LEVERAGING UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENTS: 
A CASE STUDY ANALYZING COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC TEAMS’ 
CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS ADVANCING MISSION STATEMENTS

A Dissertation 
presented to 
the Faculty of the Graduate School 
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment 
Of the Requirements for the Degree 
Doctor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

by

NICOLE FREEMAN

Dr. Sandy Hutchinson, Dissertation Supervisor

JULY 2016
The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
dissertation entitled

LEVERAGING UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENTS:
A CASE STUDY ANALYZING COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC TEAMS’
CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS ADVANCING MISSION STATEMENTS

presented by Nicole Freeman,
a candidate for the degree of doctor of educational leadership and policy analysis, and
hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

________________________________________
Dr. Sandy Hutchinson

________________________________________
Dr. Barbara Martin

________________________________________
Dr. Douglas Thomas

________________________________________
Dr. Steve Ritter
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the coaches, competitors, and alumni competitors of the four competitive academic teams who agreed to participate in this case study. Without their willingness to engage in the research process, this study would not have been possible. I am truly grateful to the individuals associated with the University of Central Missouri’s Mock Trial, DECA, LAE, and Speech & Debate teams. To the coaches, thank you for caring so deeply for your students that you invest countless hours into them and your team as you build scholars, leaders, and advocates. To the competitors and alumni, thank you for caring about your craft and team so much that you devote your free time to representing UCM with poise and professionalism. You are a gift to the University.

Additionally, I would like to thank the members of my committee who supported me throughout the research process. Dr. Martin, Dr. Thomas and Dr. Ritter were always willing to provide a kind demeanor, constructive feedback, and critical attention to detail. I am truly grateful to have worked with such a collaborative committee, and I will forever be thankful for your willingness to serve.

Finally, I must thank my dissertation and program advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. Thank you for being such an encouraging, selfless, and passionate educator, leader and mentor. I have learned more both professionally and personally from you and my time in the ELPA program than I can begin to express, and for that, I will be forever grateful. Thank you for your constant guidance and consistent motivation. You have made me a better educator, coach, and leader. As cliché as it may sound, there truly are no words to adequately explain how much you have influenced me. Thank you.
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Leveraging University Mission Statements:
A Case Study Analyzing Competitive Academic Teams’ Contributions Towards Advancing Mission Statements

Nicole Freeman

Dr. Sandra Hutchinson, Dissertation Supervisor

Abstract

This case study examines the importance of program alignment with a university’s mission and pedagogical commitment to students and articulates the unique ways in which competitive academic teams advance the mission and learning contract of the University of Central Missouri. By engaging in site-specific research that highlights how co-curricular activities such as competitive academic teams, advance the university’s mission, programs can take a proactive approach to sharing with university administration the unique ways in which they can provide data to fulfill the Higher Learning Commission’s (HLC) accreditation requirements, contribute to the overall success of the university, and solidify their own position amongst the institutional community.
Section I

Introduction to the Background of the Study

According to Dr. Pat Lynch, the President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc. (2010), in times of economic downsizing, the phrase often adopted is “we simply need to learn to do more with less,” in an attempt to continue to have high levels of production and momentum (p. 1). This mentality is not new in higher education. Since the 1980s, policy regarding higher education has evolved to be more focused on economic gain and market model approaches (St. John, Daun-Barnett & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). This ideological shift, along with yearly projected state budget cuts, enrollment variance, and campus funding realignments, greatly influences administrative decisions regarding resource allocation and budgetary spending at many institutions of higher education, including the University of Central Missouri (UCM). Although the “more with less” ideology is often used with positive intent as an attempt to motivate and encourage employees that mission effectiveness and overall efficiency can continue despite an environment of economic stringency through hard work and frugality alone, Lynch would disagree. She explained,

It's time to let go of the fantasy that we can do "more with less." Why? Because we can't - not if we're honest with ourselves. If we overburden people and systems, we will succeed only in burning out employees, experiencing equipment and process meltdowns, and cutting corners or engaging in other activities that will come back to haunt us in the long-run if not in the short-run. (p. 1)

Although Lynch’s words are directed towards the business world, they still ring true to the current financial situation many institutions of higher education face. Analysts and
fiscal researchers Mitchell and Leachman (2015), writing for The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, explained how deeply institutions of higher education have been impacted by reductions in state and federal financial support. Many states are currently still funding higher education at a rate lower than they did during the economic recession in 2008, resulting in “. . . cuts to educational or other services, or both” (p. 1). For instance, English Professor Dr. Peter Schock (2015) expressed in his opinion piece for The New Orleans Advocate, “. . . doing more with less really means that you cut into the flesh and bone, punishing students in the process” (p. 1). Schock teaches at the University of New Orleans, which has involuntarily increased class sizes by 31% while eliminating 18 faculty positions in his department since 2009. The University of New Orleans is not an anomaly, however. When economic instability contributes to the creation of an overburdened system, universities are forced to evaluate spending habits and make difficult decisions regarding funding and resource allocation. This process can become extremely challenging, as creating a matrix to guide budgetary decision-making is often an arduous task. However, universities have one frequently overlooked tool that should provide the foundation for creating such a matrix - their mission statement.

As stated on their website, The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) (2015), responsible for the accreditation of the majority of colleges and universities across the United States, requires universities to have a mission statement that “articulate[s] publicly the organization’s commitments, defines the varied internal and external constituencies the organization intends to serve, and includes a strong commitment to high academic standards that sustain and advance excellence in higher learning” (p. 1). Further, and perhaps an even more compelling reason to use mission statements as a means to guide
budgetary decisions, are two other HLC core components that must be met for accreditation: “The institution’s academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission,” and “The institution’s planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission” (p. 1). Essentially, mission statements are viewed as being the words that guide and direct the actions that occur upon the campus grounds, including instruction, campus offerings/activities, and extra/co-curricular offerings. Therefore, one could assume if a mission statement is being fulfilled, the university is meeting or exceeding the goals set out by the HLC for successful accreditation, making it a perfect tool to use as a decision-making matrix for funding and strategic planning.

The University of Central Missouri’s mission is to “. . . transform students into lifelong learners, dedicated to service, with the knowledge, skills and confidence to succeed and lead in the region, state, nation and world” (University of Central Missouri Fact Book, 2014, p. ii). The vehicle, or strategy by which UCM advances this mission is through the recently adopted Learning to a Greater Degree contract, through which the University promises to provide students with “an educational experience that extends beyond the classroom,” that will prepare students to “excel in the fast-paced world of today and tomorrow” (UCM Quick Reference Guide, p. 2). One way UCM achieves this goal is through offering students the opportunity to participate in a plethora of academic extra and co-curricular activities, such as competitive forensics (speech and debate) or mock trial, for example. Involvement in forensics and similar academic teams enhances critical thinking abilities, builds confidence and leadership skills, and teaches the importance of discourse and civic engagement (Bartanen, 1998; Rogers, 2005), which
seem to directly link to and support UCM’s Learning to a Greater Degree contract and, therefore, subsequent mission statement. However, due to budget constraints, misconceptions surrounding competitive academic teams, and the lack of a credible means to both establish and measure the success of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, it is becoming increasingly more challenging to meet and measure the University’s mission via participation on academic teams.

Statement of the Problem

Problem of Practice

It is not uncommon for smaller academic programs that are not viewed as financial contributors to the larger university income to be scrutinized, especially in times of financial instability (Littlefield, 1991). When a program is seen as one that strains resources while operating within a market-model ideology, a program’s viability can become endangered. If a program cannot justify they are worth the money it costs to fund them, then solidifying a place of value in the university community is nearly impossible. For example, athletic programs have the opportunity to generate income by charging admission and attracting donors, thus contributing revenue. This eases the financial burden on the university budget, making athletics at least somewhat self-sufficient. However, competitive academic teams often do not have the opportunity to charge such spectator fees; therefore, the programs are largely dependent upon administrative financial support. These teams risk being viewed as programs that do not generate income or increase enrollment, and can come to be viewed as relatively expensive investments in terms of the size of student population they serve (Bartanen, 1998; Rogers, 2005).
In an attempt to control and monitor funding for competitive academic teams, UCM recently implemented a new academic teams funding committee and model that unintentionally creates several challenges for teams and coaches, thus limiting advanced planning, potential for growth, academic and competitive opportunities for students and, ultimately, overall team success. For example, one of UCM’s largest and most active competitive academic teams, the speech and debate team, has received nearly a 30% reduction in the overall availability of direct administrative funding since 2012 (J. Rogers, personal communication, June, 2013). Resource cuts to this magnitude, which are often rooted in the market-model ideology, can harm both the academic/pedagogic and social benefits that program participation offers (Harris & Witte, 2011). It is possible the social and academic benefits fostered by the university’s competitive academic teams support and advance the university’s overall mission and contract, while also adhering to the HLC’s accreditation standards. However, without a proper matrix for measuring the teams’ social and educational value linked directly to the mission statement and learning contract, the competitive teams have little data to demonstrate whether or not their presence adds value to the university. Due to this, some of UCM’s largest and most active academic teams, which may be valuable assets to the fulfillment of the university’s mission statement, thereby providing potentially helpful supporting data for HLC accreditation, are in danger of not reaching their full competitive and academic potential at the very least and, at the very worst, face the possibility of elimination.

Currently, there is a great deal of research available to advance this study, focusing primarily on the two areas that will provide the foundation: the purpose and function of mission statements and learning contracts, and the benefits gleaned from
participation on teams at the collegiate level. The gap in the literature exists primarily within the realm of the contributions of collegiate competitive academic teams, as the vast majority of research examines only participation on athletic teams, not academic teams. The most significant gap, however, exists within the lack of research on the values and benefits gained from participation on collegiate academic teams and how to align them/measure them using a university’s mission statement or learning contract. Despite there being a small amount of research on specific academic teams and the skills they teach, there is significantly less linking said programs to educational policy and decision-making. This case study will attempt to evaluate whether or not competitive academic teams can fulfill and advance a university’s mission statement, while also highlighting the importance of aligning program/team outcomes with their institution’s learning contract and/or subsequent mission statement.

**Purpose of the Study**

Although academic teams may not generate income in the same obvious ways as athletics do, they are able to make valuable contributions to the university if they are successful programs with high levels of administrative support. Littlefield (1991) explained, “Debate and individual events programs enhanced the recruitment of students to the institution, the recruitment of faculty, the attraction of scholarship contributions, and enhanced the education of students” (p. 91). It can be assumed that other competitive academic teams would produce the same results if fully supported by the institution. Many competitive academic teams and programs seem to perceptually embody the university’s mission. However, without a direct, visible mode of contribution, academic teams’ contributions may be misunderstood and risk going unnoticed. In the 2012 State
of the University Address, upon which the Learning to a Greater Degree contract for strategic placement was introduced, University President Charles Ambrose explained, “. . . it will serve as a compass for the decisions we make on behalf of the university and the behavior that supports the overall direction” (Murphy, 2012, para. 4). Since mission statements, and in this case the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, are designed to guide the actions, priorities, and decisions of an institution, it is imperative that research is conducted to identify whether or not UCM’s competitive academic teams are in alignment with, and support, the new Learning to a Greater Degree contract, thus showing if/how they contribute to the university’s overall success. Therefore, this study will examine whether or not the University’s competitive academic teams support and further the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and, as a result, overarching mission.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How can the four pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract be operationalized regarding contract and mission statement fulfillment?
2. Do the competitive academic teams at the University of Central Missouri effectively contribute to the fulfillment of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and mission? If so, how?

**Framework**

**Conceptual Framework**

In 2012, UCM adopted the Learning to a Greater Degree contract as a means to fulfill the overall mission of the institution. This new contract identifies four “reasons to believe,” or pillars of academic success, all of which link to the larger institutional

According to the 2012 UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, engaged learning refers to the hands-on, practical training students receive while on campus, which should prepare them for a future in an ever-changing, fast-paced society. The worldly perspective pillar is dedicated to providing students with opportunities to prepare them for interactions with individuals from other cultures, as well as “employment in a globalized market and economy” (p. 1). Preparing students for a culture of service refers to the numerous campus programs and service learning projects devoted to promoting the importance of volunteer service work. Finally, the future-focused academics initiative focuses on providing students with educational experiences and training with “new technologies within their field” that will make them competitive in the job market and enhance their professional success post-graduation (p. 1).

Although these tenants sound like an excellent foundation to any academic program, it has been difficult to tangibly identify or measure whether or not the university is successfully achieving these pillars, which is a problem often faced by many institutions of higher education (Davis, Ruhe, Lee & Rajadhyaksha, 2007). This difficulty is rooted in the verbiage chosen for the overall mission statement, as well as how the contract’s pillars are specifically defined, and how those definitions articulate into measurable outcomes. As a result, measuring whether or not the mission statement is fulfilled is quite challenging, due to the language in the mission statement and contract being overly philosophical and seemingly un-tangible (Davis, Ruhe, Lee & Rajadhyaksha, 2007). Due to this, the researcher operationalized the Learning to a
Greater Degree pillars based on the specific definitions provided by the 2012 UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, as it serves as the primary vehicle to mission statement success. These definitions, to a large extent, provide the conceptual framework for this study.

In addition, this study was guided by research conducted by Adams (2008); Kissell (2011); Meacham (2008); Meacham and Gaff (2006); and Ozdem (2001), which stress the importance of a university mission statement as a means of reflecting an institution’s educational commitment and contract. The researcher will then build upon the importance of mission statements by discussing why there is often tremendous difficulty in measuring the success of mission statement and/or learning contract fulfillment, despite being a necessity for HLC accreditation: Research conducted by Allen (2001); Berg, Csikszentmihalyi, Nakamura (2003); Camelia and Marius (2013); and Davis, Ruhe, Lee & Rajadhyaksha (2007) will serve as the foundation to this discussion. Finally, this broad foundation will then be contextualized specifically to the University of Central Missouri.

Theoretical Framework

Due to the nature and specificity of this study, two theories are used in tandem, serving as the study’s guiding theoretical framework. First, the Human Capital Theory, which asserts that human capital is gained by sacrificing resources today in order to reap the benefits in the future, is used (Becker, 1993; Mincer, 1974; Psacharopoulos, 2006; Schultz, 1961; Scott, 2004). The Human Capital Theory provides the foundation to discuss the academic and social benefits gleaned from obtaining advanced education. This premise is then be built upon further by using Astin’s (1984) theory of student
involvement and retention, which serves as the link to mission statement fulfillment. For human capital to be obtained, mission statements must be fulfilled. Student engagement influences retention and involvement rates which, in turn, impacts mission statement fulfillment and, therefore, human capital. Simply stated, students who are more actively engaged in their education through participation in extra/co-curricular activities have higher retention rates and more opportunities to fulfill a university’s mission statement because their learning extends far beyond the classroom (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1999).

Once the importance of human capital and student involvement is established, then a more narrow perspective will be taken, examining the skills garnered by academic team participation. Specifically, the collaborative research done by The Conference Board, The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families and Society for Human Resource Management (2014) identifying the top 21st century skills students need to succeed beyond the classroom, Rogers’ (2002; 2005), Kuyper’s (2011), and Bartanen’s (1998) research regarding long-term benefits to forensics team involvement and Pascarella and Trunkenmiller’s (1999), Ueno’s (2012), and Downs and Ashton’s (2011) studies analyzing of the benefits gleaned from competitive teams will be used.

Beker’s (1964) and Scott’s (2004) work on Human Capital Theory, along with Astin’s (1984) work on student involvement and the research on team participation will then be discussed within the context of UCM’s Learning to a Greater Degree contract and mission statement, specifically, the definitions of the four pillars: engaged learning, future-focused academics, gaining a worldly perspective, and creating a culture of service. By merging research regarding academic involvement/retention, human capital,
and team involvement, a theoretical framework that provides a means to measure competitive academic teams’ relation to overall mission will be created (Levin & McEwan, 2000; St. John, Daun-Barnett & Moronski-Chapman, 2013).

**Design of the Study**

**Setting**

This study is a qualitative case study of the competitive academic teams relationship to the Learning to a Greater Degree contract at The University of Central Missouri, a mid-sized four-year institution located in Warrensburg, MO. There are currently approximately 13,500 students enrolled at the university, with close to 10,000 being of undergraduate status. UCM offers more than 150 programs of study and boasts a 16:1 student-to-faculty ratio (University of Central Missouri Fact Book, 2014, p, i). More specifically, this study focuses primarily on the two colleges that house the majority of the University’s competitive academic teams: the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and the Harmon College of Business and Professional Studies. Within these two colleges, the following departments sponsor UCM’s largest and most active competitive academic teams: The Department of Criminal Justice, The Business and Marketing Department, The Department of Communication, and The Department of Government, International Studies, and Languages.

**Participants**

Per the definition of the Academic Team Funding Committee, in order to be eligible to receive funding, academic teams must meet the following requirements: the team must be engaged in a competition that is organized/overseen by a regional/national organization external to UCM, faculty from the sponsoring department must serve as the
team’s advisor/coach, the competition preparation and participation must provide educational experience relevant to the student’s academic program, competition must require team engagement by requiring collaborative or cumulative effort of multiple students, and all team competitors must be enrolled as students at UCM (S. Bax, personal communication, August, 2013). Though the number and composition of officially recognized academic teams varies from year to year, nearly 20 teams met the definitional requirements to seek and obtain funding status from the committee during the 2014-2015 school year. Within this study, the researcher focuses solely on competitive academic teams that adhere to the requirements set by the Academic Team Funding Committee, as well as the following requirements set by the researcher: the team must have a designated coach or advisor who actively works with the team to prepare them for competition, the team must compete in more than one competition per year, and their competition structure must lead to a culminating event, such as a state, regional, or national competition. Out of the original 20 teams, four competitive academic teams met the requirements: Mock Trial, DECA, Lambda Alpha Epsilon (LAE), and The Talking Mules Forensics Team.

Mock Trial, housed in the Department of Government, International Studies, and Languages, is an activity that prepares students for careers in law by placing competitors in roles within a courtroom scenario (American Mock Trial Association, 2015, para. 1). Both DECA and LAE are housed in the Harmon College of Business and Professional Studies. DECA is an organization that prepares participants for careers in business industries such as marketing, finance, hospitality, and management (DECA, 2015, para. 1), whereas LAE is an organization that teaches professionalism, ethical conduct, and
educational training within the criminal justice field (American Criminal Justice Association, 2008, para. 1). The Talking Mules Forensics team is located in the Department of Communication and is defined as an activity that teaches competitors critical thinking, research, performance, writing, and presentation skills (National Forensics Association, 2015, para. 2).

Individual participants in this study include coaches, current competitors, and alumni competitors of one or more of the four identified competitive academic teams, as well as various university administrators of Dean status or higher. The researcher preferred there be 25 or more study participants to represent each academic team, including a balanced population of both current team members and alumni, however, due to the age of some of the teams, adjustments were expected and made.

**Data Collection Tools**

The researcher used the definitions of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract provided to create various data collection tools to use within this study, including interview questions, focus group questions, and an electronic survey. The specific components of each pillar’s definition served as the foundation to the questions created, in an attempt to operationalize how the definitions might create specific criteria through which to examine the contributions of the academic teams identified. In doing so, the researcher was able to ask questions unique to the pillars, and if/how they are advanced through the practices of the four participating academic teams, thus answering both RQ 1 and RQ 2. The instruments themselves address RQ 1 by serving as the modes of operationalization of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract. The data collected will answer RQ 2. To ensure ethical soundness, this study received IRB approval and
participation was strictly voluntary. Individuals were provided with consent forms reminding them of their voluntary status. For individuals who agree to participate in a focus group or interview, permission to record the session was also obtained. Research was collected via interview, focus group, and electronic survey. Coaches of competitive academic teams and various administrators were interviewed using a list of open-ended questions, allowing ample time for follow-up questions (Appendix A & B). Current team competitors, as well as alumni competitors were first asked to participate in an electronic survey that includes 26 questions. The electronic survey asks a series of open-ended questions focused on team participation and the Learning to a Greater Degree contract (Appendix C & D). At the end of the survey, respondents read an announcement requesting participation in a focus group, in an attempt to collect richer, more descriptive data. If respondents were willing to participate in the focus group, they were asked to contact the researcher to ensure all participation is voluntary. Competitor focus groups were specific to each team to aid in clarity, and lasted no longer than 90 minutes. Groups were asked a series of open-ended questions, while allowing time for discussion and follow-up questions (Appendix E). Alumni were asked to participate in a general, non-specific focus group (Appendix F).

**Data Analysis**

Due to the primarily qualitative nature of this study, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. Throughout the data collection process, vigorous field notes were taken to aid in data clarity, organization, and inventory. Merriam (2009) explained “the overall process of data analysis begins by identifying segments in your data set that are responsive to your research questions” (p. 176). Therefore, to begin, open coding was
used to analyze the interviews, focus groups, and answers to the open-ended survey questions, looking specifically for “recurring regularities” among the answers provided, keeping the data gathered from each team separated (p. 177). Codes were assigned to the recurring themes. The researcher then engaged in analytical coding, allowing for a deeper analysis of the data, linking the themes specific to each team to the pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, mission statement, and research questions.

**Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls**

When addressing the limitations of this study, the researcher contends that a case study examining only one university’s linkage between its guiding documents and core statements and their possible expression through academic teams may limit the ability to identify generalizable outcomes that could be applied to different universities that operate under a different funding model, mission, and/or programmatic setting. Although the study produced usable results in more generalized settings, to repeat the study, an institution must re-create the data collection instruments to be uniquely aligned with its mission statement, therefore impacting the ability to easily replicate the study within a different setting or context. In addition, this study is only examining competitive academic teams’ contributions to mission statement fulfillment, when it is highly likely that other academic-based campus programs also advance mission fulfillment efforts. Therefore, studying only four programs, which are all competitive academic teams, is somewhat limiting in nature. Finally, because the data collection tools are institution-specific, the researcher acknowledges that the research instruments have not been empirically tested or validated.
Prior to engaging in the data collection process, this study was rooted in two primary assumptions held by the researcher. First, the perception that the UCM competitive academic teams do advance, at the very least, parts of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract simply by their nature as competitive academic teams. However, this assumption leads to the second and, perhaps more important, supposition: the researcher was not fully aware of the detailed operations, philosophies, and practices of three of the four competitive academic teams and, therefore, was only assuming they engage in the practice and promotion of academic advancement.

The researcher remained mindful of personal bias throughout the study, due to her position and relationship with one of the teams. Although specific design controls were implemented to ensure the study’s overall credibility, it was important to identify researcher bias as a potential limitation to the study. To manage bias beyond simply being mindful of it, credibility and validity were maintained throughout the study by using three key practices. Firstly, continuous communication with the study’s advisor occurred. Approval was also be obtained and updated barring any major changes through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Provost Deborah Curtis. Secondly, multiple methods of data collection were employed to increase data triangulation efforts (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the researcher engaged in respondent validation practices to reduce personal biases and ensure correct interpretation of data collected.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

**Academic teams funding committee.** Upon much discussion, in 2013, the Provost/Chief Learning Officer at the University of Central Missouri implemented the academic team funding committee as an attempt to streamline funding requests from
competitive academic teams. Prior to the committee’s existence, coaches of each team would ask the Provost directly for supplemental funding to support competitive events not covered by the teams’ regular budget. Often, requests were made for ‘post-season’ events such as state, regional or national finals tournaments. In addition, funding for international competitions was provided through these direct requests to the Provost’s Office. The committee’s purpose is “to encourage and promote co-curricular engagement of students by providing support for university competitive academic teams” (S. Bax, personal communication, August, 2013). The committee is responsible for reviewing funding applications submitted by each competitive academic team, awarding money to the team, and ensuring that teams follow the requirements set forth for spending, including documentation and funding accountability. The committee is chaired by the Vice Provost for Student Experience and Engagement. The committee is comprised of several faculty representatives appointed from each academic college. Currently, only one member of the committee is a coach of a competitive academic team and, thus, has experience in the intricacies and challenges of coaching.

**Competitive academic teams.** At the collegiate level, a competitive academic team is similar to an athletic team in the sense that it is a group of individuals led by a coach that compete against teams affiliated with other universities in an attempt to earn honors/victories. The difference lies in the activity. Competitive academic teams compete in activities that are rooted in academics. They are often referred to as co-curricular activities because they complement academic learning, while athletics are referred to as extra-curricular activities, because they are not affiliated with specific curriculum.
**Culture of service.** A culture of service, which is the third pillar of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, refers to the many hours UCM students, faculty and staff devote to service and volunteering, in an attempt to teach the importance of civic engagement and generosity both on campus and beyond. Service learning that occurs both inside and outside of the classroom environment are also components of a culture of service (UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, 2012).

**DECA.** DECA, formerly known as Distributive Education Clubs of America and/or Delta Epsilon Chi, is an organization associated with business industries, and is considered a competitive academic team within the College of Business. The activity strives to prepare participants for careers in such business fields as marketing, finance, hospitality and management. Participants may compete in individual or team events, and speaking or written events. Individual competition includes a written exam, as well as role-playing simulations. Team competitive events include strategic problem solving relating to provided case studies. The events foster skills in team building, creative thinking, and problem solving within a business context (DECA, Inc., 2015).

**Engaged learning.** The first pillar of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract is engaged learning, which refers to the many campus programs, opportunities and initiatives that ready graduates to “. . . enter the workplace prepared with practical, hands-on experience” (UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, 2012, p. 1). Examples of engaged learning at UCM include events such as The State Farm Marketing and Sales Competition, which “gives students an opportunity to test their knowledge and skill in selling insurance to young adults. . .” and the Integrative Business Experience, where students create a product to market and sell to the campus and community (p. 1).
Forensics. Forensics is a term synonymous with speech and debate at the collegiate level, making it a competitive academic team. University speech and debate teams may specialize in either individual events (speech events), debate, or be considered a comprehensive program, meaning the team participates in both individual events and at least one format of debate. The University of Central Missouri’s forensics team is a comprehensive program, competing in eleven different individual speaking events and four types of debate, both domestically and internationally. Although typically housed in the Department of Communication or Performing Arts, forensics is an activity that is typically not affiliated with a specific major, as it teaches participants soft skills such as critical thinking, conducting research, writing, and presentation skills, which are useful in any major or profession (National Forensics Association, 2015).

Future-focused academics. The fourth pillar to the Learning to a Greater Degree contract is future-focused academics, which denotes UCM’s incorporation of new technologies and teachings that “. . . expose students to real-world applications. . .” (UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, 2012, p. 1). Examples include UCM’s music technology program that trains students in the most current technologies and practices within the field, and the professional pilot training program, which “. . . enables students to experience jet aircraft systems from the cockpit of a Boeing 737 and Redbird simulators” (p. 1).

Lambda Alpha Epsilon (LAE). LAE is an organization that teaches professionalism, ethical conduct, and educational training within the criminal justice field, while operating as a competitive academic team. Participating universities consist of LAE chapters who, at regional and national competition, compete against other
chapters in various events such as crime scene investigation, firearms competitions, agility competitions, and academic and written competitions. Success is then measured individually, per event, and also collectively as a team (American Criminal Justice Association, 2008).

**Learning to a Greater Degree Contract.** According to the University of Central Missouri’s 2012 Strategic Positioning Platform and Quick Guide, there are four “reasons to believe,” or pillars that represent the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, which is the learning contract promised by the University to incoming students and their parents/guardians. Essentially, it serves as the University’s promise to provide academic excellence through various modes of involvement, both inside and outside of the classroom. The contract is the vehicle used by the University to further the institutional mission statement.

**Mock Trial.** Mock Trial is an activity designed to prepare students for careers in law by teaching them about the legal system within a competitive atmosphere, making it an example of a competitive academic team. Team members fulfill various roles replicating those present in a courtroom scenario. To prepare, each team is provided with a case packet at the beginning of the competitive season. Participants must study/analyze the case and master their part, or role, in the scenario. During each round of competition teams, comprised of students playing the parts of three attorneys and three witnesses, work together to best present the facts of the case and adherence to court procedure, and are awarded team awards (by winning the trial) and also individual awards, such as Top Attorney or Top Witness (American Mock Trial Association, 2015).
**Worldly perspective.** The second pillar of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract is that of a worldly perspective, which implies that “UCM prepares students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities. . .” (UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, 2012, p. 1). These study abroad opportunities vary from semester long experiences with partner universities overseas to shorter, two week study tour expeditions, often linked to specific departments or programs and/or topics of study. Other experiences that create opportunities to gain exposure to various cultures are also ways to foster a worldly perspective. For example, The International Center’s use of conversation partners, which pairs an international student with one who has been raised in the United States, is an opportunity to influence a worldly perspective.

**Significance of the Study – Scholarship and Practice**

This case study provides a unique analysis of the skills gained by participating on one of the four UCM co-curricular academic teams examined in this case study. Further, it examines whether or not UCM’s competitive academic teams contribute to the advancement of the new Learning to a Greater Degree contract and subsequent mission statement. The significance of this study includes two practical applications, benefitting both the competitive academic teams and also the larger university community. First, if the competitive academic teams are able to produce evidence regarding how they are valuable assets in fulfilling the mission statement, thereby providing valuable data for accreditation, then it may result in greater understanding of how academic teams contribute to the broader institutional community. Such an understanding may lead to greater administrative confidence, support, and financial stability. Or, if the teams are not
fulfilling the contract, thus failing to advance the overall mission, this study’s results could provide an opportunity to re-examine program goals to be better aligned with UCM’s mission and commitment to learning. Secondly, this study provides UCM administration with a measurement tool firmly rooted in the specific tenets of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract pillars. It is possible the measurement tool created for this study could be used to evaluate many other campus programs and opportunities, which would provide administration with strong evidence backed by data which could be used to support mission statement fulfillment during HLC accreditation visits.

On a broader, more scholarly, scale this study also addresses the importance of mission statements that are measurable, as they can be used as tools to evaluate program effectiveness and drive decision-making at both an institutional and programmatic level. Although programs such as academic teams will likely have their own mission, it is important they uphold the university’s mission as well, using it as the foundation upon which specific program outcomes stand. This study explores how mission statements can be powerful tools in justifying programs, making decisions, strategic planning, and proving success, which is useful to a vast audience, not only those involved in competitive academic teams.

Finally, the issue of a progressively restricted financial environment for institutions of higher learning is, and likely will continue to be, a nation-wide challenge. Countless institutions across the United States are faced with funding cuts, forcing program administrators and coaches of extra/co-curricular teams to seek a method to justify their survival. Rogers (2002) observed, “Administrators who are forced to allocate scarce resources within a very competitive environment are faced with no discernable
method for prioritizing allocations based upon measurable results or outcomes” (p. 2).
When looking specifically at the current research regarding collegiate competitive
academic teams, there is a noticeable lack of research addressing the meta-issue of how
the vision and programmatic goals of academic teams specifically link to and further
support the larger issues of institutional missions and goals. The author hopes the model
advanced through this study will serve as a means through which other programs might
find added value to their institutions through linking their programmatic outcomes to
their respective institutional missions and learning contracts.

Summary

As many institutions of higher education struggle to “do more with less,” strategic
and informed decisions regarding spending and resources must be made. When programs
are seen as costly investments, scrutiny will likely occur. Many co-curricular programs,
such as competitive academic teams, often face such scrutiny, resulting in a struggle to
gain support and financial stability in the larger university community. However, the
human capital gained from participation on such teams may be one way to measure
mission statement fulfillment and university success.

At the University of Central Missouri, involvement on competitive academic
teams is an opportunity that is cherished by many students and faculty but, without the
support needed to operate, may become an opportunity lost to many. If these teams
contribute to the fulfillment of UCM’s mission statement and acquisition of human
capital gains, their value must be better analyzed and articulated. However, if they are not
fulfilling the University’s mission, then the teams must use the mission statement as a
catalyst to realign their program outcomes and goals, making the Learning to a Greater
Degree contract the foundation to their operation. If programs such as competitive academic teams can be used to further advance a university’s mission statement and provide usable accreditation data to the HLC, then it is a success for all involved.
Section II

Practitioner Setting for the Study

Introduction

Although it may seem as though using the competitive academic teams as a means to measure mission statement fulfillment would be a logical and seamless process, recent significant changes that have occurred regarding the organizational structure impacting the competitive academic teams’ ability to secure funding and support have obstructed leadership abilities and overall team functionality. Without adequate resources, the competitive academic teams cannot operate at their most optimal level, thus impeding their success and efficacy in fulfilling the University’s mission and Learning to a Greater Degree contract. Despite being a perhaps viable method to verify mission fulfillment to the HLC, structural obstacles are challenging team operations, leading to the question, is the University underutilizing its competitive academic teams as a tool for mission advancement? To fully understand the context of the current climate surrounding the competitive academic teams, the history leading to the structural change, along with an analysis of the impacts upon the organizational and leadership structures are warranted.

History of the Organization

Since their inception, institutions of higher learning have recognized the goal of molding growing minds by fostering intellectual advancement through the pedagogical relationship between the teaching of critical thinking and the resulting practical application: pairing the skill sets learned in the classroom with their application and use outside of the classroom walls. The University of Central Missouri is no different.
According to its website, UCM strives to engage students in “learning to a greater degree” by providing “an educational experience that extends beyond the classroom.” One way UCM seeks to achieve this goal is through encouraging its students to participate in extra and co-curricular activities, such as competitive academic teams. Participation on such teams fosters leadership skills, teaches and sharpens writing and presentational skills, and promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are skills seemingly paralleled by the desired student outcomes identified in the UCM mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree contract (Bartanen, 1998; Rogers, 2005).

As some of the oldest and most successful University teams on campus, the competitive academic teams historically operated under a model typified as primarily functioning as highly individual organizational structures. As they evolved, there was a lack of much direct competition or interaction with the other academic teams on campus. Under this model of operation, the coaches of the competitive academic teams handled all planning, logistical details, decisions and finances. For example, regarding funding, it was common practice for the competitive teams to receive a lump sum budget, often from the college or department the team was housed in, and/or small fundraising efforts. In addition, it was common practice for the academic team coaches to submit additional funding requests to the Provost’s or President’s Office. Often, these funds were used to underwrite “post-season” competitions such as national finals competitions and the annual international debate competition, the Montgomery Cup. The expectation was these additional expenses would be met through these types of ad hoc requests to the Provost.
With those commitments for additional resources in hand, the coaches were expected to operate within the budget and funding constraints responsibly.

Due to a change in leadership at the administrative level, coupled with budget constraints, a new academic team funding committee was implemented and charged with reallocating resources. This was done, initially, to make the additional funding request process available to all academic teams in an attempt to make it more fair and accountable for all. During discussions regarding what the new funding model would look like, concern began to grow amongst the coaches of the teams. Although an attempt was made to collect data concerning each team’s individual make-up, travel schedule and involvement level, according to the administrator appointed to chair and oversee the committee, very few teams submitted their information. This lack of detailed information resulted in the creation of a highly generalized model that struggles to address individual and unique academic team designs. Consequently, the unique funding needs of each of the academic teams’ operations are difficult to sufficiently gauge and thus fulfill. The most significant change that occurred with the implementation of the new funding model was the eradication of direct monetary gifts from the Provost. Now, the funds the Provost used to provide through direct requests to individual academic teams have been placed in one account to be managed and allocated by the funding committee. With roughly 19 eligible academic teams fulfilling the requirements put forth by the committee capable of filing funding requests, a smooth and streamlined process certainly needed, but not yet in place (Appendix G & H).

Although founded under a somewhat generalized model, the funding committee attempts to operate under very specific parameters in an effort to make the funding
request process fair to all 19 teams. In order to acquire additional funding, separate funding requests must be completed and submitted for each event a team seeks to attend, and the committee, which only meets three or four times a year, must then approve the requests and allocate funds. This has resulted in some academic teams operating in a state of flux. Small teams with limited competition opportunities may only need to file a single request in August for their one competitive event that occurs in April. Once the committee meets and approves the request, typically by the end of September, that coach has seven months to plan for that single event. However, teams with ‘seasons,’ which begin in September and extend through April, such as the Speech & Debate Team and the Mock Trial Team, have numerous tournaments that lead to state, regional, and national finals competition. Often 10 or more tournaments must be scheduled. This necessitates the generation of 10 individual funding requests to the committee, which may only provide funding for the fall tournaments. The coach often has no idea if the spring funding requests will be funded or at what level. Hence, the ability to plan a season-long tournament schedule becomes challenging, at best. Coaches are faced with the conundrum of spending all of their available funds to get qualified for ‘post season’ tournaments only to find there is no additional funding from the committee to be able to afford to send those students who have qualified.

For the 2015-2016 school year, the committee attempted to address the concern regarding the inability to plan team activities for the year by announcing funding allocations for both fall and spring requests in September for those tournaments or activities which might lead to qualification to attend a ‘post season’ tournament; however, they have withheld funding decisions with regard to those ‘post-season’ events.
Although this new procedure does alleviate some of the planning concerns, it still makes long-term planning difficult. What if the committee decides to withhold the end of the season funding? Or, much more likely, what if the committee does not have the funds remaining to fully fund their approximately 30%? Do the coaches send every student to each season-long qualifying tournament, which can be expensive, or do they spend cautiously, withholding funding from their operating budgets just in case the committee cannot fund or fully fund the ‘post-season’ tournament(s).

In summary, the unintended result is that a great deal of control has been relinquished by the leaders of each team due to this inability to know how much money is available to fund operations in advance with sufficient time to set competitive goals and develop planning strategies. There is also extensive follow-up paperwork that must be completed to prove proper spending and to justify future allocations, increasing the amount of time spent on administrative duties significantly (Appendix I). These accounting procedures are already required, collected and stored by the university’s office of accounting; however, additional copies and reports must be submitted to the committee resulting in needless redundancies, while the coaches are spending less time leading their teams through coaching and more time serving their teams as managers.

This change in structure has impacted the competitive academic teams’ own organizational structure and leadership capabilities, as it has created a significant shift in power and decision-making. Oddly enough, the conceptualization and implementation of this process has occurred simultaneously with the University integrating more campus-wide efforts to collect and track data for assessment and accreditation purposes. Essentially, an interesting dichotomy is created; while the University attempts to collect
data proving mission fulfillment for HLC accreditation purposes, it is also complicating operational efficiency for the competitive academic teams, which may be a valuable asset in providing data demonstrating mission statement and learning contract fulfillment. To understand this further, a deeper analysis of the organizational structure and its impacts on leadership is necessary.

**Organizational Analysis**

The organizational and subsequent leadership changes that occurred due to the adoption of the academic team funding committee can best be analyzed using Bolman and Deal’s (2008) structural and political frames. The structural frame places great emphasis on implementation of a structure that places people in the correct roles, governed by a hierarchy of leadership and clear rules and regulations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Structure is a beneficial tool to enhance productivity and clarity within organizations, however, when the structure is dramatically changed, thus changing the roles and rules that pertain to leadership and management, conflict can emerge. As Bolman and Deal (2008) explained, “change undermines existing structural arrangements, creating ambiguity, confusion, and distrust” (p. 383), which occurred when the new funding committee model was proposed and implemented.

In the past, the relationship between upper administration and the competitive academic teams could best be described as a Professional Bureaucracy (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Within this model, the majority of decisions are made at the operational level, among those highly specialized individuals who hold expert and legitimate power which, in this case, are the coaches of each competitive academic team (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Northhouse, 2013). Within this dyad, the University would be considered the strategic
apex, with the coaches serving as the operating core, or the leaders of the team. Within this structure, the sub-structure, that of the coach/team operation, subscribed to a simple structure, allowing coaches a great deal of freedom when making decisions regarding team management. Teams were coordinated using both vertical and lateral communication and decision-making techniques, with the bulk of logistical planning occurring at the vertical level, with pertinent information being disseminated laterally to the team members. By implementing both vertical and lateral coordination, team communication flowed smoothly and readily. This control provided the coaches with the perfect balance between creating too loose and too tight a sub-structure among their respective teams.

The implementation of the new funding model, however, has changed the organizational structure to a more divisionalized model (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Here, the committee overseeing academic team funding fills the role of the organization’s headquarters, thus holding a great deal of reward power (Northouse, 2013). The teams are considered to be just one of the many divisions at UCM. This model shifts the bulk of decision-making power and ability to the headquarter level, reducing the leaders with expert and legitimate power of much of their abilities to plan and coordinate. Now, rather than knowing how much money each team has to operate, there is an element of ambiguity present. Although the committee tries to adhere to the needs of each academic team to the best of their ability, numbers fluctuate somewhat consistently, due to the nature of applying for monies. This has led to coaches attempting to plan their competitive season in a continuous state of flux, which has resulted in a significant change in leadership and operational style.
When Bolman and Deal (2008) outline the tenants to the structural frame, they explained, “organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures” and “structures must be designed to fit an organization’s current circumstances (including its goals, technology, workforce, and environment” (p. 47). Within the new structure, these two tenants are not met due to the complexity created and by overlooking academic team diversity. The generalized model does not allow for much consideration regarding the structural differences within the academic teams. For instance, some teams have fewer than five members, only participate in one or two competitions and rarely, if ever, travel. Other teams are quite large and travel extensively, both nationally and internationally. During the 2015 fall semester, each team, regardless of size, success, or overall schedule, was provided with roughly 30% of the funds requested (S. Bax, personal communication, September, 2015).

