbers* (subtheme 2.3.1).

For Research Question 3 two major themes and 10 subthemes emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts. The two major themes were *barriers that prevent quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members* (theme 3.1) and *suggestions for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members* (theme 3.2). The four subthemes related to theme 3.1 were: *issues with quality management*

*measures* (subtheme 3.1.1); *issues related to the process or implementation of quality management* (subtheme 3.1.2); *front-line faculty members' perceptions of quality management* (subtheme 3.1.3); and the *divide between front-line faculty and administrators* (subtheme 3.1.4). The six subthemes related to theme 3.2 were: *use outcomes and measures that are meaningful to front-line faculty* (subtheme 3.2.1); *improve communications related to quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.2); *provide front-line faculty with incentives and/or compensation for quality management work* (subtheme 3.2.3); *provide more assistance to front-line faculty engaging in quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.4); *increase front-line faculty members' involvement in quality management* (subtheme 3.2.5); and *decrease the fear factor associated with quality management activities* (subtheme 3.2.6).

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions**

The purpose of this research study was to explore perceptions of front-line faculty members in the United States related to quality and quality management in higher education. The study's three research questions were: (1) How do front-line faculty members in the United States define quality in higher education? (2) How do front-line faculty members in the United States describe how quality in higher education should be measured? and (3) Assuming that quality management activities will continue to be mandated by external and internal entities, what do front-line faculty members in the United States believe could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members? Chapter 5 provides a discussion of how the results presented in Chapter 4 relate to findings from the body of literature on quality in higher education. This discussion of results is organized by research question and is followed by the study's contributions and implications for future quality management policy, practice, and research.

### **Discussion of Results**

**Research Question 1.** Given how quality in higher education was frequently described in the body of literature reviewed for this study as a contentious issue (e.g., Law, 2010), I was surprised to find that all 20 front-line faculty members who participated in this study defined quality in higher education either partially or solely in terms of student outcomes. Although neither I nor any of my participants referred to the Association of American Colleges and University's (AAC&U's) conception of a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal education during interviews for this study, the majority of my participants defined quality in higher education in ways that are similar to the AAC&U's definition of a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal education. According to the AAC&U (n.d.):

Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

Thus, a liberal education is focused on student learning outcomes, vocational outcomes, contribution to society outcomes, breadth of knowledge, and depth of knowledge, all important components of quality that were discussed by multiple participants in this study.

Using Harvey and Green's (1993) seminal framework for defining quality, study participants' definitions of quality aligned most closely with Harvey and Green's notion of quality as *transformative* as participants emphasized student growth and specific skills and abilities they hoped students would gain during their college or university experience. The quality as transformative approach is often associated with value-added measures that attempt to show how students have changed over time, and the need to assess students longitudinally was a major theme for Research Question 2 (see below).

Although a few quality studies conducted outside of the United States found that faculty members' conceptions of quality were discipline-specific (Cardoso et al., 2013; Henkel, 2000; Kleijnen et al., 2011), the results of the present study do not support that front-line faculty members working in different disciplines tend to view quality in higher education differently. Overall, study participants' definitions of quality in higher education were more similar than different.

**Research Question 2.** Participants' predominant view of quality as transformative was reflected in participant responses to the question "How do you think quality in higher education should be measured?" Multiple participants shared the belief that student growth should serve as a primary indicator of quality in higher education. Participants also believed that in order to effectively measure student growth, students must be assessed over time. These study findings are closely related to two of Astin's (1982) five traditional approaches to measuring quality. The fifth approach—value-added measures—was the type of measure most commonly referred to by study participants as many faculty members shared that a primary indicator of quality was the amount of progress students made from the time they entered higher education to when they left. In contrast, Astin's fourth approach—outcome measures—gauge the quality of a higher education institution's products (e.g., graduation rates) without considering how students may have changed over time. Although the value-added approach to measuring quality in higher education was discussed by participants more frequently than the outcome measures approach, some participants stated that they were in favor of using outcome measures such as job placement rates when measuring quality in higher education.

Most of the participants in the present study appeared to find it difficult to discuss how quality in higher education should be measured, with many faculty participants referring to the same issues associated with measuring quality as the body on literature on quality in higher education. For example, faculty participants in this study shared that measuring quality is important because what gets measured tends to get done (Dew & Nearing, 2004), and that people usually measure what is easily measured rather than what is most meaningful to measure (Jones & de Saram, 2005; Kleijnen et al., 2011). Both my faculty participants and the research

literature also discussed methodological issues that make demonstrating a course or program's impact on student learning a difficult task (e.g., Rosa et al., 2006).

Another theme that emerged for Research Question 2 was that many participants were dissatisfied with the indicators currently used to measure quality in higher education. For example, multiple participants shared the belief that current quality management activities place too much emphasis on quantitative indicators of quality (Barnett, 1994; Jones & de Saram, 2005). Barnett's (1994) sentiment that "qualities and quantities are different kinds of entities" (p. 75) was shared by multiple participants in the present study. Participants' dissatisfaction with indicators commonly used to measure quality support the writings of multiple authors in the quality management literature (e.g., Harvey & Newton, 2004; Law, 2010). In 1982, Astin wrote that "none of the traditional assessments of quality is really adequate" (p. 10). The responses of multiple faculty participants in the present study echoed Astin's statement.

**Research Question 3.** In terms of what faculty participants thought could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members, the results of this study support prior research suggesting that faculty are more supportive of quality management processes that emphasize improvement rather than accountability (e.g., Cardoso et al., 2013; Ezer & Horin, 2013; Lomas & Ursin, 2009; Rosa et al., 2012). The front-line faculty participants in this study found processes that were focused primarily on improvement to be more meaningful than processes with a sole or major focus on accountability. Thus, the present study supports the gap described in the literature between the "rhetoric of quality" and the "reality of quality." This gap is represented in the literature by differences in what faculty thought quality management should emphasize (i.e., improvement) and what they thought was

accomplished (i.e., quality management served as an accountability mechanism) (e.g., Cartwright, 2007; Hoecht, 2006; Lomas, 2007; Newton, 2000).

The present study also supports the subset of literature that suggests there is a gap between front-line faculty and administrators (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Askling, 1997; Newton, 1999, 2000; Stensaker et al., 2011). Multiple previous studies found that front-line faculty members viewed quality management activities more negatively than administrators. Since the focus of the present study was solely on front-line faculty members, it is unclear whether my participants had more negative views of quality management activities than administrators at their institutions. However, multiple participants in the present study shared that the divide between front-line faculty and administrators at their institutions serves as a barrier that prevents quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members. This is an area in which more research is needed.

While the focus of the present study was not on how front-line faculty members *experienced* quality, many study participants shared personal experiences with quality management activities while discussing the study's three research questions. Similar to the results of multiple studies found in the body of literature on quality in higher education, many—but not all—of the faculty in my study appeared to go through the motions when completing quality management requirements, adopting a stance that may be described as a “let me get this done as quickly as possible so that I can return to my *real* work” approach to quality management. Thus, the present study supports the argument in the literature that one reason why quality management activities to date have not resulted in meaningful improvements in student learning is because front-line faculty members have not been actively engaged (Anderson, 2006; Coates & Seifert, 2011; Newton, 2000; Stanley & Patrick, 1998; Watty, 2006). Multiple faculty

participants in this study discussed the need for more front-line faculty members to get engaged in quality management activities, with several faculty members sharing the belief that more faculty members needed to “buy in” to quality management activities in order for these activities to be more meaningful for front-line faculty. These findings align with results from a national survey of university provosts in the United States conducted by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014).

### **Study Contributions**

This study supports and builds upon much of the published literature related to quality in higher education. Given that there is little empirical research related to how front-line faculty members in the United States perceive quality in higher education, the study’s finding that the faculty members I interviewed in the United States had similar perceptions regarding quality management activities as their international colleagues is one of this study’s contributions to the body of literature on quality in higher education. The primary contribution of the present study is that it provides specific details related to how front-line faculty members define and measure quality and what front-line faculty think could be done to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members.