The implications that have arisen from the new model have led to an increased presence of Bolman and Deal’s (2008) political frame within the UCM competitive academic teams’ landscape. Although doing little to foster cohesion and synergy amongst the teams, the old funding method created amicable relationships among the coaches, while providing the ability to operate independently of one another. However, the structural changes that have occurred due to the new funding model have created a competitive arena for the academic teams in which to compete. The model has created a forced interdependence as all teams vie for limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The political frame asserts that coalitions are formed among varying members who, despite being interdependent, continue to embrace personal interests, agendas, and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Often, those differences are magnified in the quest to acquire
scarce resources and power, causing conflict among the coalition members (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In this situation, the competitive academic teams have been placed into a coalition, somewhat unwillingly. Due to the partnership being imposed upon the coaches, there is more resistance than acceptance currently occurring. Coaches have unique goals focusing on the success and livelihood of their specific team, but when placed in the same competitive arena to obtain resources, a sense of urgency to survive and gain power can emerge. With even fewer resources to compete for, the teams must attempt to “articulate preferences and mobilize power to get what [they] want,” thus harming efforts to build positive coalitions (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 201).

Leadership Analysis

Although leadership was discussed to some extent while analyzing the organizational structure due to the power shifting to the hands of the funding committee and administration, the most significant impact to leadership has occurred at the coaching level. Ultimately, this shift in power and control has created an overbounded system where an underbounded system once existed, resulting in significant leadership changes at best, and a relegation of leadership at worst (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Prior to the organizational shift, the coaches of the competitive academic teams had the ability to act as what Kotter (1990) referred to as leader-managers. They were able to manage their team by planning and organizing for the future because they were fully aware of budgetary constraints and had a great deal of control over the potential problem-causing variables. Additionally, by having such control over the daily logistical operations, the coaches were able to lead their teams effectively by creating vision and motivating team members to strive for success and cohesion (Kotter, 1990). They did not have to spend
lengthy amounts of time engaging in problem-solving, which is more of a managerial trait (Northouse, 2013). Rather, the coaches were able to build cohesion, plan for the future, and motivate individuals. The work the coaches were able to do under the previous model of operation was dynamic in nature, allowing for greater opportunity to position each team for success (Senge, 1990/2005).

The structural shift has changed the coaches’ power and decision-making abilities. Coaches now must act more as managers than leaders and spend significantly more time completing a lengthy and circular paper trail, increasing the amount of administrative duties, while decreasing the ability to fulfill other coaching responsibilities. Due to the nature and fluidity of the funding request process, the ability to think dynamically or plan for the future is diminished. Bolman and Deal (2008) explained, “formal structure…has a negative impact if it gets in our way, buries us in red tape, or makes it too easy for management to control us” (p. 51). Now, rather than spending time coaching and preparing their respective competitive academic teams or acting as leaders, the coaches must “fight complexity with complexity,” assuming a more managerial role, which prohibits abilities to lead-effectively (Senge, 2005, p. 442).

When discussing leadership, Heifetz and Laurie (1997) identify adaptive challenges as one of the greatest difficulties leaders face. These challenges are defined as changes that “. . . force organizations to clarify their values, develop new strategies, and learn new ways of operating,” (p.57). The implementation of the new strategic organizational model of academic teams funding at UCM could be considered an adaptive challenge. Often, when faced with adaptive challenges, leaders have a difficult time navigating the individuals they lead through the time of change simply because the
situation is often predicated in feelings of distress (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). To alleviate the distress, and successfully lead through the change, Heifetz and Laurie suggested, “Solutions to adaptive challenges reside not in the executive suit but in the collective intelligence of employees at all levels, who need to use one another as resources, often across boundaries, and learn their way to those solutions” (p. 58). In the case of the academic teams at UCM, it would seem that the leaders/coaches of the academic teams would be considered part of the collective intelligence; however, as aforementioned, the existence of the political frame and continuous struggle for resources is prohibiting the academic team leaders from creating a coalition of collective intelligence amongst one another. The model unintentionally places each team in direct competition for funding. Historically, coaches often kept abreast of the performances of other academic teams, most often cheering them on to success. However, an unintended result of the competitive funding model now pits one team’s success against another’s. For example, if one team is more successful, one may begin to wonder if that team will be given more funding, thus reducing the amount available for other teams. This seriously inhibits a sense of cooperation and collaboration necessary to produce coalitions or collective intelligence.

Ethically, this places coaches in a unique conundrum in regards to leadership and coaching strategies. Mihelic, Lipicnik, and Tekavcic (2010) explained, “being ethical is about playing fair, thinking about welfare of others and thinking about consequences of one’s actions” (p. 33). However, when the survival of one’s team is threatened, the acquisition of resources becomes of utmost importance, again reiterating Bolman and Deal’s (2008) metaphor of the political arena. A competitive mentality can easily take
over when negotiating for resources and power, clouding ethical decisions and actions. Additionally, coaches are left in a position of success becoming a double-edged sword. On one hand, having a successful competitive season may show the committee how important it is to invest in teams that have more participants and promote the University’s mission and Learning to a Greater Degree contract through success in and outside of competitions. However, if a team achieves greatness while receiving minimal resources, it may send a message to the funding committee and administration that success is not contingent upon resources. Suddenly each decision made at the coaching level could be to the detriment of the team, thus impacting the ability to make confident decisions and lead successfully.

As leaders, it is the duty of the coaches to uphold ethical decision-making and leadership practices as a means of teaching the importance of such skills to team participants (Levi, 2013; Northouse, 2013). Part of participation on a team includes the acquisition of life skills and, as educators, competitive academic team coaches should model what ethical, authentic leadership looks like, as well as uphold the institution’s mission and learning contract. However, in times of such adaptive challenges, it can be assumed that the increased pressure and distress could make it difficult for each coach to exhibit their own unique leadership style, thus impacting their abilities to teach such valuable life skills authentically. Due to the constraints of the current model and relegation of visionary decision-making abilities, coaches are somewhat forced to adapt to a situational leadership style (Northouse, 2013). Although a desirable approach, forcing leadership styles upon individuals limits their ability to be authentic leaders, true to themselves, and transparent to their followers (Northouse, 2013). When this
transparency is lacking, group dynamics can be negatively impacted, resulting in lower levels of cohesion, commitment and motivation (Levi, 2013). In order for a team to be successful, high levels of cohesion, commitment and motivation must be present; ergo, leadership authenticity and transparency is critical within team settings (Levi, 2013). When the structure in place negatively impacts such leadership and team traits, teams, such as the competitive academic teams, cannot reach their full potential.

**Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting**

Analyzing the structural and leadership changes and challenges faced by the UCM competitive academic teams is crucial as funding continues to be a growing concern for many liberal arts-based programs. However, a change in support will not occur if research showing how academic teams embody the pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract is not collected and provided to administration, especially given the role it may play regarding necessary data for accreditation purposes. A university’s mission statement serves as the foundation to decision-making and strategic operations; therefore, it is critical that universities can use their mission statement as a tool to measure whether programs uphold and advance the mission. By operationalizing the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars, the University would have access to a measurement tool that can be used to gauge programs and provide data for accreditation, thus answering the first research question. If enough data, support and awareness is garnered, demonstrating how competitive academic teams fulfill mission statements, perhaps these teams can stop operating in a continuous state of flux, constantly concerned about funding and longevity, while also providing the university with data needed for accreditation efforts, thus answering the first research question and briefly addressing the
second. When leadership is reestablished at the coaching level, these teams can begin operating at an optimum level of productivity, providing students with countless opportunities to advance the UCM mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree contract, thus addressing the second research question. It is then that all parties involved benefit the most.

Summary

Organizational structures impact leadership styles and abilities. In turn, leadership styles impact the members of the group being led. There is a unique, trickle-down effect that occurs, inextricably linking structure, leadership, and teamwork. It should be of no surprise then, the highly generalized resource allocation model that has been implemented does not adhere to the various teams’ make-ups, logistics, and needs, impacting team functionality. The organizational changes that occurred with the implementation of the new competitive academic team funding committee changed the overall structure under which the competitive academic teams previously operated. Within the previous underbounded system, coaches found it easier to accommodate needs specific to their own team. However, the new overbounded system creates a scenario of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. Bolman and Gallos (2001) stated it best,

Administrative authority is most likely to be seen as useful when it sets broad parameters and manages administrative details that faculty don’t need or want to do themselves, so long as it does not get in the way of their work. (p. 58)

Due to the recent structural change, the coaches of the academic teams are facing many adaptive challenges that are impacting leadership, team dynamics, and overall team operation. The new top-down model that micromanages funding, therefore impacting the
logistical details of academic teams, has positioned coaches to act more as managers than leaders, which is an obstacle hindering achieving optimum levels of success as coaches and as a team.

As suggested in the assumptions section, the researcher assumes that participation on competitive academic teams does advance the University’s mission and Learning to a Greater Degree contract. However, when placed in a political arena, it becomes difficult to measure and articulate the impact upon ethical leadership choices and educational advancements.
Section III

Scholarly Review for the Study

Introduction

In 2012, after much deliberation and research, the University of Central Missouri adopted the Learning to a Greater Degree contract as the strategy, or means to fulfill its mission statement. This contract serves as an agreement between the University and student body, obligating the University to provide ample opportunities for students to participate in activities that uphold the contract’s four pillars of academic success, which include engaged learning, future-focused academics, gaining a worldly perspective, and creating a culture of service. The contract’s four tenants reflect both the UCM mission statement, which is to “. . . transform students into lifelong learners, dedicated to service, with the knowledge, skills and confidence to succeed and lead in the region, state, nation and world,” and core value to learning, promising to provide students with a strong liberal arts education that supports life-long learning (University of Central Missouri Core Values, 2003, para. 1; University of Central Missouri Fact Book, 2014, p. ii). Chang (2013) explained liberal arts education as “. . . students fostering and developing a strong sense of social responsibility, as well as critical thinking and analytical and social skills that can be applied to real world settings” (p. 432). Although these tenants sound like an excellent foundation to any academic program, successful advancement of mission statements and learning contracts rooted in the liberal arts can be complicated to tangibly measure due to difficulties quantifying philosophic phrasing focusing on personal growth (Davis, Ruhe, Lee & Rajadhyaksha, 2007).
Although difficult, measurement of mission statement fulfillment is critical at both the institutional and programmatic levels. At the institutional level, data showing mission statement fulfillment are critical to a university’s accreditation process. According to the new criteria for accreditation posed by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the body responsible for the accreditation of the majority of colleges and universities across the United States, universities must have a mission statement focused on student learning and engagement that guides the institution’s operations (Higher Learning Commission, 2012, p. 4-5). Furthermore, the HLC requires evaluation of said mission statement fulfillment. Data indicating an institution’s mission statement is being fulfilled is needed to ensure a successful accreditation process.

At the programmatic level, furthering a university’s mission statement could be the key to program survival. In times of external funding cuts that necessitate internal budget cuts, along with an emphasis towards a more market-model approach to funding academics, institutions of higher education have been forced to become more narrow in focus and concentrated in areas that seem to support a model of income generation (St. John, Daun-Barnett, & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). Therefore, smaller academic programs that are not viewed as financial contributors to the larger university income are frequently scrutinized (Littlefield, 1991). For example, UCM’s competitive academic teams, such as Mock Trial, Speech and Debate, and DECA, are often viewed as programs that neither generate income nor increase enrollment. Rather, they are seen as relatively expensive programs to fund that serve a limited population (Bartanen, 1998; Rogers, 2005). However, the skills garnered by participation on such teams seem to embody investment in human capital and contribute to a well-rounded, liberal arts education, thus...
upholding the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and overall mission statement (Morris, 2011). Without proper measurement and documentation, though, this remains unproven. A report produced by the Student Affairs Leadership Council (2011) explained, “At a time when additional funds are scarce, co-curricular outcomes can be a factor in resource allocation decisions” (p. 6). As a result, it is imperative research be conducted to identify whether or not UCM’s Learning to a Greater Degree contract can be objectively measured and fulfilled by first examining the importance of human capital and student involvement’s role in advancing university mission statements and, second, how specific university programs such as competitive academic teams may be a usable, but often overlooked, tool to measure mission statement fulfillment.

Higher Education: Two Ideologies at Odds

Policy and decision making in higher education has evolved extensively since the 1970s (Mitchell, Crowson & Shipp, 2011; St. John, Daun-Barnett & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). Throughout this evolution, however, two ideologies continue to influence higher education policy and practice: the market-model approach to education and the model of investment in human capital (Mitchell, Crowson & Shipp, 2011; St. John, Daun-Barnett & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). On one end of the spectrum there is the market-model approach to education, which views education as a profitable industry. Increasing profits then improve the caliber of education because there are more resources available to improve facilities, hire faculty, and offer programming (Mitchell, Crowson & Shipp, 2011; St. John, Daun-Barnett & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). However, these luxuries often come at the expense of equitable access to higher education and investment in social and relational development (The Economist, Mar. 28, 2015). Under the market-
model, “. . . university administrators see the social role of higher education in terms of its capacity for supporting economic growth” (Scott, 2004, p. 163). On the other end of the spectrum there is the ideology that a college education is an investment in human capital, essentially believing that in order for individuals and society to reap the benefits that accompany an advanced degree in the future, an investment of resources must be made by both the individual and society in the present (Becker, 1993; Mincer, 1974; Psacharopoulos, 2006; Schultz, 1961; St. John, Daun-Barnett & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). Investing in human capital tends to reflect an investment in the liberal arts, as the two are rooted in similar mentalities, preparing individuals for life through the development of personal, social, and relational skills, while also preparing students for the workforce (Chang, 2013).

In times of financial instability, the market-model approach to higher education offers a degree of control and solace, making it a very appealing ideology to drive policy and decision-making (Scott, 2004). However, research has shown market model approaches too often downplay the social benefits gained from an educational experience (Scott, 2004; Harris & Witte, 2011). The social experience of one’s overall education is becoming increasingly more important as the social experience contributes to the learning of valuable life skills that will be used daily in the future. These life skills, such as enhanced social responsibility, critical thinking, and ability to collaborate, are often rooted in the liberal arts and could be used to better society, thus increasing human capital (Becker 1993; Chang, 2013; Larson & Miller, 2011; Mincer, 1974; Schultz, 1961; Scott, 2004).
Human Capital: A Closer Look

The premise behind the Human Capital Theory began in the 1700s and was closely linked to the evolution of classical economics. It was believed that by developing individuals, the economy would benefit (Becker, 1993; Mincer, 1974; Schultz, 1961). Since its inception, the theory has been studied extensively and began to gain much more attention in the 1960s when the concept of human capital was linked to national economic growth, education and societal advancement (Schultz, 1961). In its infancy, the research surrounding Human Capital showed positive correlations between investment in education and economic productivity and growth which, in turn, spurred a trend towards increased financial support for education (Quiggin, 1999). However, several skeptics believed too much emphasis was being placed on the idea that societal and economic advancement meant individuals were pleased with their overall quality of life, thus contributing to a lack of support, or perhaps understanding, of Human Capital (Fredman, N., 2014). Therefore, rather than solely focusing on individual development and its influence on economic growth, the theory became more advanced, especially when in reference to education, focusing on how the acquisition of advanced skills and education would lead to a better life, higher salary, and increased ability to contribute to an advancing society and workforce (Schultz, 1961). Essentially, both the individual and society were ultimately benefitted, and educational emancipation increased access to advanced education to all social classes (Schultz, 1961).

Although it may seem as though the Human Capital Theory is more aligned with a market-model approach to education upon first glance, recent advancements prove otherwise. The theory has once again evolved, broadening its focus to include a more
social perspective. While human capital will likely always be seen as a means to improve economic profit, more recently researchers have begun linking capital to non-monetary gains, such as personal health, self-actualization, social consciousness and stewardship (Becker, 1993; Rastogi, 2002; Rodriguez & Loomis, 2007). The social component to the human capital perspective, or social capital, emerged as a concept of study in the 1990s, and posits benefitting individuals professionally and personally, which in turn increases societal wellbeing.

Much of this learning is acquired from availability and involvement in networks of relations, as social capital tends to favor and foster skills relating to goodwill, or the “... information, influence, and solidarity benefits that accrue to members of a collectivity (“bonding” social capital”) and to actors, whether individual or collective, in their relations to other actors (“bridging” social capital)” (Kwon & Adler, 2014, p. 412). The three primary types of networks, or relations, in which individuals participate, include market relations, hierarchical relations, and social relations (Adler, & Seok-Woo, 2002). Market relations refer to the areas “... in which products and services are exchanged for money or bartered,” hierarchical relations are relations “... in which obedience and authority are exchanged for material and spiritual security,” and social relations refers to settings “... where favors and/or gifts are exchanged (p. 18). Essentially, social capital involves not only acquiring skills that improve one’s overall wellbeing, but also the sharing of those skills with others to create an improved society, bolstering the interpersonal side to human capital. Here, the focus is less upon overall economic advancements and gain, and more upon personal capabilities, social relationships and connectivity.
Scott (2004) coined the advancements in social human capital as the emerging of the “Citizen-Model University,” which focuses on training students to be “...capable of moral deliberation, leading to intelligent choices,” able to face the challenges present in the twenty-first century (p. 162). In a collaborative study conducted by The Conference Board, The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families and The Society for Human Resource Management, researchers Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006), compiled a list of basic knowledge/skills and applied skills that were needed by college graduates, as identified by business executives. Basic knowledge/skills were those affiliated with educational coursework, including comprehension, writing, and language skills. When addressing applied skills, abilities in critical thinking/problem solving, teamwork/collaboration, leadership, creativity/innovation, professionalism, and ethics/social responsibility were identified as desirable and needed skills to hold. The latter skills, those of the applied nature, are the skills the Social Human Capital/Capability approach and Citizen-Model University strive to create, as those are the skills that will one day better society.

In summary, under this new definition, the idea of social human capital is no longer strictly rooted in economic gain. Rather, it is in a student’s ability to leverage soft skills in an attempt to create networks that reinforce both individual growth and adjustment, as well as societal well-being and advancement. This trend is one that is quite prevalent among institutional mission statements. Specifically, the UCM mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree contract serve as the educational agreement between the students, the institution, and the larger community of state and nation, and focus on the development of skills rooted in a liberal arts education that will benefit the
individual professionally and personally, while also contributing to a progressive society, which aligns perfectly with the advancements in social human capital (Berg, G.A., Czikszentmihali, M., Nakamura, J., 2003; Cady, Wheeler, DeWolf & Brodke, 2011; Ozdem, 2011).

**Trends in University Mission Statements**

Meachem (2008) defined university mission statements as “declarations of a campus's rationale and purpose; its responsibilities toward students and the community; and its vision of student, faculty, and institutional excellence” (p. 1). Essentially, the mission statement, and in this case, learning contract, reflects an institution’s purpose and educational commitment to students (Bonewits Feldner, 2006; Camelia & Marius, 2013; Woodrow, 2006). Berg, Czikszentmihali and Nakamura (2003) credit the mission statement as the words that “. . . provides the ground rules as well as the inspiration for the ‘great game’ of higher education, one that can fill all those who participate in it with passion and purpose” (p. 47). Although the goals and rules of higher education may vary among institutions due to differences in size and focus, in a study analyzing prevalent themes in university mission statements, Meacham and Gaff (2006) found the most common theme, which was represented in nearly half of the 312 sampled statements, was grounded in providing a liberal arts education to students. Furthermore, Meechem (2008) reported in a study of more than 300 institutions of higher education in the United States, the second and third most common trends identified in mission statements centered around the university’s responsibility and commitment to developing graduates who were able to contribute to their communities and becoming socially and civically responsible citizens. In a study identifying mission statement trends which included analyzing 158
mission statements from public colleges and universities, Morphew and Hartley (2006) found similar results, citing “serves local area, commitment to diversity and liberal arts” to be among the three most common elements found in the mission (p. 463). While analyzing the statements from 141 private colleges and universities, their results were analogous, as the top three trends focused on liberal arts, civic duty/service, and diversity. The results of these studies are not surprising, as the liberal arts have been emphasized at universities since the medieval times (Mondschein, 2001).

As many universities feel the pressure to increase revenue while simultaneously increasing access to education, institutions are put into a position where they are compelled to reevaluate their purpose and mission. For example, Kissel (2011) cited the case of The University of California, which increased class size, consolidated and eliminated programs, froze hiring, laid off numerous employees, and increased tuition in an attempt to provide access to a quality education for all. The University of California is not an isolated case; even smaller institutions, such as Roosevelt University, have been forced to reduce course offerings and adjunct faculty in an attempt to provide advanced education to a broader population (Kissel, 2011). Yet amongst these financially turbulent times that have forced significant institutional cutbacks, both universities proclaimed a commitment to quality education and the acquisition of life skills that will benefit students and society in the future (Kissel, 2011). Clearly, identifying life skills that contribute to increased human capital and the students’ individual social profit is a very prevalent trend amongst university mission statements, even during times of financial insecurity.
Obstacles Faced when Trying to Fulfill the Mission

Regardless of what a mission statement identifies as the university’s goals, Ozdem (2011) observed, “Mission and vision statements should not be treated as cool sentences to adorn the websites and brochures of the universities, they should be put into action” (p. 1893). Unfortunately, Collins (2009) found organizations spend more time composing a mission statement than actually creating institutional alignment with the mission; which, he argued, is precisely the opposite of what should happen. In many instances, it seems the committee members who formulated the mission are the only ones who actually know it. Adams (2008) wrote, 

Ask faculty on nearly any college or university campus to identify their school’s mission and you will likely get a blank stare. If pressed, some might say their school’s mission statement was written by a committee, has no relevance to what they do, and only surfaces during accreditation visits. Make no mistake, though. The most successful and most focused companies and campuses are defined by their mission and driven daily by a sense of that mission. (p. 27)

A mission statement should not just be words on a piece of paper, it should be reflected in a university’s actions. If there is not strategic alignment to the educational offerings, the mission statement serves little purpose (Krohe, 1995).