Most of the findings from the empirical studies that were reviewed for this research are presented in the form of generalized statements. For example, Laughton (2003) contends that in order for quality management activities to result in meaningful assessments that facilitate improvement, faculty must support how quality is defined and measured by quality management activities. However, no details are provided in Laughton’s work related to how faculty believe quality should be defined and measured. Similarly, while Lomas (2007) argues that “academics

should have far greater say in the indicators of quality chosen” (p. 409), her study does not provide specifics regarding what faculty describe as the ideal “indicators of quality.”

While general results like those provided by Laughton (2003) and Lomas (2007) may serve as a basis for improving quality management activities, more specific information related to how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members may benefit a variety of higher education institutions. Thus, the aim of the present study was to provide specific, concrete details and suggestions that could be used by quality management professionals to inform future quality management policy and practice. Although multiple studies in the research literature found that faculty members held negative views of quality management (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Cartwright, 2007; Jones & de Saram, 2005; McInnis et al., 1995), they do not offer specific suggestions for how quality management activities could be improved. Without these details, it will be more difficult for quality management professionals to implement meaningful change. In contrast, the present study includes detailed information in terms of both the specific barriers that faculty participants believed prevented quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members (see Table 3) and specific implementation strategies that faculty participants suggested could be used to make quality management activities more meaningful to front-line faculty (see Table 4). These tables provide a unique contribution to the body of literature and to quality management professionals.

It is also important to note that multiple previous studies related to how faculty members perceive quality in higher education (e.g., Barandíaran-Galdós et al., 2012; Rosa et al., 2006; Watty, 2006) did not provide their participants with opportunities to respond to open-ended questions. Instead, the authors of these studies developed quality frameworks and/or specific response options for their participants to consider. In my study, I intentionally utilized

interviews with open-ended questions in order to capture more of front-line faculty members' voices. This data collection method enabled participants to discuss their thoughts and beliefs in their own terms and to share whatever they believed to be most important rather than be limited to closed-ended question responses. In Chapter 4, I included excerpts from all 20 participants not only to provide evidence of the themes that emerged from the data analysis process but to share multiple front-line faculty voices. Mertova and Webster (2009) argue that "the academic voice has been missing from ... quality mechanisms and systems employed in higher education" (p. 141). The present study provides my participants with an opportunity for their voices to be heard and influence the future direction of quality management.

### **Limitations**

In addition to noting study contributions, it is important to acknowledge limitations associated with this research. One of the major limitations of this study is that I had limited options for engaging in triangulation (beyond comparing participant views), which is one of the primary strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research. I am not currently aware of any existing data sources that provide in-depth information regarding how individual front-line faculty members define and measure quality in higher education. Documents written for quality management activities such as institutional self-studies are frequently written by administrators rather than front-line faculty members. Even when department-level documents such as those prepared for academic program reviews are written by faculty members, they generally reflect the views of a group of faculty members rather than the perspective of an individual faculty member. Thus, I was not able to use multiple data sources as a triangulation strategy for the present study.

Another limitation of this study is that qualitative research is not designed to produce generalizable results (Patton, 2002). Thus, it is important to remind readers that the results and discussion presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation reflect the experiences of the 20 front-line faculty members who participated in this study and should not be considered as representative of all front-line faculty members in the United States. It is my hope that the results of this study will help to identify additional groups of faculty members that should be interviewed and that more front-line faculty members will be interviewed in the future.

An additional limitation of the study stems from the fact that quality in higher education is a complex concept. Barandiaran-Galdós et al. (2012) state that defining quality in higher education is extremely complicated since:

there are reasons to believe that what people see as important varies according to circumstance. It is only human to attribute greater importance to those factors which are found to be absent in a given situation: it is precisely their absence that makes them stand out, inundate the discourses of stakeholders and bias their opinions. (p. 92)

Thus, it is possible that participants may have emphasized aspects of quality that they believe are not being emphasized as much as they should be at their current institution rather than the aspects of quality which they may believe to be most important given a different or neutral context.