Mission and action alignment is often problematic however, due to the vagueness of language and difficulty in operationalizing the verbiage used in the mission statement (Camelia & Marius, 2013). For example, in a study analyzing mission statement trends conducted by Cady, Wheeler, DeWolf, and Brodke (2011), the researchers found, “A popular approach was to attempt to communicate multiple messages or feelings by
strategically employing key words and phrases. In those cases, there was no attempt to clarify, explain, or operationalize the concepts” (p. 76). Further, when reflecting on over twenty years of work assisting organizations write mission statements, Carver (2000) lamented,

One of the major problems I have found with the traditional approach to developing mission statements is that organizations often speak of their philosophy, beliefs, values, vision, and goals in the same breath as their mission and purpose. I value these words just as everyone else does, but have found that to focus the efforts of organizations so that they can truly make a difference, it is best to lay all these terms aside, at least at the outset. (p. 20)

This mindset was reiterated by Morphew and Hartley (2006) when they wrote, “. . . colleges and universities fashion mission statements that maximize institutional flexibility. They communicate that nothing is beyond the reach of the organization in question” (p. 458). They continued, criticizing mission statements as “. . . being steeped in symbolism [as] many of their pronouncements cannot be objectively measured” (p. 459). Carver (2000) explained mission statements as “. . . rhetorically attractive statements that are “blue sky,” unattainable aims. As a dream or wish, that is OK. But as a guide to action, unrealistic aims are not useful. . .” (p. 20). Research shows although a university’s mission statement is seen as the foundation of the university, there is tremendous difficulty in measuring the success of mission statement fulfillment due to the philosophic nature often used in the language, frequently revolving around the social perspective of human capital gains and traits linked to the liberal arts. However, despite the difficulty in measuring mission statements due to their wording, institutionally, the
HLC mandates quantifiable data measuring mission statement fulfillment for accreditation purposes (Higher Learning Commission, 2012, p. 4-5). Programmatically, Meachem (2008) stressed the importance in using the mission statement to guide decision making: “When resources become scarce, difficult choices must be made . . . a conversation grounded in the campus's mission statement might help bring about consensus” (p. 1). Therefore, albeit difficult, efforts must be made to operationalize the verbiage used in the mission statement in an attempt to measure whether or not the statement can be fulfilled. Furthermore, tangible ways to measure the mission’s outcomes must be identified and operationalized.

**The Role of Student Involvement in Mission Statement Fulfillment**

According to the United States Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, in 2013, only 59% of full-time college students who had begun working towards obtaining a degree at a four-year institution (beginning in 2007) actually graduated, while the remaining 41% were either unable to complete a degree program in four years or were not retained, meaning they dropped out of the institution. In order for mission statements to be fulfilled, students must first be retained. The lower an institution’s retention rate, the less likely they are to successfully advance the mission statement and/or learning contract, simply due to the fact that an un-retained student is not able to show mission fulfillment. In fact, a student who is not retained is very often the antithesis of mission fulfillment. Therefore, it is critical that students feel a high degree of what Duque (2014) referred to as “overall service quality,” or, overall satisfaction level with one’s educational experience (p. 5). Within that level of satisfaction, the elements of cognitive learning and affective learning are subsumed. Frye
(1999) identified cognitive learning outcomes as concerning the “. . . student’s acquisition of specific knowledge and skills. . .” and the affective learning outcomes as the experiences in higher education that “. . . influence[d] the student’s values, goals, attitudes, self-concepts, worldview and behavior” (p. 4). When students feel high levels of satisfaction on both accounts, retention rates will increase (Duque, 2014). When assessing how such skills were best developed, research has found the most effective learning occurs in both formal settings, such as classroom settings, and informal settings, such as those experiences outside of the classroom, which tend to be more interpersonally laden (Galagan, 2010).

To achieve this, students must first successfully adjust to college life and exhibit high levels of involvement in their education, thus feeding both the cognitive and affective outcomes (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1999). Ting (1997) argued that in order to successfully adjust to college life, students must learn how to cope with stress and change, manage time effectively, be self-disciplined, take responsibility for one's behavior, and improve leadership skills, all similar skills to those identified as social human capital or desired 21st skills. Astin’s (1984, 1999) work, using his student development theory, found students who were highly involved in their educational experience and campus community experienced improved academic standing, had better relationships with instructors, felt a stronger connection to the campus community, and developed several of the traits identified by Ting (1997). Kuh (2009) defined these actions as methods of student engagement, or “. . . the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of colleges and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (p. 683). Increased student
engagement and involvement tends to decrease student dropout rates, which is beneficial to both the student population and the university, as degree completion is an essential goal of education and essential to mission statement fulfillment (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1999).

One vehicle of involvement Astin (1984, 1985, 1993, 1999) identified in his research was through the use of campus organizations, teams, and clubs, often referred to as extra or co-curricular activities. Involvement in co-curricular activities is often seen as a staple to the undergraduate collegiate experience, supplying students with ample social interactions and relational connections with both peers and faculty. In addition, life skills are inadvertently taught through participation in organizations, as involvement requires a level of commitment and dedication that often serves the student well in their academic career (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1999; Rogers, 2002, 2007). Astin’s claims have been supported by Chebator (1995), who found in his studies students who were involved in co-curricular activities outside of the classroom had higher grade point averages and retention rates, more self-confidence, and increased emotional stability over their peers who were not involved. Simply stated, it would seem the relationship between a university’s fulfillment of its mission statement and learning contract, and its direct link to involvement, student academic success, retention and graduation rates cannot be underemphasized. Astin (1999) suggested further research be conducted analyzing whether a relationship existed between particular modes of student involvement and specific programmatic outcomes that might relate to overarching university goals and missions. It would seem the pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract could be
substituted for specific programmatic outcomes to analyze whether a relationship exists between UCM’s teams (modes of student involvement) and the mission statement.

Even the HLC has identified co-curricular programming as integral to the achievement of an institution’s education mission and suggested the inclusion of their role on campus as part of the self-study required for successful accreditation. In their new accreditation standards, the HLC specifically articulates under the area of student learning a section on the students’ education through the offering and measurement of co-curricular programs: “Co-curricular programs are suited to the institutions’ mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students” and “The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched education environment” (Higher Learning Commission, 2012, p. 7). Since the HLC requires data for accreditation, and the university currently has no means through which to gather data to operationalize their satisfaction of the requirement, it is yet one more reason to assess whether or not a relationship exists between co-curricular offerings and the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, as a means to provide proof to the HLC that the accreditation criterion has been successfully met.

**Collegiate Competitive Teams**

When discussing the benefits gleaned from participation on competitive teams, which are considered to be extra/co-curricular, Hinck (2003) explained:

Competing can give a student identity as a member of a team since joining a team, becoming assimilated as a member, and preparing for a season of tournament activity can challenge students to develop social skills that are essential to success beyond the college classroom. . . . a competitive season simulates life situations
requiring adaptation to changing circumstances, recommitment to achieving one’s goals, coming back from a disappointing experience, and hard work without the guarantee of success. (p. 62)

Generally speaking, involvement in organizations and/or teams at the collegiate level increases a student’s feeling of connection to the campus community, including faculty and staff members such as coaches. Within a team or organization, the interactions between faculty/staff and students are increased exponentially simply because of the amount of time spent together. Many researchers have found that these interactions are likely the strongest influencing factor on retention and positive educational outcomes (Burris, Ashorn, Akers, Fraze, Brashears & McCulloch, 2010; Kuh & Hu, 1999; O’Keefe, 2013). Additionally, several researchers, including Astin (1984, 1985, 1993, 1993), Holland and Huba (1991), Pascarella et al. (1986), Pascarella and Smart (1991), and Ryan (1989) reported students involved in co-curricular programs were more satisfied with their collegiate experience than uninvolved students. The link between increased student involvement and satisfaction to higher retention and graduation rates was even further advanced.

More specifically, when thinking about collegiate competitive teams, what typically come to mind are athletic teams. Numerous studies have found a positive correlation between participation in athletics and the development of social skills such as communication, teamwork, cooperation, stress management and the use of positive coping mechanisms (Bland, Melton, Bigham & Welle, 2014; Duarte, Araujo, Correia & Davids, 2012; Duch, Waitzman & Amaral; 2010; Eccles, 2010; Passos, Davids & Araujo, 2011). Furthermore, Uneo (2012) found individuals readily identified and acknowledged
how the skills learned while participating in athletic clubs or on athletic teams would continue to benefit them in the future. Martin (1997) found student athletes felt personally fulfilled by participation, as it aided in their ability to remain disciplined, focused and manage stress. Further, they received a high level of encouragement and support from their families, peers, teammates and coaches. Many of the social skills identified in these studies, such as teamwork and motivation, are attributes that a liberal arts education and collegiate mission statements strive to produce (Ozdem, 2011). Bartanen (1998) explained, “Preparing students for democratic citizenship and leadership is a fundamental goal of colleges and universities” and without a balanced education in both life skills and academics, this goal is difficult to obtain (p. 3).

Although there is tremendous support regarding the positive correlation between athletic team participation and the development of social skills useful to post-university life, the research surrounding collegiate participation in athletics influence on academics is more varied. Many studies have reported that college athletics may negatively impact participants’ overall college experience and academic performance (Hernandez & Rotthoff, 2014; Sparent, 1988). For example, in a study examining collegiate athletes from 18 different institutions, Pascarella and Trunkenmiller (1999) found in many cases, athletes scored significantly worse on writing aptitude and critical thinking skills than non-athlete participants. Furthermore, in their longitudinal study, Aries, McCarthy, Salovey and Banaji (2004) found student athletes to have more difficulty in time management skills, which directly impacted their study habits in a negative way, far more than their non-athlete peers. Essentially, the non-athlete participants surpassed athlete participants in time management and study skills. Consequently, the researchers reported
athletes as rating lower in overall academic skills than their counterparts. When studying reasons athletes terminated their participation, Martin (1997) found a large percentage (26%) of respondents identified difficulty in ability to focus on academics as their reason to cease participation. As a result, it would be prudent to identify modes of student involvement that provide both access to the benefits of competitive teams and successful academic outcomes.

Philosophically, it appears that the collegiate competitive academic teams would provide the same benefits to participants as athletic teams do, while perhaps being more strongly aligned with a university’s academic mission statement. Academic teams claim to teach critical life skills while being naturally aligned with the university’s academic curricula. In their study analyzing participation on co-curricular teams, Kosloski and Ritz (2014) found that co-curricular activities such as competitive academic teams allow learners to “. . . take part in many educational activities outside of the classroom that may include community service, leadership, competitive events, and career awareness, all reinforcing the learner’s curriculum” (p. 154). The learning extends far beyond curricular gain, however. For example, Kuyper (2011) found involvement in forensics (speech and debate) taught a plethora of social/interpersonal skills similar to those identified as outcomes to athletic team participation, such as teamwork and enhanced communication skills. Furthermore, participants viewed the activity as fun, which motivated them to continue with the activity and their education, thus aiding in retention efforts. Kuyper’s (2011) findings continued, identifying academic success as yet another benefit of team participation. Similar results touting academic success and intellectual advancements due to competitive forensics have been found by several others (Bartanen, 1998; Rogers,
In his four year longitudinal study including 100 students from 28 institutions, Rogers (2002) found students who participated in competitive debate scored considerably higher than non-debate participants in the areas of social/civic responsibility, academic success, and psychological adjustment (mental and emotional well-being). The study was replicated four years later. Rogers (2005) found these gaps between debate and non-debate students increased significantly, placing debate participants well above their peers in the critical skills necessary for success in their post-university experiences. While involved in forensics, students learn to critically examine issues from multiple points of view, engage in systematic thinking, and “. . . have always had a tremendous advantage over other students in terms of their abilities to find, organize, and manage information” (Bartanen, 1998, p. 9). Skills such as this naturally transfer into useful skills in the classroom as well.

However, the learning that occurs when involved in an academic team such as forensics extends far beyond the classroom. Rogers (2002) found:

Developing argumentation supporting both sides of a topic teaches balance, understanding and tolerance for other people’s views. Weighing evidence results in a higher commitment to ethical and moral argumentation. Policy testing and evaluation leads to a higher sense of social and civic awareness; which, in turn, leads to increased social advocacy and governmental participation. (p.1)

Bartanen’s (1998) research complemented this, arguing that forensics “. . . offers students of varying skill levels with oral and written communication opportunities not possible in the traditional classroom” (p. 9). Many of the skills identified by Bartanen (1998), Rogers
(2002, 2005) and Kuyper (2011) sound similar to the overarching trends in desired traits and goals identified in university mission statements and learning contracts.

Forensics is just one small component of competitive academic programming, however. Although much newer to the collegiate competitive academic world, when analyzing Mock Trial, Karraker (1993) found the activity to “. . . develop a range of transferable skills, including oral and written communication, secondary data research, and teamwork” (p. 136). Additionally, students were able to more appropriately apply sociological and political frameworks to social issues, which aided in understanding and depth of discussion both in class and while participating in Mock Trial competitions. Pasternack (1983) applauded the activity’s ability to teach students how to respond appropriately in high pressure situations while also enhancing oral and written communication skills, critical thinking, professionalism and persuasive theory. Rich (2006) found comparable results, again, showing similarities to the desired characteristics identified by university mission statements.

The overriding mission of DECA is to “. . . reinforce nationally recognized curriculum standards and provide realistic educational experiences with respect to marketing, management, and entrepreneurship” (Kosloski & Ritz, 2014, p. 151). These traits are in natural alignment with the social human capital traits used to navigate the market and hierarchical relations and networks. In Kosloski and Ritz’s (2014) study, they found the majority of survey respondents, all participants in DECA, reported having a higher grade point average due to their involvement in the activity. During competitions, students practice problem solving abilities and apply their skills in a very practical setting. However, much like the benefits gained from the other competitive academic
activities, studies show “DECA’s annual activities offer its members many opportunities for not only intrinsic rewards, but also provides socialization, prestige, and travel opportunities that members might not otherwise be afforded” (p. 165). Their study continues to show how participation on competitive academic teams enhances both the academic and social skills by providing opportunities and enhancing skills beyond the classroom environment.

When analyzing the results gleaned from studies on participation in competitive academic teams, there is a distinct trend; participation seems to enhance academic performance while in school, foster involvement and engagement both in and outside of the classroom, which bolsters participants’ feelings of belonging and benefits them past graduation by preparing them to be civic-minded and ready to contribute their social capital to society. These are the very skills identified by society as desirable 21st century traits. Further, they are the traits and skills the University has deemed important through the institutional mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree contract. If the HLC requires data verifying mission fulfillment, perhaps the competitive academic teams could provide said data.

**A Current Gap in Available Research**

Although there is some available research analyzing the benefits acquired from participation on collegiate competitive academic teams, there is a paucity of research in two key areas. First, despite finding a fair amount of research analyzing competitive collegiate forensics, there is considerably less research available focusing on other collegiate competitive academic teams such as Mock Trial and DECA, for example. Furthermore, and even more problematic, there is seemingly no data available analyzing
participation in LAE. Second, there is very little research available examining the relationship between competitive academic teams as a mode of student involvement and university mission statement fulfillment. Essentially, Astin’s (1999) recommendation of examining the connection between university mission outcomes and specific modes of involvement has yet to occur within the realm of competitive academic teams. Bartanen (1998) agreed when she lamented, “One challenge facing the forensics community, then, is to strengthen its connection with campus discussion of pedagogy” (p. 12). Of course, Bartanen’s words ring true for every other competitive academic team. Efforts must be made to align programs with the mission of the university. Before that can happen, however, research must first be conducted analyzing the current relationship between the four competitive academic teams and the Learning to a Greater Degree contract. This study seeks to heed Astin’s (1999) recommendation by examining whether or not the University of Central Missouri’s competitive academic teams are a successful mode of student involvement to use to gauge mission statement fulfillment.
Section IV

Contribution to Practice

Plan and Rationale for Dissemination

Since this study is a case study, the results are unique to UCM and institutional decision-makers alone. Therefore, the study’s results are best suited for those who are in decision-making roles, especially those overseeing student engagement, student learning, and funding. Although dated, Anderson’s (1974) words still ring true today and span far beyond forensics, “In an age of educational accountability, the forensics community is and will increasingly be called upon to tell what it seeks to do, how well it accomplishes its goals, and what other effects it has” (p. 155). Due to the current economic climate, along with the HLC’s accreditation standards, it is imperative to share research of this nature that specifically analyzes the contributions various competitive academic teams make towards mission fulfillment with university administration.

Therefore, the researcher will share the executive summary of the findings (see below) with appropriate University of Central Missouri administration who share in decision-making responsibilities regarding student learning and University operations. More specifically, individuals such as the coaches of the competitive academic teams, the Deans, Dr. Shari Bax, Vice Provost for Student Experience and Engagement, and Provost Deborah Curtis will receive the results. Additionally, if any department chairs or faculty are interested, they too will be provided with a copy of the results. It is the hope of the researcher that the study would then be shared with President Charles Ambrose and the UCM Board of Governors by Provost Curtis. Upon a successful dissertation defense, the researcher intends to share the executive summary of the results of the study.
electronically, and will encourage a meeting/discussion with the appropriate administration to further discuss the findings and ensure visibility of the study. For any interested party, the full results which include a deeper level of analysis and explanation, more evidence in the form of quotations garnered from the study, and clearer links back to the scholarly review will be provided electronically as well (Appendix K).
Executive Summary of the Study

Nicole Freeman
University of Missouri-Columbia

Leveraging university mission statements:
A case study analyzing competitive academic teams’ contributions towards advancing mission statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Per the HLC, institutions of higher learning must provide evidence of mission statement fulfillment as part of the accreditation process. This study seeks to identify whether or not UCM’s competitive academic teams advance the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, thus showing if/how they contribute to UCM’s overall mission and could be used as evidence meeting accreditation standards.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Capital Theory</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>1. How can the four pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract be operationalized regarding contract and mission statement fulfillment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becker, 1993</td>
<td>Coaches</td>
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<td>Mincer, 1974</td>
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<td>Psacharopoulos, 2006</td>
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<td>Schultz, 1961</td>
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<td>Scott, 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory of Student Engagement</td>
<td>University administration</td>
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<td>Astin, 1964</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>Electronic Surveys</td>
<td>2. Do the competitive academic teams at the University of Central Missouri effectively contribute to the fulfillment of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and mission? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to a Greater Degree pillars &amp; UCM mission statement</td>
<td>Current competitors</td>
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<td>Alumni competitors</td>
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<td>21st Century Skills desired by employers</td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
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<td>Current competitors</td>
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<td>Alumni competitors</td>
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Definitions of Key Terms

**Competitive academic teams.** At the collegiate level, a competitive academic team is similar to an athletic team in the sense that it is a group of individuals led by a coach that compete against teams affiliated with other universities in an attempt to earn honors/victories. The difference lies in the activity. Competitive academic teams compete in activities that are rooted in academics. They are often referred to as co-curricular activities because they complement academic learning, while athletics are referred to as extra-curricular activities, because they are not affiliated with specific curriculum.

**Culture of service.** A culture of service, which is the third pillar of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, refers to the many hours UCM students, faculty and staff devote to service and volunteering, in an attempt to teach the importance of civic engagement and generosity both on campus and beyond. Service learning that occurs both inside and outside of the classroom environment are also components of a culture of service (UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, 2012).

**DECA.** DECA, formerly known as Distributive Education Clubs of America and/or Delta Epsilon Chi, is an organization associated with business industries and is considered a competitive academic team within the College of Business. The activity strives to prepare participants for careers in such business fields as marketing, finance, hospitality, and management. Participants may compete in individual or team events, and speaking or written events. Individual competition includes a written exam, as well as role-playing simulations. Team competitive events include strategic problem solving relating to provided case studies. The events foster skills in team building, creative thinking, and problem solving within a business context (DECA, Inc., 2015).
**Engaged learning.** The first pillar of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract is engaged learning, which refers to the many campus programs, opportunities and initiatives that ready graduates to “. . . enter the workplace prepared with practical, hands-on experience” (UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, 2012, p. 1).

**Forensics.** Forensics is a term synonymous with speech and debate at the collegiate level, making it a competitive academic team. University speech and debate teams may specialize in either individual events (speech events), debate, or be considered a comprehensive program, meaning the team participates in both individual events and at least one format of debate. The University of Central Missouri’s forensics team is a comprehensive program, competing in eleven different individual speaking events and four types of debate, both domestically and internationally. Although typically housed in the Department of Communication, forensics is an activity that is typically not affiliated with a specific major, as it teaches participants soft skills such as critical thinking, conducting research, writing, and presentation skills, which are useful in any major or profession (National Forensics Association, 2015).

**Future-focused academics.** The fourth pillar to the Learning to a Greater Degree contract is future-focused academics, which denotes UCM’s incorporation of new technologies and teachings that “. . . expose students to real-world applications. . .” (UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, 2012, p. 1).

**Lambda Alpha Epsilon (LAE).** LAE is an organization that teaches professionalism, ethical conduct, and educational training within the criminal justice field, while operating as a competitive academic team. Participating universities consist of LAE chapters who, at regional and national competition, compete against other
chapters in various events, such as crime scene investigation, firearms competitions, agility competitions, and academic and written competitions. Success is then measured individually, per event, and also collectively as a team (American Criminal Justice Association, 2008).

**Learning to a Greater Degree Contract.** According to the University of Central Missouri’s 2012 Strategic Positioning Platform and Quick Guide, there are four “reasons to believe,” or pillars that represent the Learning to a Greater Degree contract. Essentially, it serves as the University’s promise to provide academic excellence through various modes of involvement, both inside and outside of the classroom. The contract is the vehicle used by the University to further the institutional mission statement.

**Mock Trial.** Mock Trial is an activity designed to prepare students for careers in law by teaching them about the legal system within a competitive atmosphere, making it an example of a competitive academic team. Team members fulfill various roles replicating those present in a courtroom scenario. To prepare, each team is provided with a case packet at the beginning of the competitive season. Participants must analyze the case and master their role in the scenario. During each round of competition, teams work together to best present the facts of the case and adherence to court procedure, and are awarded team awards (by winning the trial) and also individual awards, such as Top Attorney or Top Witness (American Mock Trial Association, 2015, para. 1-2).

**Worldly perspective.** The second pillar of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract is that of a worldly perspective, which implies that “UCM prepares students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities.” (UCM Strategic Positioning Platform, 2012, p. 1).
Results

Respondent Information

Data were collected via electronic survey, focus group, and interview during a three month period. Nine individuals, consisting of coaches of the participating academic teams and current administrators of Dean level status or higher, were interviewed. The focus groups, consisting of current and alumni competitors, had a total of 28 participants ranging in size from three to eleven participants per group, and the electronic surveys targeting the same population received 55 responses (current competitors, n=30, alumni competitors, n=25). The current competitors ranged from participating on the team from one to four years, as did the alumni respondents. Alumni respondents graduated between the years of 1994 and 2015.

Summary of Results

After the data were gathered, the researcher analyzed the information gathered to identify overarching themes which were prevalent through triangulation. Data analysis illuminated three overarching themes: involvement with competitive academic teams impacts participants as students, citizens, and professionals. The first theme, that of participants as students, aligns with pillars one and four (engaged learning and future-focused academics). The second theme, participants as citizens, shares similarities with pillars two and three (worldly perspective and a culture of service). The final theme, participants as professionals, aligns with pillars two and four (worldly perspective and future-focused academics). Under each of the three overarching themes, sub-themes also emerged that are discussed further. After each discussion, poignant responses from
participants are included that might serve as usable antidotal evidence to provide to the HLC for accreditation purposes.
Theme I- Participants as Students

When analyzing the data, the researcher found copious amounts of evidence supporting how the university’s competitive academic teams impact participants as students. As mentioned, this theme shares a direct link with the pillars of engaged learning and future-focused academics. Regarding how involvement advances engaged learning within students, two prevalent sub-themes emerged. First, competing on an academic team gave participants an opportunity to practice and apply skills learned in their classes in an outside, and often more practical environment. Second, involvement’s impacts on academic success. The second pillar represented under this theme was that of future-focused academics. Here, two sub-themes emerged as well: how the teams cultivate the skills needed to be adaptable and future-focused, and also how involvement bolsters academic success even after obtainment of an undergraduate degree, while also encouraging individuals to be life-long learners.

Engaged learning. While explaining how the participating competitive academic teams advance engaged learning, numerous respondents from the interviews, focus groups, and surveys articulated that the competitive atmosphere serves as an opportunity for students to practice and apply skills they learn in class in a setting outside of the classroom. As two of the coaches from different teams explained, the university’s competitive academic teams serve as a lab, of sorts, similar to that within the science field. Within their classes, students learn various skills and techniques that will help them to be successful, such as how to think critically, write effectively, and create engaging presentations. The practices and competitions serve as the lab setting, where the students
engage in the process of applying the knowledge and skills they have learned in their classes, which deepens their understanding of the concepts.

The competitive setting acted not only as a lab to practice transferrable knowledge from course content, but also as an atmosphere for advanced learning, which was characterized as not being able to occur within a classroom. This type of learning encompassed both hard and soft skills; not only practical techniques that will be useful in their future professions, but also social-based skills. The unique, out-of-class experience that involves an element of competition is what motivates many high achieving students to participate in competitive academic teams, thus contributing to a well-rounded academic program that occurs within and beyond the classroom setting.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Sub-Theme I- An Opportunity to Practice, Apply &amp; Advance Skills (Theory to Practice)</th>
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</table>
| **Mock Trial**    | • “Mock Trial is a perfect example of engaged learning. It is the real world application of what we learn in class, we get to practice what we might do in the future.”  
• “The setting of Mock Trial is different of that of the classroom. It forces us to learn in a different way. Every day is a test, and we have to apply information differently.”  
• “Our practices teach us how to write cases and speeches, and conduct cross examinations in ways that real attorneys use in real trials. I get to interact with lawyers and judges through my involvement. It feels like a class that isn’t offered at UCM.”  
• “It is essentially practicing skills they will use in their future careers with a safety net.” |
| **LAE**           | • “LAE takes [what we learn] from theory to practice. I know a lot more about the required class content because of my involvement.”  
• “This is a student’s opportunity to apply practical knowledge and skills outside of the classroom. It helps them develop a work product.” |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Forensics</th>
<th>DECA</th>
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<td>“Participation gets you more acquainted with everything in the criminal justice field and it starts us off early. It is a hands on approach to learning rather than class and lecture.”</td>
<td>“The Talking Mules promotes engaged learning because it gives me the opportunity to further develop my professional speaking skills while encouraging the Socratic way of thinking in which, instead of simply asking for the answer to my question, I research for the answers I seek.”</td>
<td>“Our competitions are set up as real life simulation. We get to role play within our field.”</td>
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<td>“I believe LAE provided me with more practical experience than a classroom could provide, such as first hand practice of crime scene investigations.”</td>
<td>“By constantly having to recall and apply classroom lessons, my academics were enriched, and it led me to a heightened understanding of most topics that we discussed in class. My knowledge never had a chance to grow rusty, since it was being used so often.”</td>
<td>“My involvement in DECA, both as a member and an officer, provided an opportunity to translate textbook knowledge into applicable experience. Further, I developed skills outside of the classroom that proved valuable immediately after graduation including leadership, team management, and presentation skills. My participation in DECA reinforced the idea that education has to leave the classroom to provide an adequate opportunity for a student.”</td>
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<td>“My courses just made more sense after I was involved with the Talking Mules. I was able to think quickly and efficiently through my coursework, and I not only knew the structure of writing a paper, but I understood how the structure worked to create a persuasive and logical stance.”</td>
<td>“DECA has taught me so much more about the business world, far beyond what we learn from text books. We actually experience how things work in the real world.”</td>
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<td>“DECA has helped me experience the interpersonal side of interactions, like learning to read signs and non-verbal cues, things you can’t experience from a text book.”</td>
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The second sub-theme present under engaged learning is that of how participation on competitive academic teams impacted academic performance in the classroom. Numerous individuals representing each participating team identified their involvement on a competitive academic team as a determining factor of their classroom successes. This thought was reiterated by the coaches, who all spoke to the academic achievements of their competitors. Additionally, two of the coaches produced evidence in the form of published studies in journals, showing competitors having a higher GPA within their major than their non-competitor peers. However, competitors’ academic performance was impacted in more ways than just GPA, it also made a profound impact on their overall performance as a member of the campus community.

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<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Sub-Theme II- Team Involvement Impacting Academic &amp; Social Success</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mock Trial</td>
<td>“I excelled academically due to my ability to take things I learned from Mock Trial and use them in the classroom, both as an undergraduate and as a student of law.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAE</td>
<td>“I take classes and coursework more seriously, because I know it will help me in LAE.”</td>
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<td>“The prestige of our LAE team…now this is a serious deal, I know I need to work hard to uphold it.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“LAE gives me a feeling that I belong to something bigger than myself. I know I have a family here on campus that truly cares about me. I know I could ask any member for help in a class and they would be there to help me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forensics</td>
<td>“I was used to being challenged with practical experiences by my team and was therefore able to manage challenges in coursework, organization and time-management so much better.”</td>
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<td>“The debate team gave me focus and taught me how to research better, comprehend more of what I read, and organize my study habits. As a result, my grades improved and it motivated me to want to be more.”</td>
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</table>
“The dedication you learn from participating on the team was translated also into my academic life which translated to good grades and having strong relationships with my professors. I’m a better leader in my classes and within group projects now.”

“Through the dedication and compassion of the coaching staff on the debate team, I was able to grow as an individual, both inside and outside of the classroom. I was encouraged to set goals that were slightly beyond what I thought I could accomplish, and was then given the help and guidance to reach (and go beyond) what I thought was possible. No other professor in my time at UCM had nearly the impact on me as my coach.”

“Honestly, I think the debate team kept me in college and helped me to graduate. My freshman year, I was pretty lost. I did a lot of partying and skipped a lot of class. As a result, my grades suffered and I was really close to dropping out. I was recruited to join the team out of [the coach’s] class. He set tough standards, but he wouldn't let me quit on myself.”

There is a sense of family that helps us excel as a team. We are mutually invested in each other’s successes and failures, so we push each other.”

Evidence showing engaged learning was the most prevalent amongst the data collected. The University’s competitive academic teams create an environment for practical application of theory, advanced knowledge to be acquired and tested, and a unique social outlet that contribute to the overall success of a participant. Engaged learning is not something the competitive academic teams strive to produce; it is a natural occurrence within the competitive team setting.

**Future-focused academics.** The second pillar prevalent under the participants as students theme was that of future-focused academics, which denotes the University is actively preparing students to be ready to not only join the professional ranks upon graduation, but are prepared to excel in it. Members of each of the participating academic
teams identified characteristics of future-focused academics present within their activity that helped them succeed as students, again pointing to two sub-themes: how the teams cultivate the skills needed to be adaptable and future-focused, and also how it bolsters academic success post-undergraduate career.

The coaches, competitors, and several administrators agreed that competitive academic teams created an environment outside of the classroom to not only learn the skills needed to one day change the world, but also provided a safe space to practice and apply said skills so that when they do enter the workforce they are more prepared than their peers. Participation not only exposed individuals to what their future professional setting may look like, but also taught them the skills needed to be successful in such a setting. This opportunity also dramatically impacted their ability to grasp, retain, and apply such important skills while still on campus, making them stronger students and leaders, while also preparing them to enter the constantly evolving workforce and world.

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<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Sub-Theme I- Preparing Students to be Adaptable &amp; Future-Focused</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mock Trial</strong></td>
<td>• “We get exposed to what our work environment is going to look like. It is still very much a high impact learning experience, we just happen to be old school in our field and practice.”&lt;br&gt;• “The law changes all the time. In our mock trial simulations we had to use technology to research and use initiatives to counter developing and new ways of practice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forensics</strong></td>
<td>• “This group of kids, these are the future thinkers and leaders. If we can get them to start thinking about how they can change the world, when they get out into the real world, they aren’t content to just sit back and just take what the status quo gives them. Our activity by its very nature, plus our emphasis on advocacy, teaches them to research and talk about new ideas, but also teaches them how to put those new ideas into actions.”</td>
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• “Speech and debate by its very nature is always relevant, since the topics are constantly updated by the national conversation. This participation in civic conversation is undoubtedly useful post-graduation.”

• “We are learning a technology that is thousands of years old- the human voice. It allows you to understand how you fit in the world, and how you can use your voice to change the world. And that is a skill that is not likely to change in the future.”

DECA

• “Real world application doesn’t always have to be innovative- the cases our students present on to professionals within that professional area include new knowledge in the field.”

The second sub-theme, that of how team involvement influences one’s academic success post-undergraduate career, was especially prevalent in two of the four participating teams, although comments were made from respondents representing each team regarding the prospect of attending graduate school. For many competitors on academic teams such as Mock Trial, obtaining an advanced degree is desired, or even necessary in order to meet their professional goals. Due to the skills garnered and preparation received, participation on a competitive academic team as an undergraduate student often led to greater success in obtaining an advanced degree.

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<th>Table 4</th>
<th>Sub-Theme II- Impact on Academic Success Post-Undergraduate (Life Long Learning)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mock Trial</td>
<td>• “Mock Trial prepared me for the future more than any other class, organization, or activity that I took part in. It taught me legal principles that most of my classmates in law school had no clue about.”</td>
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<td>• “… in law school, I was able to receive the highest grade in my Evidence course, and I believe this is because I already had the necessary background knowledge from my Mock Trial experience.”</td>
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</table>
• “Mock Trial helps students get into higher ranking law schools that are nationally recognized. Our students going to schools that you wouldn’t necessary think would be the next step from someone who graduated from a Division II school.”

LAE

• “We push all our members to present, to publish, and to write, all while they learn about ethics [within the field], and teamwork, among many other skills.”

Forensics

• “[Participation has] has definitely increased my abilities in graduate school. I’m used to heavy and rigorous reading load. Additionally, the theoretical knowledge I acquired during my time competing directly applied to my coursework. Debated helped narrow my interest in graduate school and helped me identify what I wanted to be my research focus.”

• “I would say that debate by its very nature, is future focused. Maybe not in the use of technology (besides research tools and databases), but in the way you are trained to think. We were always exploring the potential impacts of a given decision or policy proposal. This method of analytical thinking, of exploring all the possible outcomes of a decision, is at the core of future-focused thinking. This is what debate and forensics does, it teaches students to consider a situation from a variety of perspectives (ethical, financial, practical, etc.) and then reach a conclusion about which approach would be the best, given the information.”

In summary, the engaged learning experience provided by competitive academic teams increases student involvement both academically and socially within participants. When students feel more involved, their enrichment and overall feelings of satisfaction increase. Additionally, they are obtaining skills that will help them succeed in current and future classroom settings, and beyond. The engaged learning and future-focused academics present within competitive academic team settings are greatly impacting participants as students.
Theme II- Participants as Citizens

The second overarching theme to emerge from the data analyzed revolved around how participation on competitive academic teams impacted individuals as citizens. Within this theme, participants elaborated on how the skills taught and experiences garnered through competitive academic teams contributed to their development into citizens who are civically engaged members of a much larger global community. Under this theme, two pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract were prevalent and connected easily- the worldly perspective and the culture of service. Under each of these pillars, two sub-themes emerged as well. When discussing how involvement on a competitive academic team impacts one’s worldly perspective, participants spoke to the broadening of perspectives that occurs via participation and, secondly, to how that broadened perspective led to an increased level of empathy for others. Under the culture of service pillar, involvement on a competitive academic team often taught the importance of service/civic engagement and, secondly, it provided a better understanding of needs that exist, further contributing to a broadened perspective.

Worldly perspective. Due to the competitive element of the teams, they each travel to different regions of the country to compete, giving participants numerous opportunities to meet/interact with individuals from various universities and industries. Additionally, one team in particular, the speech and debate team, competes internationally, creating even more opportunities to engage with individuals from different areas and backgrounds. These activities, by nature, expose participants to varying viewpoints and diverse groups of people. Not only do the participants meet and interact with other college students, coaches, and professionals from across the world,
they are also judged/critiqued in competitions by individuals with varying perspectives. The judging/critiquing experience allows participants to do more than simply interact with diverse individuals. Participants commented on how opening themselves up to receiving criticism and comments from others allowed them to not only interact with diverse perspectives, but also to process and seek to understand that individual’s perspective. Each judge’s comments influenced the competitors’ own personal thoughts and perspectives.

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<th>Table 5</th>
<th>Sub-Theme I- Involvement Broadens Perspectives</th>
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<td><strong>Mock Trial</strong></td>
<td>• “It’s taught me that individuals are important and that each individual perspective is unique. You can’t find a “system” that works for everyone, you have to treat each case with a new view.”</td>
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| **LAE** | • “There’s a lot more to the world than you think. “I came from a really small farm community…even Warrensburg seemed crazy big … LAE has really broadened my perspective of the world.”
• “…our travels show us how it is so different. I’m from the opposite-I’m from a big city, but traveling with LAE still has the same effect.” |
| **Forensics** | • “The team encourages coming into contact with multiple ideas and perspectives and speaking on them, forcing individuals to learn different ideas that lead to a more worldly perspective.”
• “Coming into college, I considered myself to be fairly learned, turns out I was wrong. Every time you walk into a round, you hear things you never imagined, some that challenge the fundamental precepts of the arguments you are making, as well as your belief system, and it really influences your opinions and perspectives.”
• “In a lot of rounds, you have a profound moment where you are forced to reconcile with issues and perspectives right now. You have to listen to their arguments and figure out how to respond to them. You realize the world is so much more complex. Debate forced you to engage with diversity every weekend, and it forced me to grapple with issues I wouldn’t have normally.” |
On most study abroad tours, you are a passive receiver of information. Ours is unique because we are not passive learners, we are engaged learners. We do every other thing that every study tour experiences, but we also engage in a debate with other students, scholars, and professors while they learn about the culture.”

“My horizons, both politically and socially, have been broadened because of my respective team. I honestly feel like I have become a better person because of my new experiences.”

“I had never been on an airplane prior to joining this team- and there were many others like me. I got the opportunity to travel and engage with students from the United States and Europe, discussing various current events. We saw the world from their perspective and, in turn, were able to grasp an understanding of a perspective we would have never gotten had we not been offered these opportunities from this team.”

ICDC (International competition) brings competitors from universities around the world, as well as judges from national and international companies together. Everyone gets to mingle during the week-long conference/competition.”

The second sub-theme to emerge under the worldly perspective in context to participants as citizens builds upon the idea of broadened perspectives and supports the development of social human capital. As student’s perspectives were changing and being broadened via participation on competitive academic teams, increased levels of empathy were experienced, ultimately leading to a perspective built on understanding, tolerance, and acceptance. This increase in empathy was present at both the professional and personal level of respondents, thus impacting participants very deeply.
Table 6  Sub-Theme II- Involvement Increases Empathy  
(Professional & Personal)

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| Mock Trial | “Specifically [Mock Trial] helps to better understand legal representation and the need for all persons regardless of background to have an adequate defense.”  
“We learn to provide adequate representation and defense to all persons in all situations regardless of personal belief. We serve others by defending them in a court of law, and learn to be professional at all times.” |
| LAE     | “At our national competition, I attended a training on showing empathy to offenders. It forced me to engage in a way of thinking I wouldn’t have been able to before. I had to think in the shoes in the other.” |
| Forensics | “It has increased my patience, kindness, group dynamics, and communication skills. I'm unbelievably grateful.”  
“It has given me a greater appreciation for social differences, and has made me a more patient and caring individual. This will translate into every career that I choose.”  
“I don’t see the globe as segments anymore, and I’m sensitive to people from all walks of life. My work since graduation has been dedicated to diversity and human rights. I have respect for these issues because I was given the opportunity to learn and engage them as a competitor with the Talking Mules.” |
| DECA    | “Not only did I have a better understanding of my own style [of leadership], I then knew how to work with others who differ from me with a greater level of understanding and respect.” |

In summary, students who participate on a competitive academic team are often exposed to more opportunities to broaden their own perspectives due to travel and interactions with others. These experiences contributed to perspectives rooted in a deeper understanding of all, cultivating mindfulness and acceptance of others within participants.
**Culture of service.** The second pillar that aligns with the theme of participants as citizens is that of a culture of service. Under this, two additional sub-themes emerged as well. First, involvement on a competitive academic team often taught the importance of service, and secondly, it provided a better understanding of needs that exist, which further contributed to a broadened perspective. To begin, it became quite clear that volunteerism, or service learning was not simply an event that a team participated in occasionally. Rather, service is something woven into the teams’ culture.

While being interviewed, three coaches spoke to the amount of direct service work in which their respective teams participate. Some of these experiences were tied specifically to the activity itself while others were more of benefit to the greater good. For example, each year the DECA team plans and hosts a high school DECA tournament as a way to give back to their own community. The LAE team cleans up the local shooting range and is given a small stipend for the metal/shells they recover. Alternatively, the teams also participate in several other, non-activity related service opportunities. For example, the speech and debate team and LAE have adopted children at Christmas time and participated in the community cupboard initiative. The speech and debate team has also participated in a state-wide anti-bullying campaign, literacy promotion, and various projects with the United Way.