### **Implications for Future Policy and Practice**

Much of the existing literature related to faculty engagement in quality management activities (e.g., Gray, 2002; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh et al., 2014) either reflects the views of senior administrators or is not empirical in nature. The results of the present empirical study provide both general and specific strategies for how quality management activities could be more

meaningful to front-line faculty members across different types of institutions as suggested by front-line faculty members themselves. These results inform six conclusions that offer implications for quality management policy and practice. These conclusions reflect many of the subthemes, barriers, and implementation strategies presented in Tables 3 and 4, and all three of these components should be taken in account when considering the design of quality management processes and/or activities. Readers are also encouraged to consider additional implications as they reflect on the study findings and their potential transferability. From the analysis of data collected for this study, six conclusions reflecting the responses of the 20 front-line faculty members who participated are presented below.

**Conclusion 1.** The successful recruitment process for this study suggests that these front-line faculty participants are interested in engaging in discussions related to quality in higher education. Participant responses to interview questions suggest that the question “What is quality in higher education?” or “How do you define quality in higher education?” could be used by quality management professionals as a conversation starter to get front-line faculty members talking about student outcomes, quality measures, and quality management activities without specifically talking about student outcomes, quality measures, assessment, accreditation, and/or academic program review—all terms which may have negative connotations for some front-line faculty members. If individuals who oversee quality management activities can start with, and then build upon, specific faculty beliefs related to quality in higher education in developing or coordinating quality management activities, this may increase faculty engagement in quality management work. Engaging faculty members in dialogues about quality and then linking these discussions to conversations about specific quality management activities may help faculty to

experience more ownership of quality management processes. As stated by Gray (2002), “building faculty ownership is the key to successful implementation [of assessment]” (p. 58).

**Conclusion 2.** The results of the present study suggest that a subset of the front-line faculty members I interviewed could benefit from more information about the purpose of quality management activities and why they are needed. This finding suggests that it would be helpful for quality management professionals to build upon current efforts to educate front-line faculty members about the purpose of quality management activities. Participants in this study also suggested that it would be helpful for quality management professionals to communicate more clearly to front-line faculty members that faculty are already engaging in assessment while teaching and advising students. If quality management professionals could harness more of what front-line faculty members are already doing for quality management purposes, then front-line faculty members may become more engaged in quality management activities.

Another subset of the front-line faculty members I interviewed believed that measuring quality in higher education is necessary and/or important. This finding suggests that some of the front-line faculty members I interviewed were already on board with quality management activities conceptually. To minimize any divide between faculty and administrators, quality management professionals could work closely with this second group of faculty members to help bring faculty members in the first group on board with quality management activities. Faculty members in the second group could help educate their colleagues about the purpose of quality management activities and why they are needed. When front-line faculty members understand why quality management activities are conducted and what they can accomplish, they should be more likely to actively engage in quality management activities.

**Conclusion 3.** A third conclusion is that quality management processes that focused on accountability did not appear to resonate with the front-line faculty members who participated in the present study. This finding suggests one strategy that could be used to increase front-line faculty members' engagement in quality management activities is to emphasize improvement over meeting standards. Some of the faculty members who participated in the present study shared that writing and submitting quality management reports merely to demonstrate that standards were met was counterproductive. Not only did participants say that these processes did not accomplish much, it appeared to make them less likely to engage in future quality management activities that are more improvement-focused. Thus, the results of this study suggest that faculty engagement may increase as a focus on quality management activities leading to improvement increases.

**Conclusion 4.** A fourth conclusion is that in order for the faculty members I interviewed to be more actively involved in quality management, quality management processes should be more faculty-centered. Many quality management activities are currently driven by administrative requirements or external mandates. Faculty work is sometimes required to fit into the current system rather than the system adapting to fit the work of faculty members. Comments from participants in the present study suggest that if quality management processes were more tailored to the needs of front-line faculty members, front-line faculty would be more likely to engage in quality management activities in meaningful ways. For example, multiple participants talked about being involved in two different types of quality management systems: one that was set up by accrediting bodies or quality management professionals that they did not find to be as helpful in making improvements to their courses or program, and one created internally within their department that they did find to be useful, but quality management

professionals did not find to be as useful in meeting quality management requirements. Not surprisingly, my study participants did not find this two-system format to be conducive to increasing faculty engagement in quality management activities. Thus, finding ways to increase efforts to combine these two systems could help to improve participant engagement in quality management activities.

**Conclusion 5.** A fifth conclusion is that many of my study participants believed that front-line faculty should be rewarded for active participation in quality management activities either in terms of time (e.g., course releases), money (e.g., summer stipends), or recognition. Measuring quality was described as difficult work that requires time and effort. Although the majority of the faculty members who participated in the present study recognized this, they did not always believe that the institutional leaders they worked with adequately recognized the demands that quality management work placed upon them. Faculty members in the present study spoke about receiving little compensation—in most cases, no compensation—for their participation in quality management efforts. As expectations of front-line faculty members continue to grow and requirements for promotion and tenure increase, front-line faculty members will be more likely to invest time and energy in activities that are valued in annual faculty activity reports, judgments related to promotion and tenure, and decisions related to salary increases. Multiple faculty members who participated in the present study indicated that they would be interested in engaging in quality management activities more deeply if they were given the time to do so and/or the appropriate recognition.

**Conclusion 6.** A final conclusion is that multiple faculty participants in the present study shared that if they did not find the indicators used to measure quality to be meaningful, then the results associated with a quality management activity were not meaningful. Thus, they did not

find the process as a whole to be helpful. This finding suggests that if the measures either created or selected to measure quality in higher education resonate with front-line faculty members and provide them with data that they can use to make improvements in their courses and programs, then efforts made to engage front-line faculty members in quality management activities will be more successful. Many faculty participants in the present study described a belief that quality in higher education is not something that is one-size-fits-all; thus, indicators of quality should not be one-size-fits-all. Quality management processes that require the same measures to be used across departments, disciplines, and/or institutions appeared to conflict with a fundamental belief held by some front-line faculty members. This finding suggests that encouraging faculty to assess what is meaningful to them in formats that are meaningful to them may enable quality management processes to be more successful. Given front-line faculty members' dissatisfaction with current indicators used to measure quality in higher education, addressing the measures used in quality management activities appears to be a good place to start when working to increase front-line faculty members' engagement in quality management activities.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Since the literature on quality in higher education provides few specific details related to how front-line faculty members in the United States define quality, would like to measure quality, and believe quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members, this research was exploratory in some respects. Given that multiple participants commented that they had not thought much about quality in higher education in general or specific aspects of quality in higher education prior to participating in this study, my research interviews provided participants with an opportunity to develop their own ideas related to quality

in higher education. These ideas suggest a variety of directions for future research, and it is my hope that they can be refined with future study.

The successful recruitment process for this study suggests that other front-line faculty members may be open to sharing their thoughts about quality in higher education and how quality management processes could be improved. In order to provide front-line faculty members with a voice in quality management processes that can be heard, more qualitative research on this topic is needed. When conducting interviews with additional front-line faculty members it would be particularly helpful for researchers to speak with front-line faculty at institutions outside of Virginia and at types of institutions that were not included in the present study (e.g., community colleges). This study's finding that there is sometimes a divide between front-line faculty members and administrators also warrants additional study. As a starting point, I could ask administrators at the same three higher education institutions that were included in the present study how they define quality in higher education and compare their responses to those of the front-line faculty members I interviewed. It would also be helpful to ask a wide variety of stakeholders, including individuals who are not directly associated with post-secondary education, my first interview question—"How do you define quality in higher education?"—and compare responses. This data would provide a much broader view of what constitutes quality in higher education.