The three teams mentioned above all had a very direct path to service, as identified by the numerous examples of different events in which they had participated. Mock Trial, however, shared the same view regarding the importance of service, but the model of service they spoke to was perhaps less direct regarding the specificity of events and service projects. However, the link was extremely direct when placed in the context
of the field of law. Both current and alumni competitors alike spoke to the inherency of service within the practice of law, highlighting another layer of participation teaching the importance of service amongst the competitive academic teams.

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<th>Table 7</th>
<th>Sub-Theme I- Involvement Teaches the Importance of Service</th>
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| **Mock Trial** | • “The entire [Mock Trial] program is designed to engender the ability to serve society at large, as well as individuals. It teaches students how to provide that service.”  
• “Attorneys are public servants, and Mock Trial taught me how and why public service to the community is important.”  
• “This activity has changed my view on the importance of serving the community through how it has sculpted my own views of morality and by showing how important it is to advocate for those who need it most.” |
| **LAE** | • “Our community service really builds a culture among the team rather than having it just be something to do to show we are participating in service.”  
• “We get to see how we help people. You see that it effects people, and it’s a good feeling. We do it because we want to, not just to earn service points. It is very satisfying when you actually see change. It also makes you appreciate what you have more.” |
| **Forensics** | • “Advocacy projects are a part of our team culture, and we all care about them. We don’t do it just because we have to. Being an informed person is part of what we have to do as a society, it is our civic duty.”  
• “Volunteering doesn’t seem like work, it seems like something we should do to be a good person. We learn how to talk the talk when we advocate for issues in rounds, but forensics also teaches us to walk the walk, so when we hear about a problem, we are more likely to do something about it.”  
• “Speech and debate helped me realize the critical intersection of speech and action. I now firmly believe there is no action without speech, nor speech without action. The activity made me more considerate of those in my community.” |
DECA

- “[Participation in DECA] gives students a good foundation for philanthropy. It has taught me there’s more to being a philanthropist than just giving things away. It is more about an experience. It means a lot to someone and might lead that person to pay it forward. We are in the mindset to help people when we graduate, and it carries on.”

The final sub-theme to emerge under the culture of service pillar seemed to naturally emerge from the first. Once participants experienced the importance of service, they ultimately became much more aware of their surrounding world and, even more so, the needs that exist within it. By being engaged in such diverse service related experiences, numerous individuals representing each of the four teams commented on how their involvement contributed to a better understanding of civic engagement. Participation on competitive academic teams exposed students to an interconnected society. Students were able to apply their broadened worldly/global perspective to the importance of service by recognizing the needs of others within the community, region, country, and beyond. Service is integrated into the guiding philosophy and actions of the participating teams; therefore, competitors had greater opportunities to become a more engaged and informed global citizen which, in turn, taught them the importance of civic engagement, service, and contributing to the creation of a greater collective society.

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<th>Table 8</th>
<th>Sub-Theme II- Involvement Teaches the Need for Service (Broadened Perspective of Service)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mock Trial</td>
<td>• “Before I was involved in Mock Trial, civic engagement meant things like voting. But now, I’ve learned that civic engagement is so much more- it’s about sometimes leading, and sometimes working behind the scenes to help others lead.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LAE</strong></td>
<td>“Community service is so important, but seeing it now at college and within a larger community, I've realized that it goes so much further than what a couple groups can do.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Forensics</strong></td>
<td>“Involvement changed my view of civic engagement because I used to think that was just things like voting. It made me realize there are bigger issues happening even within my community that I wasn’t aware of.”</td>
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<td>“I never realized there were so many problems. I know that sounds silly, but at tournaments, you hear about all these problems you never knew about. Forensics has increased my awareness of issues around me, which opens the door for a lot more volunteer opportunities.”</td>
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<td>“Speech and debate has shown me how everyone in society is interconnected, and doing community service has shown me that even if an issue isn’t affecting me, it could be affecting someone I know. It’s about making the world better for all people. Not just me.”</td>
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The data collected were quite apparent in showing how participants were impacted as citizens. Competitive academic teams contributed to the creation of a broader global perspective which included traits of empathy and understanding. This perspective allowed students to grasp how interconnected society truly is, which then led to more engaged levels of service.

**Theme III- Participants as Professionals**

The final theme that emerged from the data involved how competitive academic team participants were impacted as professionals. This theme is naturally connected to the previous two, as the data presented under participants as students and participants as citizens contributes to preparing graduates to enter into the professional setting. This theme was supported primarily by two of the Learning to a Greater degree pillars: the worldly perspective and future-focused academics. Under these two pillars, two sub-
themes emerged linked to how competitors have been impacted by participation as current or future professionals. Under the worldly perspective pillar, participants believed involvement on a competitive academic team increased their overall understanding of diversity and, secondly, as a result, prepared them to work with others more effectively. Under future-focused academics, two sub-themes were present as well: participants were provided with more networking opportunities; and the skills acquired via participation on a competitive academic team directly transferred into the professional setting.

**Worldly perspective.** Although the worldly perspective pillar was already discussed in relation to impacting participants as citizens and broadening perspectives, it went beyond that in respect to impacting participants as professionals. The data reported it was apparent that involvement with competitive academic teams not only broadened one’s perspective, but it also made individuals more understanding of diversity, which in turn impacted participants within their professional lives as leaders and group members.

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<th>Table 9</th>
<th>Sub-Theme I- Involvement Teaches an Understanding of Diversity</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mock Trial</strong></td>
<td>• “Our coach helps us cultivate worldly perspective since we get an opportunity to interact with people actively practicing law in different fields.”</td>
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<td><strong>Forensics</strong></td>
<td>• “[In debate], you have to understand the issues and cultures. Debate provides an intellectual study abroad. I’ve always lived in Missouri and, by being on the team, I’m studying and writing cases that teach me about the interconnectedness of the world. It builds respect for other cultures and reduces ignorance. It has made me more open minded and understanding of the world around me.”</td>
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<td>• “Debate forced me to reconcile with different ideas, to be more micro-politically aware, specifically regarding how discourse shapes reality and impacts people. It forced me to become more aware with how I engaged with the world, how my language impacts the world and certain groups of people.”</td>
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“Debate was the impetus for me to go from casual observer of politics to a true student of them, attempting to take in as much information as I could handle; constructing a world view of how international politics operate. Debate brings all of that information into a system so that you understand not just "what" things are happening, but "why" they happen the way they do. I couldn't have made sense of international politics without broadening and really developing my worldview so that I can understand how things fit.”

Fostering a greater understanding of diversity within our evolving world is a valued and honorable trait, but involvement on competitive academic teams seemed to advance beyond a simple understanding to an ability to lead and work with diverse populations more effectively. The second sub-theme to emerge under the worldly perspective as it involves participants as professionals was how competing on an academic team prepared individuals to be better equipped to lead and work with others. Many of the traits recognized are in direct alignment with the traits identified by Casner-Lotto and Barrington’s (2006) research regarding employee traits desired by business executives, including: collaboration and leadership skills, professionalism, communication skills, ethical/social responsibility, and creative problem solving abilities.

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<th>Table 10</th>
<th>Sub-Theme II- Participation Prepares Individuals for Group Work and Leadership Roles</th>
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<td><strong>Mock Trial</strong></td>
<td>“There is a diverse group of people in Mock Trial at UCM, including athletes, Greek life students, ROTC students, students that only do Mock Trial, and students in a wide variety of other activities. This creates an atmosphere of diverse opinions from a wide range of backgrounds.”</td>
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<td>“Mock Trial has allowed me personally to grow socially and as a leader. I’ve learned how to work with people in a way that doesn’t occur within the classroom.”</td>
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“Not only does the activity of debate and forensics inherently include discussions of global issues, requiring a deep knowledge and understanding of the issues that impact our global society, but it also allows participants to experience global societies and have debate interactions with international students. This experience goes beyond simply a surface experience of culture. It is an amazing opportunity to share in challenging conversations with those with a very different world view, and to search and work with them to find solutions to some of the biggest challenges faced by our 21st century world.”

“DECA helped me realize how much I enjoy working with others. It became evident how more I preferred to be involved with my peers than standing aside, alone. I’ve taken that realization and carried it forward with me into [my current position].”

In summary, when the engaged learning experience of competitive academic teams is paired with the teaching of diversity, students receive training in soft skills that better prepare them to enter the global society. Their undergraduate experience advanced in them the voice of empathy, understanding, and reasoning; they became the individuals capable of being the innovative problem solvers who research the impacts of a decision on others before implementing any action. They were built up to be the individuals capable of leading and creating cohesion amongst diverse groups of people. Due to the diverse skill set that includes both knowledge-based and applied skills they acquired, they are the desired employees of the 21st century (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

**Future-focused academics.** The second Learning to a Greater Degree tenant that was most prevalent under the participants as professionals was that of future-focused academics. When students leave UCM and join the workforce, administrators hoped that graduates would be able to “add value to an employment opportunity as soon as they walk out the door.” Under this pillar, two additional sub-themes emerged linking to
participants as professionals. First, being involved on a competitive academic team significantly bolstered networking opportunities and, secondly, the skills acquired are used daily within the professional lives of the respondents.

The most common sub-theme to emerge throughout this entire study was how involvement on the participating competitive academic teams led to increased networking opportunities with professionals or scholars within the field, thus increasing one’s ability to secure a job post-graduation. The coaches of each respective team commented on how involvement on a competitive academic team led to countless networking opportunities within the professional and academic fields to which non-competitors would likely not have access.

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<th>Table 11</th>
<th>Sub-Theme I- Increased Networking Opportunities</th>
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<td><strong>Mock Trial</strong></td>
<td>• “I’ve gone before Federal Judges in competitions…I now feel comfortable interacting with law enforcement and judges…and this has opened doors to scholarships and internships.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LAE</strong></td>
<td>• “Our advisors, as well as professionals from other areas are at the forefront of helping us find out what and how to pursue careers. This includes interview preparation as well as insight into typical job duties for a variety of positions.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DECA</strong></td>
<td>• “My success in DECA was undoubtedly a role in being hired as a Marketing and Promotions Graduate Assistant… before I’d finished my undergraduate degree.”</td>
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The interconnected world participants became privy to became far more intimate at this level, which provided them with opportunities to connect with others in their fields, leading to greater opportunities than many of their non-engaged peers.

The final sub-theme that emerged from future-focused academics as it relates to participants as professionals was how the skills obtained during their competitive careers
are now the skills respondents use daily within their professional lives. The alumni respondents were the primary source of this sub-theme’s data, as they are the ones currently applying their acquired skills post-graduation.

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<th>Table 12</th>
<th>Sub-Theme II - Applying the Skills Obtained Via Participation to the Professional Field</th>
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| **Mock Trial** | • “My goal is to create students who are capable of getting into law school and succeeding, and then when they get out, practicing law in a way that is not just good for them, but also good for the practice of law because, ultimately, we work together in the field.”
  • “My experience with the mock trial team exposed me to court room procedure, learning, and skills that are required as a real-world attorney.”
  • “[The competitions are] a fairly typical representation of a normal trial schedule…it sort of represents the physical, emotional, psychological, physiological, every type of impact you can think of when trying a case.”
  • “I use things I learned from Mock Trial myself daily in my job. These competitions are the best representation of legal proceedings you can be involved in other than actually being in a legal proceeding.” |
| **LAE** | • “Our competition even has a professional division that encourages past members to come back and compete. It keeps us focused on staying engaged academically in our field” |
| **Forensics** | • “The competitive nature of the activity increases a drive to perform and motivation to work hard to achieve success. In addition, it provided connections to different universities and their particular coaches who taught differently. It gave me insight to multiple ways of running a team (or business), as well as running a classroom. Practicing for debates and speeches also promotes self-awareness and helps one notice speaking and behavior flaws that can be addressed to prepare for potential job interviews.” |
• “The team teaches both public and interpersonal communication skills that are necessary for any post-graduation path, whether it be in academia or the work force.”

• “Everything I did to prepare for competition was a skill that I use every day to lead my team and serve my customer base. I can't think of any better preparation for a professional life than being on a speech and debate team.”

• “I use those skills every day on the job and they have helped me to get ahead. I am the youngest regional sales director in my corporation. I owe it, in large part, to the skills I learned in debate.”

• “Participating on the Talking Mules speech and debate team was a crucial part of my learning experience at UCM. It honed my ability to think critically about a situation in high stress and time-sensitive environments. My participation also taught me how to structure evidence-based and accurate arguments and transfer those into writing. Even further, I am confident in my ability to persuasively speak for groups and individuals, even without preparation. All of the aforementioned skills are things I use in everyday life to not only function in my job position, but to progress above others in similar roles.”

DECA

• “Members had to be knowledgeable about newest strategies within the field- like in digital marketing or social media, for example. DECA is all about forward thinking with an emphasis on one-on-one communication.”

In summary, from their years involved with a competitive academic team, alumni were afforded countless opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom and practice the skills that would one day lead to their professional success in a realistic, practical setting. Some of those skills are rooted specifically in knowledge-based content areas, such as the practice of law or business; however, many of the skills garnered are applied, and contribute to the creation of a well-rounded professional capable of interacting with others in a positive manner. Essentially, both the hard skills and 21st
century social human capital skills are developed, making participants who hold such skills desired employees (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Scott, 2004). It is graduates that encapsulate those skills that UCM should be proud to claim as alumni, as they are living proof of mission statement fulfillment and advancement of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract.

In the case of competitive academic teams, the data clearly support the advancement of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and subsequent mission statement, thus answering the research questions favorably. Additionally, copious amounts of antidotal evidence were gathered to use for the HLC (or any other) accreditation process. Although some teams may advance particular pillars more than others, they contribute to the well-rounded student experience UCM provides, which produces graduates who embrace service, understand others, and are prepared with the skills to advance within their own personal and professional lives.
Discussion/Impacts and Answers to Research Questions

When applying these results to the problem of practice previously identified and the first research question which focused on operationalizing the pillars to the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, the practicality of this study was magnified. Per the HLC’s website (2015), a university’s mission statement should be used as the guiding principle in university-wide actions, offerings, and instruction. Furthermore, within this particular case study, President Ambrose identified the Learning to a Greater Degree contract as the compass that will guide the decisions made regarding overall university direction (Murphy, 2012, para. 4). Clearly, the HLC accreditation standards and the Learning to a Greater Degree contract provide the institutional foundation upon which all University decisions rest.

Since the mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree contract, along with HLC accreditation standards, are the primary drivers of decision-making, providing usable proof of program alignment (in this instance, the participating competitive academic teams) to the mission and contract would seem to be extremely important, which participating administrators agreed upon. When asked how important it was for the University’s competitive academic teams to be in alignment with the mission and Learning to a Greater Degree contract, one administrator explained,

I think it’s always got to be a direct line, otherwise, those kinds of groups might cease to exist or at least the passion for them. We are all about showing student success. Students put such high value on their undergraduate years, but this is just the start of their career and life. You just hope that start gives them the tools to navigate well in the future.
While still agreeing, two other administrator respondents interpreted the question a bit differently. They explained that, largely, the competitive teams advance the pillars simply by the very nature of what they do. One administrator remarked, “These [teams] integrate all of the four pillars and more simply because of what they are.” Although that may be a comforting fact for the coaches and participants of these teams, it should not be assumed as enough. Another administrator, who also believes these teams naturally reflect the pillars, commented, “Although it’s a natural alignment, I don’t think it’s a bad idea to step back and look to see how do the teams reflect and manifest these pillars.”

Although the data from this study are rich with evidence showing how UCM’s competitive academic teams contribute to the fulfillment of the mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree pillars, it is also important that it be the correct type of data needed to provide evidence to HLC and other various stakeholders. When speaking with members of the administration regarding how the University reports data to the HLC, one administrator explained, “…we create artifacts that demonstrate to others what we do… it goes beyond course grades and letter grades.” Essentially, artifact-based or antidotal evidence is acceptable, and perhaps even favored by administration and the HLC. Therefore, this case study should be considered acceptable based upon the amount of antidotal data collected.

Research Question One of this study sought to identify how one could operationalize the tenants of the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars as a means to measure whether or not the UCM mission statement was being fulfilled. Camelia and Marius (2013) identified how difficult it can be to measure the fulfillment of mission statements due to the language often chosen being vague or overly philosophical.
However, when universities implement some sort of learning contract, such as the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, as a means to fulfill the mission, operationalizing and measuring effectiveness and fulfillment can be achieved. Within learning contracts, oftentimes more tangible or, in this case, measurable goals are identified, as compared to mission statements. Essentially, the learning contract provides the specifics that are lacking in the mission statement. It is the specifics that can be operationalized and measured. By using the four pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract as the catalyst for the questions asked in the interviews and on the surveys, respondents were able to provide specific examples and, therefore, evidence in support of each pillar. The data collection instruments created were not written specifically for the four participating teams so they could be used to assess other campus programs or organizations. As all the administrators explained, if the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars are being fulfilled, then so is the mission statement, as the learning contract is essentially a more detailed, specific explanation of the mission statement. One administrator in particular elaborated, “The reasons to believe, or four pillars, are really a part of the mission and heart of this institution.” Therefore, albeit sometimes difficult, it is possible to operationalize and measure mission statements and learning contracts, especially when the verbiage includes more specific, identifiable goals. The interview questions, surveys, and focus group questions used to collect the data for this study are rooted in the specific details of the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars and can be found in the appendices, providing the evidence to support and answer Research Question One.

However, while discussing usable means of data, upon further elaboration, administrators explained that the data supplied to the HLC to show mission statement
fulfillment is collected by various teams or committees of individuals from different offices and departments on campus. Therefore, it does no good to have data that show program alignment with the mission and learning contract if it is not shared with the correct people. Despite Astin’s (1999) suggestions to conduct more research analyzing the relationships that exist between modes of student involvement and program outcomes, many organizations, such as competitive academic teams, fall prey to Bartanen’s (1998) concerns, when she lamented, “One challenge facing the forensics community then, is to strengthen its connection with campus discussions of pedagogy” (p.12). Although she was speaking directly about forensics, her words ring true for any co-curricular or extra-curricular mode of student involvement. Gathering the research to show how a program aligns with the mission is not useful unless it is shared with those who are on the teams and committees of individuals who are responsible for reporting data to the HLC and other invested stockholders.

Research Question Two asks whether the four competitive academic teams that participated in the study effectively contribute to the fulfillment of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and University’s mission and, if so, how. The data analysis provided a complex answer. Overall, based upon the data collected and results provided, it is clear the four participating teams contribute to the fulfillment of the learning contract. However, if the teams are not communicating how they contribute to fulfillment, then one must question how effective they are in advancing the contract and mission. If one is measuring effectiveness by the impact participating on the academic teams has upon the students, then the answer is a resounding yes; the participating teams are effectively fulfilling the mission and pillars. However, if effectiveness is measured by
the amount of evidence shared with and known by the university administration as well as the larger university community, then the answer is likely not as effective as they could be.

To begin, if effectiveness is measured by student impact, then it is unquestionable that these teams are not only fulfilling, but advancing the mission and learning contract in unique and powerful ways. The coaches, current competitors, and alumni competitors all provided countless accounts of how participation on their respective competitive academic team engaged them in a way that a traditional classroom could not, which allowed participants to advance their content and applied knowledge within their professional fields. Additionally, they highlighted the many ways service learning and contributing to a culture of service is engrained in the team’s philosophy by providing specific examples of all the service projects completed. Despite the other two pillars (future-focused academics and worldly perspective) being a little more difficult to demonstrate for some of the participating teams, given the university’s chosen verbiage, ample evidence was still provided that highlighted how the very nature of the team advanced an understanding of diversity and further prepared students to excel in their given professional fields, which were elements of the worldly perspective and future-focused pillars identified by all participating administrators. Analyzing how participation on a competitive academic team impacts participants as students, citizens, and professionals provided strong support affirming there is no question that the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars and subsequent mission statement are being fulfilled and advanced by team participation.
It could be argued that some of the applied or soft skills acquired via participation could also be learned while participating on an athletic team or engaging in various organizations or modes of student engagement, thus still advancing components of the Learning to a Great Degree contract and equipping individuals with the 21st century skills desired in the workforce (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1999; Bland, Melton, Bigham & Welle, 2014; Chebator, 1995; Duare, Araujo, Correia & Davids, 2012; Duch, Waitzman & Amaral, 2010; Eccles, 2010; Passos, Davids & Araujo, 2011). However, participation on competitive academic teams has the unique ability to fulfill the pillars due to it being viewed as an extension of the classroom. Therefore, development of knowledge-based skills, in addition to applied skills, occurs. Kosloski and Ritz (2014) explained participation on a competitive academic team as an experience in “. . . reinforcing the learner’s curriculum” (p. 154). Bartanen (1998) concurred, finding participation offered students “. . . oral and written communication opportunities not possible in the traditional classroom” (p. 9). When graduates possess both the knowledge-based and applied skills desired by employers within their fields, their likelihood of obtaining success increases (Rogers, 2002, 2005). Competitive academic teams offer not only fulfillment of the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars and mission, but also an environment that fosters both the advancement of knowledge-based and applied skills, such as leadership, problem solving, communication, and professionalism. Involvement on competitive academic teams produces in participants a great deal of social human capital, which Psacharopoulos (2006) and Scott (2004) referred to as being the types of individuals who will become contributors to the creation of a greater society.
While being interviewed, each participating administrator believed the four competitive academic teams within this study did advance each of the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars. As expected, it was easier for the administrators to identify specific ways in which the teams advance particular pillars, such as engaged learning. However, although they agreed the teams did advance the remaining pillars, their ability to produce specific examples of how became apparent. It was clear the administrators understood the overarching purpose of the teams, the general nature of each team, and their success records, but recalling specific details regarding what the team does when not competing were sparse. For example, each of administrators interviewed knew the teams participated in service learning, but only one of them could identify specific projects the teams had engaged in. This led the researcher to wonder how effective the participating teams are in communicating their actions and purpose to the university administration and wider campus community.