There are also options for pursuing quantitative research related to this topic that could help shed light on the prevalence of front-line faculty beliefs related to quality. For example, the specific barriers that participants believed prevent quality management activities from being meaningful to front-line faculty members (Table 3) and suggestions participants made for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members (Table 4)

could be used as items in a closed-ended survey that could be administered to a larger, more diverse group of front-line faculty members in order to gain more information about the population of front-line faculty members as a whole. It is my hope that continuing this line of research will help to build the knowledge base related to quality in higher education so that quality management activities can be more meaningful to front-line faculty members, and hence, more likely to lead to improvements in student learning.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The primary aim of this study was to learn more about how front-line faculty members perceive quality and quality management activities in higher education using a method that honors faculty members' voices. Rather than seeking to determine a consensus on the indicators that participants believed should be used to measure quality in higher education or how quality management activities could be improved, this study was designed to uncover participants' key beliefs and concerns related to quality in higher education. Previous researchers suggest that a major reason why quality management activities have not had a positive impact on student learning is because front-line faculty members who are at the learner-teacher interface have not been actively engaged in quality management activities. Results from the present study support these findings and provide specific suggestions for how quality management activities could be more meaningful to front-line faculty members. As higher education leaders work to embrace quality management activities that lead to improvements in student outcomes, front-line faculty members' views on how quality in higher education should be defined and measured should be taken into account when developing and implementing quality management processes.

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## Appendix A

### IRB Approval Letter



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** April 24, 2014  
**TO:** Molly R Hall, Penny Burge  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Quality in Higher Education: Perspectives from Front-Line Faculty in the United States  
**IRB NUMBER:** 14-454

Effective April 24, 2014, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**  
Protocol Approval Date: **April 24, 2014**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **April 23, 2015**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **April 9, 2015**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

#### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

\* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office (irbadmin@vt.edu) immediately.

## Appendix B

### Key Informant Email with Participant Criteria

Hello [insert name],

I am currently in the process of conducting a qualitative research study for my dissertation at Virginia Tech that is designed to explore tenured faculty members' perceptions of quality in higher education. For this study, I plan to interview tenured faculty members at three different types of higher education institutions in Virginia. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to identify 10-15 faculty members at [insert name of university] who meet all of the criteria listed below and you believe may be willing to participate (especially given the fact that many faculty interviews will be conducted over the summer).

#### Study Criteria:

- Potential participants will be tenured faculty members.
- Potential participants will typically carry a full teaching load each semester (this is based solely on how your specific institution defines a full teaching load).
- Potential participants will **not** hold significant administrative responsibilities (e.g., they will not be department chairs).
- As a group, potential participants will work in a variety of academic disciplines.

Should some of the faculty members you identify choose to participate in this study, they will be asked to complete one 60 minute interview that will be scheduled according to their availability and location preference. I hope to complete all participant interviews in person.

Currently much more is known about how university administrators view quality in higher education than how teaching faculty perceive quality. It is my hope that this research will offer insights into how quality processes such as accreditation and academic program review may become more meaningful to instructional faculty.

This study has been approved by Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about the study or would be willing to identify potential faculty participants, please contact me at [mrhall@vt.edu](mailto:mrhall@vt.edu) or (857)204-0070.

Many thanks,  
Molly

Molly Hall, M.S.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Research & Evaluation  
Virginia Tech

## Appendix C

### Initial Participant Recruitment Email

Dear Dr./Ms./Mr. [insert name],

I would like to invite you to participate in a qualitative research study that is designed to explore tenured faculty members' perceptions of quality in higher education. I received your name from X [key informant name] who felt you would be able to offer a valuable perspective on this topic.

This research is being completed for my dissertation at Virginia Tech. Should you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete one 60 minute interview that will be scheduled according to your availability and location preference. I hope to complete all participant interviews in person.

Currently much more is known about how university administrators view quality in higher education than how teaching faculty perceive quality. Benefits of your participation in this study include the opportunity to help fill this gap in the literature and to reflect on quality in higher education in a meaningful way. This research may also offer insights into how university quality processes such as accreditation and academic program review may become more valuable to faculty members.