If effectiveness is to be measured by the amount of information stakeholders and administrators are aware of, then the answer to the second research question becomes yes, the teams fulfill the mission, but perhaps not as effectively as they could. When the participating administrators revealed that the data gathered to provide to HLC for accreditation and other interested stakeholders was often compiled by teams or committees of individuals, the researcher began to question how accessible the data from the institution’s competitive academic teams truly were. If such data exist, but are not shared with the administration, campus community, and individuals on the data collection committees, then the data cannot be expected to be used to support the University’s goal in fulfilling the mission statement and learning contract. Simply stated, having the data
does very little to help the University or competitive academic teams. Making the data accessible to the parties who can use them to highlight campus successes, demonstrating the worth of programs and both their alignment to and support of the University’s mission, and ability to contribute to the data used in the HLC’s accreditation process, is critical. It is not enough to heed Astin’s (1999) and Bartanen’s (1998) pleas in which they request more research be conducted analyzing specific programs’ relationship to pedagogy and learning. The data must be communicated and shared if they are to have any value.

There is clear evidence showing how the four participating competitive academic teams assist in fulfilling the Learning to a Greater Degree contract within student participants. These teams are more than effective at transforming the lives of participants so when they graduate they are ready to enter the professional world, equipped with the knowledge-based and applied skills desired by employers in the 21st century. However, if the evidence of this is never shared with the University administration and campus community, then the data cannot be shared with interested stakeholders and the HLC. The data lose their effectiveness when they goes unnoticed, unused, and undervalued, which will be discussed further in the recommendations section.

**Limitations**

While completing this study, the researcher identified several observations that could be considered limitations that likely impacted the magnitude and scope of the study. Although these observations were minor when compared to the greater impact of the study, they are still worth discussing. Particularly, the observations or limitations that
occurred within this study include three key areas: small sample sizes, securing alumni participants, and the varying degrees of faculty/coach involvement.

When originally designing this study, the researcher desired to secure at least 15-20 survey responses per each team, per population (current competitors and alumni). Upon further investigation, that target was unrealistic due to the current size of several of the participating academic teams. For example, the Mock Trial team can only have 10 members due to their current coaching and resource restrictions. DECA and forensics also have teams of less than 20 people, so although the survey response rate was quite high regarding percentage of responses based on population size, many of the populations were smaller than the researcher anticipated, making it impossible to reach the target response rate for current competitors. Although this likely did not skew the results in any way, it is important to note that some teams had far less data to report simply due to being smaller in size. Unfortunately, at times this led to an unbalanced representation within the study’s results section.

Issues regarding response rates were exacerbated when securing alumni participants, both for the electronic survey and focus group. This was, undoubtedly, the most challenging component of this study. The researcher was only pleased with the amount of alumni respondents from one team (n=16), which was the only team the researcher had a personal connection with, therefore allowing for more access to alumni. The researcher was quite surprised by the lack of connection or communication many teams had with their alumni participants. One team in particular essentially said they had no way or ability to send the electronic survey to alumni members because they kept no account or records of their alumni upon graduation. Once this revelation was made, the
researcher contacted the Alumni Relations office in an attempt to identify more participants. After searching through their records, the office found that competitive academic teams has not been used as a marker in identifying alumni, so they also had few, if any, records that could be used to identify potential survey or focus group participants. This led the researcher to attempt to contact alumni by any means, essentially resulting in contacting current competitors and asking them to forward the survey to any alumni they may be in contact with. Although this did provide marginal success, it gave an extremely limited view of the lasting impact participating on competitive academic teams has on participants, as the majority of alumni participants had only been out of school for under three years (with the exception of one team that had representation ranging from 1994-2015). Although the data gathered from this population are still relevant and usable, the researcher hoped to have a broader range represented within the alumni population to better see the lasting impacts.

Finally, as briefly touched on previously, the sheer differences regarding faculty/coach involvement altered the study to a minor extent. Based on the parameters identified by the researcher, in order for a team to be considered as a participant in this study, they had to have at least one dedicated faculty member serving as the coach. Although this perimeter was met by each team, the researcher was quite surprised by the varying degrees of coach involvement. For example, one team has two dedicated faculty members who receive release time to coach the team. Due to this, their involvement levels were extremely high. Another of the teams has an adjunct faculty member devoted to coaching the team; however, the only role that individual has as adjunct faculty is to coach, making that individual far more removed from the overall university culture.
Furthermore, that particular coach has a fulltime job that is not associated with the University in any way. The remaining two teams have more than one faculty member designated to working with the team, but they all self-identified their roles as more of an advisor rather than a formal coach. Although they do have direct contact with their respective teams and assist in competition preparation, the teams are more student-run.

These degrees of involvement are likely an influencing factor in the data gathered, and subsequent results gleaned. For example, the team that participated in service learning and/or volunteer projects the least, is coached by the adjunct faculty member whose only role is to coach. Therefore, that coach is less indoctrinated into the University mission, Learning to a Greater Degree contract, and overall campus culture. Therefore, that coach and respective team are likely less involved in initiatives and activities that are more removed from team preparation and competition. Although members from the teams that are more student-run did identify having more exposure/deeper relationships with faculty members as a benefit to team involvement, there was less evidence of the lasting impact of those relationships. For example, the team that has two committed faculty members as coaches provided the most data regarding the impact their coaches had on their academic and personal lives, articulating how important engagement and feeling like a part of a community are to students. Numerous stories were shared speaking to instances where the coach was identified as being a key factor in success while at UCM, but even more so, beyond their time as an undergraduate. This is likely due to the greater level of direct involvement by those coaches with the students, wider campus community, and culture of engaged learning.
**Recommendations**

It is the hope of the researcher that this study will be adjusted and replicated on other campuses as a means to highlight the importance and value competitive academic teams offer to the greater university community. As the results of this small study have demonstrated, competitive academic teams can be a valuable asset in the production of data and evidence to support the HLC accreditation process. Further, the researcher recommends that one day, this study be expanded and repeated on the UCM campus as a way to examine all of the competitive academic teams’ contributions to the University community, mission, and fulfillment of the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars. This particular study only reflects the advancements made by the four participating teams, leaving the majority of UCM’s competitive academic teams falling prey to their contributions to mission fulfillment going unreported, ergo, unheard. It is likely there is a wealth of usable evidence and data that is simply overlooked due to individuals being unaware of the happenings, successes, and actions of our competitive academic teams.

Regarding the four participating teams in this study specifically, based on the observations and subsequent impacts previously mentioned, the researcher makes two recommendations to the teams, regarding record keeping and reporting. Furthermore, the researcher makes three recommendations to the University, again regarding record keeping, levels of involvement, and finally, pillar verbiage and content.

**Team Recommendation 1.** Due to the difficulties in locating alumni members, it became apparent to the researcher that many of the competitive academic teams are unlikely to have consistent contact with their alumni members. This could be attributed to a variety of factors: perhaps the team is more student-run, resulting in a much more
transient population and a decreased ability to sustain institutional knowledge and history, poor record keeping, or changes amongst the coaching staff. Regardless of the reason, it is imperative that teams and coaches keep in contact with alumni members. Often, alumni members are the key to sustaining institutional knowledge when there is a change within the coaching staff. Additionally, alumni can be utilized as volunteers, but only if they are aware of the opportunity and are asked/included in the culture post-graduation. Finally, in a time of constant financial insecurity, alumni may be willing to make contributions towards supporting their respective team, again, only if they are aware of the opportunity and remain engaged in the team culture. For all these reasons, it is recommended that the teams attempt to stay better connected with their alumni members.

**Team Recommendation 2.** The researcher suggests the teams and coaches make more of an effort to increase their overall visibility on campus. When speaking to members of the administration, it became clear that although many do know of the competitive success of our academic teams, they are less aware of the other types of activities teams participate in, namely those contributing to the advancement of the culture of service Learning to a Greater Degree pillar. When asked specifically about the competitive academic teams’ role in this pillar, many administration commented they were aware the teams participated in volunteer and service learning opportunities, but they could not articulate the types of events that occur. This is alarming, especially considering the extremely high levels of civic engagement and service-related activities the teams participate in. Because these teams can be used as evidence to support this part of the University’s mission and learning contract to the HLC, it is imperative that more
efforts to communicate these types of achievements occur. Administration cannot report what they do not know.

**University Recommendation 1.** Alumni record keeping should be increased at an institutional level as well. Based upon the experience the researcher had working with the Alumni Office, it became clear the University does not use competitive academic teams as a marker when identifying alumni. Currently, the University boasts of around 19 competitive academic teams, some who have over 50 competitors at one time. It is likely that a significant amount of our student body population is engaged with a competitive academic team. The university should identify that characteristic within alumni, similar to the way alumni student athletes are identified. If record keeping could be improved at both the team and institutional level, it is likely the alumni of competitive academic teams would be a more engaged and active population. The benefits to the teams and university as a whole should be obvious, but range from increased involvement by alumni within the academic teams as volunteer coaches and networking opportunities within the professional world, to the development of fundraising opportunities for the teams, University foundation, and alumni offices.

**University Recommendation 2.** The researcher recognized that many of the observations gleaned from this study could potentially be viewed as shortcomings of the coach. However, upon making recommendations to better record keeping and improve communication with administrators, it is important to note that many of our competitive academic team coaches are overtaxed. It is not uncommon for coaches of competitive academic teams to fulfill many different roles far beyond simply coaching their teams to be successful in competitions. For example, most coaches must balance their own budget,
manage their own visibility (often including writing press releases and managing social media accounts), attempt to keep in contact with alumni, plan and implement fundraising initiatives, and make all travel arrangements (often including driving vehicles full of student competitors), all while also managing a teaching load or full-time job outside of academia. Simply stated, most coaches of competitive academic teams do not have enough time or resources to fulfill all necessary roles at optimum levels, meaning many duties that are further removed from actual coaching often receive less attention.

Although comparisons of this type are discouraged, it does provide an interesting perspective; consider athletic departments. Oftentimes, the coaches of athletic teams are devoted solely to coaching and recruiting future team members. Then several other individuals are employed by the athletic department who are devoted to elements such as fundraising/development, media relations, and marketing. We should not be surprised that the efforts and accomplishments of competitive academic teams often go unnoticed or unreported, simply due to the fact their role often includes far more than simply coaching. If the coaches of the University’s competitive academic teams had more devoted faculty and/or employees to assist in the subsidiary components, such as marketing, development, and media/public/alumni relations, it is likely they could be capitalized on even more at an institutional level.

Finding more resources to devote to competitive academic teams is not an easy feat, especially in times of financial insecurity. However, due to their ability to vastly contribute to the advancement of the University’s mission and learning contract, coupled with the coaches’ current inability to fulfill many of the ancillary roles expected of them, devoting more resources to these teams would be beneficial on many levels. First, they
provide a wealth of rich data and evidence that can be used in accreditation efforts. Secondly, the teams could be leveraged and used as a recruitment tool, thus contributing to UCM’s desire to bring quality students to campus.

University Recommendation 3. One very common theme amongst the responses from coaches, students, and even administration was that of the wording used to describe two of the pillars: a worldly perspective and future-focused academics. Per the University of Central Missouri Strategic Position Platform from 2012, which is one of the primary documents used to unveil the description of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and pillars, a worldly perspective entails “UCM preparing students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities that include…,” with the definition continuing by providing examples of various study abroad opportunities. Two issues arose from this wording. First, the word “worldly” was not favored by many, in fact, each of the administrators interviewed said they would prefer we use the word “global” instead. Additionally, the wording implies that one can only be prepared to work in a more globalized world if they participate in study abroad or similar experiences. Although study abroad opportunities are extremely beneficial and are likely the best way to be open to a more global perspective, when asked what a global perspective meant to them, university administrators all spoke to a more broad definition and experience. They mentioned traits such as being understanding and accepting of diversity, being able to work with a diverse range of individuals, and being less ethnocentric. Although perhaps to a lesser extent, these are all skills students could learn and experience in situations other than study abroad. Simply by traveling to a new region in the country is a truly awakening experience for someone who has never left the state.
However, the current wording of the definition is quite specific, and therefore limiting, making it more difficult to fulfil and articulate to the HLC and other interested stakeholders.

The second pillar that brought up concerns regarding the wording was that of future-focused academics. Per the University’s definition, future-focused academics denotes UCM’s commitment to new technologies that keep students abreast of the latest changes in their field. Although this is a well-thought out commitment, it is somewhat limited to specific fields such as science and technology. When administration were asked about what future-focused academics meant to them, they again provided answers that were much broader than that provided by the University’s definition of future-focused academics. They spoke to students being prepared to adapt to an ever changing world, being prepared for jobs and/or fields that may not even exist yet, and to being life-long learners. For example, two of the teams from this study are housed in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Science, and as such, are rooted in components of the liberal arts which, often times, does not advance as rapidly within the realm of technology. Upon hearing the definition, one respondent representing Mock Trial remarked, “It seems like the definition is limited to whether or not your field has technological advancements. The practice of law isn’t based on technological advancements. In this setting, technology is irrelevant.” While another respondent from the forensics team explained, “We aren’t always learning actual technology, but the things we learn and do within our community are very important to the real world. It makes you an effective communicator, an active listener. These skills will never be less valuable.” Although the skills gleaned from participation on academic teams may not always have a bend towards technology, they
are skills that will help participants become the forward thinkers of the world, who are adaptable individuals who respect diversity. Essentially, when using the thoughts of the administration as the definition, the ability to fulfill and articulate evidence advancing the worldly perspective and future-focused academics became more inclusive to all fields. If the definitions were to be broadened, far more fields could capitalize on the ability to promote these pillars.

Additionally, the researcher recommends the University consider including more content within the Learning to a Greater Degree Contract regarding the importance of student engagement and involvement. While being interviewed, several administrators spoke to student engagement as being a key component to providing a well-rounded collegiate experience. As Astin (1984; 1985; 1993; 1999) explained, student engagement increases retention and overall satisfaction rates among students. Since the University is home to so many different modes of student involvement, capitalizing on said opportunities by integrating involvement into the Learning to a Greater Degree Contract may further bolster student engagement, retention rates, and overall success.

**Summary**

In times of financial instability and unpredictable levels of support, it is critical co-curricular programs are equipped with program-specific data that highlight the benefits students gain from participation, as well as how the activity contributes to the overall success of the institution. Both Astin (1999) and Bartanen (1998) encourage scholars to engage in further research analyzing the relationships that exist between co-curricular programming to campus pedagogy and desired student outcomes, as it may provide evidence to the institution that is usable in meeting the HLC’s accreditation standards, as well as provide program survival and longevity. This case study showed
how university mission statements and learning contracts could be operationalized as a means to collect data that could aid in accreditation requirements. Additionally, it showed how UCM’s competitive academic teams could be a valuable tool in collecting said data and advancing the mission statement.

In addition to answering the posed research questions, this study illuminated several recommendations for both the teams and the University. If the posed recommendations are adopted, the benefits would be twofold. First, the teams would gain an increased level of administrative support, which would likely improve team success. Second, the University would not only have access to rich data to support accreditation standards, but it would also likely reap the benefits of increased student recruitment due to the success of its competitive academic teams. Finally, if broader, more agreed-upon, definitions of the two pillars in question were adopted, University administration, faculty, and students would likely share a more unified understanding of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, which would further increase the ability to fulfill and advance it.

It is the hope of the researcher that this study will be adjusted and replicated on other campuses as a means to highlight the importance and value competitive academic teams offer to the greater university community. As the results of this study have demonstrated, competitive academic teams can be a valuable asset in the production of data and evidence to support the HLC accreditation process, which benefits not only the teams themselves, but also all interested and invested stakeholders; the same individuals who are often in charge of making the difficult decisions regarding funding. Validating the critical role that competitive academic teams/programs serve to both support and
supply substantive data and evidence of the university’s mission and/or learning contract
is paramount to the future success and survival of such programs.
Section V

Contribution to Scholarship

Below is a manuscript version of this study that will be submitted to *The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta*, which is the oldest, continuously published journal dedicated to the promotion of scholarly research regarding the theory and/or practice of the discipline of forensics education. It is a highly competitive, peer reviewed journal that is circulated quarterly on a national level.

It is the hope of the researcher that this study be used as a pilot study, encouraging other universities to engage in a similar research to ensure program outcomes and practices align with university mission statements. Measuring modes of student engagement and how they align with a university’s mission and goals is a wise a prudent practice for all invested parties and stakeholders. This study, and those similar in nature that are unique to a specific university, strive to provide administrators with the data needed to aid in program longevity and university accreditation per the Higher Learning Commission’s (HLC) guidelines.
Leveraging university mission statements:
A case study analyzing competitive academic teams’ contributions towards advancing mission statements

by

Nicole P.M. Freeman

University of Central Missouri

Correspondence Address:
Martin 136, Dept. of Communication
Warrensburg, MO
64093

E-mail Address:
nfreeman@ucmo.edu

Telephone Number:
(660)-473-3316
Abstract

This case study examines the importance of program alignment with a university’s mission and pedagogical commitment to students and articulates the unique ways in which competitive academic teams advance the mission and learning contract of the University of Central Missouri. By engaging in site-specific research that highlights how co-curricular activities such as competitive academic teams, advance the university’s mission, programs can take a proactive approach to sharing with university administration the unique ways in which they can provide data to fulfill the Higher Learning Commission’s (HLC) accreditation requirements, contribute to the overall success of the university, and solidify their own position amongst the institutional community.
Leveraging university mission statements: A case study analyzing competitive academic teams’ contributions towards advancing mission statements

Introduction

According to Dr. Pat Lynch, the President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc. (2010), in times of economic downsizing, the phrase often adopted is “we simply need to learn to do more with less,” in an attempt to continue to have high levels of production and momentum (p. 1). Since the 1980s, policy regarding higher education has evolved to be more focused on economic gain and market model approaches (St. John, Daun-Barnett & Moronski-Chapman, 2013). This ideological shift, along with yearly projected state budget cuts, enrollment variance, and campus funding realignments, greatly influences administrative decisions regarding resource allocation. Many states are funding higher education at a rate lower than during the economic recession in 2008, resulting in “...cuts to educational or other services, or both” (Mitchell & Leachman, 2015, p. 1). As a result, universities have been forced to evaluate spending and make difficult decisions regarding funding and resource allocation. This process can become extremely challenging, as creating a matrix to guide budgetary decision-making is often an arduous task. However, universities have one frequently overlooked tool that should provide the foundation for creating such a matrix - their mission statement.

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) (2015) requires universities to have a mission statement that “articulate[s] publicly the organization’s commitments, defines the varied internal and external constituencies the organization intends to serve, and includes a strong commitment to high academic standards that sustain and advance excellence in higher learning” (p. 1). Further, the HLC advances two core components that must be met for the institution to reach and maintain accreditation: “The institution’s academic
programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission,” and “The institution’s planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission” (p. 1). Essentially, mission statements should guide and direct the priorities, actions, and resource allocations on the campus, including instruction, campus offerings/activities, and extra/co-curricular programs. To attain and maintain accreditation, the university must demonstrate that the relationship between mission and resulting priorities has been met and continues to direct decision-making. The challenge is to provide sufficient and impactful data that demonstrates this committed relationship.

The University of Central Missouri’s (UCM) mission is to “. . . transform students into lifelong learners, dedicated to service, with the knowledge, skills and confidence to succeed and lead in the region, state, nation and world” (University of Central Missouri Fact Book, 2014, p. ii). The vehicle through which UCM advances this mission is the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, which promises “an educational experience that extends beyond the classroom,” that will prepare students to “excel in the fast-paced world of today and tomorrow” (UCM Quick Reference Guide, p. 2). One strategy to achieve this goal is through offering students the opportunity to participate in academic extra and co-curricular activities, such as competitive forensics (speech and debate) or mock trial. Involvement in forensics and similar academic teams enhances critical thinking abilities, builds confidence and leadership skills, and teaches the importance of discourse and civic engagement (Bartanen, 1998; Rogers, 2005). The traits taught via participation seem to directly support UCM’s Learning to a Greater Degree contract and, therefore, subsequent mission statement. However, without a valid matrix for measuring the team’s social and educational value linked directly to the mission statement and
learning contract, UCM’s competitive teams have little data to demonstrate their presence adds value to the University. As a result, data and subsequent opportunities are lost.