This study has been approved by Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about the study or are interested in participating, please contact me at [mrhall@vt.edu](mailto:mrhall@vt.edu) or (857)204-0070. Data collection will take place during the next few months so if you are not available now, but would be able to participate during the summer, please let me know.

Many thanks,  
Molly

Molly Hall, M.S.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Research & Evaluation  
Virginia Tech

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

**Title of Project: Quality in Higher Education: Perspectives from Front-Line Faculty in the United States**

<b>Investigator(s):</b>	<b><u>Penny Burge</u></b>	<b><u>burge@vt.edu/540-231-9730</u></b>
	Name	E-mail / Phone number
	<b><u>Molly Hall</u></b>	<b><u>mrhall@vt.edu/857-204-0070</u></b>
	Name	E-mail / Phone number

#### I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of this study is to explore perceptions of front-line faculty members in the United States related to quality in higher education. Very little is currently known about how front-line faculty members define and measure quality in higher education. It is anticipated that findings from this study will provide insight into how quality activities such as accreditation and academic program review may be structured to be more meaningful to front-line faculty members.

This study is being conducted for Molly Hall's dissertation research at Virginia Tech. Results from this study may be published in journal articles and/or presented at conferences.

All participants in this study will be tenured front-line faculty members working at universities in Virginia. A minimum of nine front-line faculty members will be interviewed.

#### II. Procedures

Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one 60-minute interview with Molly Hall. During the interview session you will also be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. The interview will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for you as a participant and is conducive to obtaining high quality data. The interview will be audio-recorded using digital recorders and a transcript of the interview will be created by a local transcription service. Any personal identifying information shared during the interview will be deleted from the audio-recording prior to transcription. After the interview has been completed and transcribed, you will be invited to review a copy of the transcript for accuracy and provide feedback. You will also have an opportunity to review a draft of the study's findings and provide

feedback.

You are asked to be open and honest about your perspectives related to quality in higher education. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

### **III. Risks**

Minimal risks are associated with this study. If you choose to share an unpleasant experience with the interviewer, it is possible that you may suffer emotional distress. However, you may decline to answer any question(s) posed during the interview session and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

### **IV. Benefits**

You will have the opportunity to reflect on quality in higher education in a meaningful way. Although you may see little personal benefit from participating, your participation may benefit future faculty members as this study aims to shed light on how quality activities such as accreditation and academic program review may be structured to be more meaningful to front-line faculty members.

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

All data collected in this study will be treated confidentially. A pseudonym will be used to identify you in any written materials. No personal identifying information will be included in interview transcripts. Instead, you will be identified within interview transcripts by a number (also known as the study ID code). Study ID codes will be kept separate from personal information, and will be stored in separate locked file drawers in Molly Hall's office. The researchers are the only individuals who will have access to the interview recordings, interview transcripts, and demographic questionnaires.

At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. Signed informed consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer, which will only be accessible to the research team.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

### **VI. Compensation**

You will not receive compensation for your participation in this research study.

## VII. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- I agree to allow the researchers to audio-record my interview. Initial \_\_\_\_\_
- I agree to allow the researchers to use non-identifying direct quotes. Initial \_\_\_\_\_
- I agree to allow the researchers to use the pseudonym I have chosen when reporting study results. Initial \_\_\_\_\_
- I understand that I will receive a copy of my interview transcript for review and feedback. Initial \_\_\_\_\_
- I understand that I will receive a copy of the study's findings for review and feedback. Initial \_\_\_\_\_

## VIII. Subject's Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject printed name

## IX. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

## X. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991.

-----  
*(Note: each subject must be provided a copy of this form. In addition, the IRB office may stamp its approval on the consent document(s) you submit and return the stamped version to you for use in consenting subjects; therefore, ensure each consent document you submit is ready to be read and signed by subjects.)*

## Appendix E

### Demographic Questionnaire

Participant name:

Preferred pseudonym:

Name of college/university where you currently work:

Primary academic department:

Primary academic discipline:

Faculty rank:

Number of classes you typically teach per semester:

What is considered to be a full teaching load at your institution for your department or discipline?

Please list any other colleges and universities where you have worked:

Number of years you have worked in higher education:

Traditionally, faculty members are expected to engage in teaching, research, and service. In terms of percentages, how much of your time is focused on each of these three areas?

- Teaching:
- Research:
- Service:

Gender:

Race/ethnicity:

After the interview, the audio recordings will be used to create a detailed transcript of the interview. Once the transcript is complete, you will be contacted and invited to read the transcript and make comments. You will also be invited to review a draft of the research findings.

Preferred email address:

## **Appendix F**

### **Interview Guide**

How do you define quality in higher education?

What do you think are the major components of a quality higher education?

What, if anything, has influenced your conceptions of quality in higher education?

How do you think quality in higher education should be measured?

Please describe your involvement with any formal activities related to ensuring or improving quality in higher education such as accreditation, academic program review, or student outcomes assessment.

Assuming that quality-related activities such as accreditation and academic program review will continue to be required in higher education, what do you think could be done to make quality activities more meaningful to front-line faculty members?

## **Appendix G**

### **Key Informant Follow Up Telephone Script**

[I will only call key informants if they do not respond to my initial email. If my call goes to voicemail, I will leave a brief message with my name and telephone number and ask them to call me back.]

#### **Telephone Script:**

“Hello [insert name]. This is Molly Hall from Virginia Tech. How are you? I recently sent you an email about a qualitative research study I am conducting on how tenured faculty members perceive quality in higher education. In my email, I asked if you would be willing to identify 10-15 tenured faculty members at your institution who meet the study criteria and you believe may be willing to participate. I just wanted to follow up and see if there are any questions I can answer for you?”

I will then answer questions as needed. If key informants say that they are interested in identifying faculty members, I will send them a basic spreadsheet that has columns for the name of the institution, the name of the faculty member, the faculty member’s email address, the faculty member’s telephone number, and the faculty member’s academic department, and ask them to please complete the spreadsheet and return it to me by an agreed upon date.

If key informants express that they do not wish to participate, I will thank them for their time and contact an alternative key informant at the institution.

## Appendix H

### Participant Follow Up Telephone Script

[This script is written with the expectation that I will most likely be leaving a voicemail message when I attempt to contact potential study participants by telephone.]

Hello Dr./Ms./Mr. [insert name],

This is Molly Hall from Virginia Tech. I recently sent you an email about a qualitative research study that I will be conducting for my dissertation. I am interested in learning more about how tenured faculty members view quality in higher education. I know this is a very busy time of year and wanted to reiterate that most of the data collection for this study will take place during the summer. **If you have any questions about this research or would like more information, please give me a call at (857)204-0070.** Thank you.

[If I do reach a potential participant, I will change the highlighted sentence to “Are there any questions I can answer for you about this study?”]

## Appendix I

### Second Participant Recruitment Email

[If I have not been able to reach my minimum sample sizes, this email will be sent to the members of my initial participant pools who have not responded to any previous communications.]

Dear Dr./Ms./Mr. [insert name],

I wanted to let you know that I am still recruiting tenured faculty members at [insert name of institution] to participate in my research on faculty members' perceptions of quality in higher education.

As a reminder, I am currently a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech and this research is being completed for my dissertation. Should you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete one 60 minute interview that will be scheduled according to your availability and location preference. I hope to complete all participant interviews in person.

Currently much more is known about how university administrators view quality in higher education than how teaching faculty perceive quality. Benefits of your participation in this study include the opportunity to help fill this gap in the literature and to reflect on quality in higher education in a meaningful way. This research may also offer insights into how quality processes such as accreditation and academic program review may become more valuable to teaching faculty.

This study has been approved by Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about the study or are interested in participating, please contact me at [mrhall@vt.edu](mailto:mrhall@vt.edu) or (857)204-0070.

Many thanks,  
Molly

Molly Hall, M.S.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Research & Evaluation  
Virginia Tech