Secondly, since mission statements, and in this case the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, are designed to guide the actions, priorities, and decisions of an institution, it is imperative that research is conducted to identify whether or not UCM’s competitive academic teams are in alignment with and support the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, thus showing if/how they contribute to the university’s overall success. Bartanen (1998) lamented, “One challenge facing the forensics community then, is to strengthen its connection with campus discussions of pedagogy” (p.12) Therefore, this study will examine whether or not the University’s competitive academic teams support and further the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and, consequently, overall mission.

**Review of Literature**

In 2012, the study’s host institution adopted the Learning to a Greater Degree contract as the primary means to fulfill its mission statement. This contract serves as an agreement between the University and student body, obligating the University to provide ample opportunities for students to participate in activities that uphold the contract’s four pillars of academic success, which include *engaged learning, future-focused academics, gaining a worldly perspective, and creating a culture of service.* The contract’s four tenants reflect both the institution’s mission statement, which is to “... transform students into lifelong learners, dedicated to service, with the knowledge, skills and confidence to succeed and lead in the region, state, nation and world,” and core value to learning, promising to provide students with a strong liberal arts education that supports life-long learning (University of Central Missouri Core Values, 2003, para. 1; University
of Central Missouri Fact Book, 2014, p. ii). Although these tenants sound like an excellent foundation to any academic program, successful advancement of mission statements and learning contracts rooted in the liberal arts can be complicated to tangibly measure due to difficulties quantifying philosophic phrasing focusing on personal growth (Davis, Ruhe, Lee & Rajadhyaksha, 2007).

Although difficult, measurement of mission statement fulfillment is critical at both the institutional and programmatic levels. At the institutional level, data showing mission statement fulfillment are critical to a university’s accreditation process. According to the new criteria for accreditation posed by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), universities must have a mission statement focused on student learning and engagement that guides the institution’s operations (Higher Learning Commission, 2012, p. 4-5). Furthermore, the HLC requires evaluation of said mission statement fulfillment. Data indicating an institution’s mission statement is being fulfilled is needed to ensure a successful accreditation process.

At the programmatic level, furthering a university’s mission statement could be the key to program survival. In times of external funding cuts that necessitate internal budget cuts, along with an emphasis towards a more market-model approach to funding academics, institutions of higher education have been forced to become more narrow in focus and concentrated in areas that seem to support a model of income generation (St. John, Daun-Barnett, Moronski-Chapman, 2013). Therefore, smaller academic programs such as competitive academic teams are not viewed as financial contributors to the larger university income and are frequently scrutinized (Littlefield, 1991). However, the skills garnered by participation on such teams seem to contribute to a well-rounded liberal arts
education, thus upholding the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and overall mission statement. Though without proper measurement and documentation, this remains unproven. A report produced by the Student Affairs Leadership Council (2011) explained, “At a time when additional funds are scarce, co-curricular outcomes can be a factor in resource allocation decisions” (p. 6). As a result, it is imperative research be conducted to identify whether or not UCM’s Learning to a Greater Degree contract can be objectively measured and fulfilled by first examining student involvement’s role in advancing university mission statements and, second, how specific programs such as competitive academic teams may be a usable, but often overlooked, tool to measure mission statement fulfillment.

Astin’s (1984, 1985, 1993, 1999) work on student development theory found students who were highly involved in their educational experience and campus community experienced improved academic standing, had better relationships with instructors, felt a stronger connection to the campus community, and developed several time management and coping traits that advanced personal and academic success (Ting, 1997). Kuh (2009) defined these actions as methods of student engagement, or “. . . the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of colleges and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (p. 683). Increased student engagement and involvement tends to decrease student dropout rates, which is beneficial to both the student population and the university, as degree completion is an essential goal of education and essential to mission statement fulfillment (Astin, 1984, 1999).
One vehicle of involvement Astin (1984, 1985, 1993, 1999) identified in his research was the use of campus organizations, teams, and clubs, often referred to as extra-curricular or co-curricular activities. Involvement in co-curricular activities is often seen as a staple to the undergraduate collegiate experience, supplying students with ample social interactions and relational connections with both peers and faculty. In addition, life skills are inadvertently taught through participation in organizations, as involvement requires a level of commitment and dedication that serves students well in their academic career (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1999; Rogers, 2002, 2007). Astin’s claims have been supported by Chebator (1995), who found students who were involved in co-curricular activities outside of the classroom had higher grade point averages and retention rates, more self-confidence, and increased emotional stability over their peers who were not involved. Simply stated, it would seem the relationship between a university’s fulfillment of its mission statement and learning contract, and its direct link to involvement, student academic success, retention and graduation rates cannot be underemphasized.

Even the HLC has identified co-curricular programming as integral to the achievement of an institution’s education mission and suggested the inclusion of its role on campus as part of the self-study required for successful accreditation. In their new accreditation standards, the HLC specifically articulates under the area of student learning a section on the students’ education through the offering and measurement of co-curricular programs: “Co-curricular programs are suited to the institutions’ mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students” and “The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched education environment” (Higher Learning Commission,
Since the HLC requires data for accreditation, it is yet one more reason to assess whether or not a relationship exists between co-curricular offerings and the Learning to a Greater Degree contract as a means to provide proof to the HLC that the accreditation criterion has been successfully met.

Generally speaking, involvement in organizations and/or teams at the collegiate level increases a student’s feeling of connection to the campus community, as well as faculty and staff members such as coaches. Many researchers have found that these interactions are likely the strongest influencing factor on retention and positive educational outcomes (Burris, Ashorn, Akers, Fraze, Brashears & McCulloch, 2010; Kuh & Hu, 1999; O’Keeffe, 2013). Additionally, several researchers, including Astin (1985, 1985, 1993, 1993), Holland and Huba (1991), Pascarella et al. (1986), Pascarella and Smart (1991), and Ryan (1989) reported students involved in co-curricular programs were more satisfied with their collegiate experience than uninvolved students. The link between increased student involvement and satisfaction to higher retention and graduation rates was even further advanced.

Academic teams claim to teach critical life skills while being naturally aligned with the university’s academic curricula. In their study analyzing participation on co-curricular teams, Kosloski and Ritz (2014) found that co-curricular activities such as competitive academic teams allow learners to “. . . take part in many educational activities outside of the classroom that may include community service, leadership, competitive events, and career awareness, all reinforcing the learner’s curriculum” (p. 154). The learning extends far beyond curricular gain, however. For example, Kuyper (2011) found involvement in forensics (speech and debate) taught a plethora of
social/interpersonal skills similar to those identified as outcomes to athletic team participation, such as teamwork and enhanced communication skills. Kuyper (2011) continued, identifying academic success as yet another benefit of team participation. Similar results touting academic success and intellectual advancements due to competitive forensics have been found by several others (Bartanen, 1998; Rogers, 2002, Rogers 2005).

However, the learning that occurs when involved in an academic team such as forensics extends far beyond the classroom. Rogers (2002) found:

Developing argumentation supporting both sides of a topic teaches balance, understanding and tolerance for other people’s views. Weighing evidence results in a higher commitment to ethical and moral argumentation. Policy testing and evaluation leads to a higher sense of social and civic awareness; which, in turn, leads to increased social advocacy and governmental participation. (p.1)

Bartanen’s (1998) research complemented this, arguing that forensics “. . . offers students of varying skill levels with oral and written communication opportunities not possible in the traditional classroom” (p. 9). Despite being focused primarily on the benefits gleaned from participation in forensics, many of the skills identified by Bartanen (1998), Rogers (2002; 2005) and Kuyper (2011) are analogous to the skills produced in individuals who compete on similar competitive academic teams, as well as the overarching trends in desired traits and goals identified in university mission statements and learning contracts.

When analyzing the results gleaned from studies on participation in competitive academic teams, there is a distinct trend; participation seems to enhance academic performance while in school, foster involvement and engagement both in and outside of
the classroom, which bolsters participants’ feelings of belonging, and benefits them past graduation by preparing them to be civic-minded and ready to contribute their social capital to society. Further, these outcomes are identified by the University as important through the institutional mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree contract. If the HLC requires data verifying mission fulfillment, perhaps the competitive academic teams could provide said data, thus advancing the following research question:

RQ1: Can the activities of competitive academic teams be directly linked to UCM’s Learning to a Greater Degree Contract and mission; and if so, would the linkage provide evidence to the HLC of the University’s accomplishment of their accreditation standards?

**Methodology**

This study is a qualitative case study of the competitive academic teams relationship to the Learning to a Greater Degree contract at The University of Central Missouri (UCM), a mid-sized four-year institution located in Warrensburg, MO. Four of UCM’s nineteen competitive academic teams were invited by the researcher to participate in this study based on the following requirements: the team must be engaged in a competition that is organized/overseen by a regional/national organization external to UCM, faculty from the sponsoring department must serve as the team’s advisor/coach, all team competitors must be enrolled as students at UCM, the team must compete in more than one competition per year, and their competition structure must lead to a culminating event, such as a state, regional, or national competition. The four teams that met all requirements included Mock Trial, DECA, Lambda Alpha Epsilon (LAE), and The Talking Mules Speech & Debate (Forensics) Team.
Data were collected via electronic survey, focus group, and interview during a three month period. Nine individuals, consisting of coaches of the participating academic teams and current university administration, were interviewed. The focus groups, consisting of current and alumni competitors, had a total of 28 participants, and the electronic surveys targeting the same population received 55 responses (current competitors, n=30; alumni competitors, n=25). Alumni respondents graduated between the years of 1994 and 2015.

Results

The data were analyzed to identify overarching themes through triangulation. Data analysis illuminated three overarching themes centered on how involvement impacts: 1) participants as students; 2) participants as citizens; and, 3) participants as professionals. Upon further analysis, the researcher found these themes to be strongly linked to the pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract. The first theme, that of participants as students, aligns with pillars one and four (engaged learning and future-focused academics). The second theme, participants as citizens, shares similarities with pillars two and three (worldly perspective and a culture of service). The final theme, participants as professionals, aligns with pillars one, two and four (engaged learning, worldly perspective and future-focused academics). Under each of the three overarching themes, sub-themes also emerged that will be discussed further. Although this study gathered data from four different competitive academic teams, for the purposes of this article and its audience, the results will speak primarily to the contributions put forth by forensics.
Theme I- Participants as Students

The researcher found evidence supporting how the University’s competitive academic teams impact participants as students. As mentioned, this theme shares a direct correlation with the pillars of engaged learning and future-focused academics. Respondents from the interviews, focus groups, and surveys articulated that the scrimmage and tournament structure provides an opportunity for students to practice and apply skills they learn in class in a setting outside of the classroom, which was the first sub-theme identified. As two of the coaches from different teams explained, UCM’s competitive academic teams serve as a lab, of sorts, similar to that within the science field. In class, students learn various skills and techniques that will help them to be successful, such as how to think critically, write effectively, and create engaging presentations. The scrimmages and competitions serve as the lab setting, where the students engage in the application process, which deepens their understanding of the concepts, which translates to future success in the post-graduation world.

Further, respondents shared that involvement prepared them for a wide skill set needed to be successful, regardless of professional field. Specifically, skills such as critical thinking, speaking and thinking with limited preparation, understanding and interpreting arguments, research skills, communicating effectively, and enhanced presentation skills were identified as skills that transfer beyond the classroom experience. Many students explained that involvement allowed participants to take theory and apply it to practice, thus contributing to an enhanced understanding of the matter, essentially allowing them to bring theory to life, which was identified as a key component to engaged learning by University administration, and thus a critical component to
advancing the UCM mission statement. Finally, many student respondents reported that the education that takes place through participation in these academic teams spanned far beyond what was taught inside a traditional classroom. The competitive atmosphere of these teams teaches students in ways difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom setting, which tends to be unique to a competitive setting that occurs outside of the classroom (Galagan, 2010; Hinck, 2003). The unique, out-of-class experience contributed to both a well-rounded and deeper academic experience, truly contributing to the high academic standards and excellence in higher learning that the HLC mandates for accreditation and administration desire.

The second sub-theme present under engaged learning is that of how participation on competitive academic teams impacted academic performance. The overwhelming majority of respondents spoke to an improved academic performance due to involvement. This thought was reiterated by the coaches, who all spoke to the academic achievements of their competitors. However, competitors’ academic performance was impacted in more ways than just GPA.

Respondents also shared feelings of being a more successful and valued member of the campus community and contributions to greater personal growth, observing that they were “a part of something bigger than myself,” which led to feeling more engaged within the campus community. According to Astin (1984), when students feel a strong tie, or sense of belonging to the larger university community, they often experience higher levels of academic success, more satisfaction with their learning environment and, perhaps most importantly, the development of life skills that will lead to successful professional and personal lives. One alumnus of the forensics team reflected:
Through the dedication and compassion of the coaching staff on the debate team, I was able to grow as an individual, both inside and outside of the classroom. I was encouraged to set goals that were slightly beyond what I thought I could accomplish, and was then given the help and guidance to reach (and go beyond) what I thought was possible. No other professor in my time at UCM had nearly the impact on me as my coach.

The data once again supports Astin’s (1984, 1985, 1993, 1999) claims regarding the importance of student engagement levels in relation to academic and personal success in college. Furthermore, the findings reiterated that relationships with faculty members are often the strongest influencing factor on one’s academic success and overall retention rates (Burris, Ashorn, Akers, Fraze, Brashears & McCulloch, 2010; Kuh & Hu, 1999; O’Keeffe, 2013).

The second pillar prevalent under the participants as students theme was that of future-focused academics, which denotes that the University is actively preparing students to be ready to not only join the professional ranks upon graduation, but that they are prepared to excel in it. The students, coaches, and administrators agreed that involvement on competitive academic teams was an environment outside of the classroom to not only learn the skills needed to one day change the world, but also provided a safe space to practice and apply said skills, so that when they do enter the workforce they are more prepared than their peers. This opportunity dramatically impacts their ability to grasp, retain, and apply such important skills while they are still on campus, making them stronger students and leaders, while also preparing them to enter the constantly evolving workforce and world. One alumni shared:
We are learning a technology that is thousands of years old -- the human voice. It allows you to understand how you fit in the world and how you can use your voice to change the world. And that is a skill that is not likely to change in the future.

Although not all students will pursue an advanced degree many respondents, including coaches and current competitors, addressed how participation on competitive academic teams increases the propensity to obtain an advanced degree. Competitors were more confident in their abilities to handle the rigors of graduate level coursework due to the skills acquired during their time with the team. Two coaches in particular specifically spoke about the amount of individuals they have helped get accepted into advanced degree programs and how their students are consistently at the head of the class. Alumni respondents who had obtained an advanced degree furthered this conclusion by explaining how they were better prepared both in technique and mental strength to handle the level of critical thinking and increased research and writing loads that accompanies graduate level coursework.

One could argue that the levels of engagement participants of competitive academic teams experience with critical thinking, research, writing, and presentation are the very skills that encourage them to be life-long learners, which was a trait identified by administration as being future-focused. This way of thinking, accompanied with the skills taught and reinforced through participation on competitive academic teams suggests these are the very skills that propel our students to the top of their graduate classes and prepare them to be the forward thinkers who are adaptable to our evolving world that the administration spoke about.
Theme II- Participants as Citizens

The second overarching theme to emerge revolved around how involvement on competitive academic teams impacted participants as citizens. Within this theme, participants elaborated on how the skills taught and experiences garnered through competitive academic teams contributed to their development into citizens who are civically engaged members of a much larger global community. Under this theme, two pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract were prevalent and connected easily: a *worldly perspective* and the *culture of service*.

Regarding the *worldly perspective*, each coach interviewed provided support for how competitive academic teams impact the perspective of participants, which was the first sub-theme to emerge. Each team travels to different regions of the country to compete, giving participants numerous opportunities to meet/interact with individuals from various universities and industries. Additionally, one team in particular, the speech and debate team, also competes internationally. Not only do the participants meet and interact with individuals from across the world, they are also judged/critiqued by individuals representing varying cultures and perspectives, which served to broaden cultural diversity and increase tolerance for the views and opinions of others.

In addition to the travel involved, there is a high level of exposure, by the very nature of the activity, to considering multiple perspectives on a given issue. This calls for advanced critical thinking and higher-order thinking. One student respondent shared, “The team encourages coming into contact with multiple ideas and perspectives and speaking on them, forcing individuals to learn different ideas that lead to a more worldly perspective.” One alumni focus group member advanced this explanation even further:
In a lot of rounds, you have a profound moment where you are forced to reconcile with issues and perspectives right now. You have to listen to their arguments and figure out how to respond to them. You realize the world is so much more complex. Debate forced you to engage with diversity every weekend, and it forced me to grapple with issues I wouldn’t have normally.

The second sub-theme to emerge under the *worldly perspective* in the context of participants as citizens was that of ‘broadened perspectives’ and further supported elements of social human capital. Students reported increased levels of empathy towards others, ultimately leading to a perspective built on tolerance and acceptance. Many reported how competing heightened their sense of compassion and empathy for others, especially in settings where contrasting views are present. One individual remarked, “It has given me a greater appreciation for social differences, and has made me a more patient and caring individual. This will translate into every career that I choose.” One alumni participant expressed:

I don’t see the globe as segments anymore, and I’m sensitive to people from all walks of life. My work since graduation has been dedicated to diversity and human rights. I have respect for these issues because I was given the opportunity to learn and engage them as a competitor with the Talking Mules.

Feelings of increased empathy were also advanced by members of LAE, Mock Trial, and DECA, especially from a more professional standpoint. For example, alumni members of Mock Trial explained how their experiences engrained in them the importance of fair and equal representation for all, while individuals associated with LAE spoke to specific trainings in showing empathy and understanding to offenders that had a
tremendous impact on their view of others. Both within the professional and interpersonal realms, involvement on competitive academic teams engenders a deeper understanding of and ability to empathize with diverse groups of people.

Empathy is a trait that is commonly associated with leadership. Those who have higher abilities to empathize with others are viewed as being more ethical, caring leaders, who often are highly favored amongst those who are being led (Levi, 2013; Northouse, 2013). Therefore, one could assume that an individual who encompasses high levels of empathy, coupled with having a broadened global perspective, would likely be viewed as a leader capable of relating to various and diverse groups of people, regardless of culture, color, sexual orientation, gender, or socioeconomic status. These are the leaders our evolving society needs, and they are the leaders business executives desire to hire (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Levi, 2013; Northouse, 2013).

The second pillar that aligns with this theme is that of a culture of service. While analyzing the data, it became quite clear that volunteerism, or service learning, was not simply an event these teams participated in casually. Rather, service is something woven into the team’s culture. The majority of the teams participate in a great deal of service or advocacy projects throughout the year in an attempt to teach the importance of civic service. Furthermore, some of the teams, such as forensics, seem to inherently be service-oriented, as the foundation of the activity is to speak about issues and injustices around us that are often unheard of or avoided. One alumni respondent summed up the relationship between service and forensics perfectly. “Speech and debate helped me realize the critical intersection of speech and action. I now firmly believe there is no action without speech,
nor speech without action. The activity made me more considerate of those in my community.

Additionally, once participants experienced the importance of service, they ultimately became much more aware of their surrounding world and, even more so, the needs that exist within it. Engagement in such diverse service related experiences contributed to a better understanding of civic engagement. By participating on the competitive academic teams, students are experiencing the interconnected society about which administrators spoke. By integrating service into the guiding philosophy and actions of the participating teams, competitors have greater opportunities to become a more engaged and informed global citizen which, in turn, teaches them the importance of civic engagement, service, and contributing to the creation of a greater collective society.

**Theme III- Participants as Professionals**

The final theme that emerged from the data highlighted how involvement impacted participants as professionals. This theme is naturally connected to the previous two, as the skills garnered through participation that impacted individuals as students and citizens also contributed to preparing graduates to enter into the professional setting. This theme was supported primarily by two of the Learning to a Greater degree pillars: the *worldly perspective* and *future-focused academics*. Under the worldly perspective pillar, participants believed involvement on a competitive academic team increased their overall understanding of diversity and, secondly, prepared them to work with and lead others more effectively because of their better understanding of diversity. Under *future-focused academics*, participants were first provided with more networking opportunities that led
to career advancements and, secondly, how the skills acquired via participation on a competitive academic team directly transfer into the professional setting.

Regarding the *worldly perspective*, while the coaches of each team spoke in depth about exposing their competitors to diversity in an attempt to help them better understand the complex and diverse world in which we live, it was the competitors, both current and past, speaking about experiences that most advanced this first sub-theme. Several respondents representing each team spoke to how exposure to diversity was foundational to their team. Particularly within forensics, participants explained that by critically engaging in issues effecting various cultures, ethnicities, sexualities, and genders, they believed they had a greater level of understanding and acceptance for all voices, regardless of background, color of skin, or status. As one alumni focus group respondent explained, “Being involved in forensics gave me the opportunity to debate against students from foreign countries that live the hypotheticals we typically speak about.” Experiences such as this provide a deeper look at the world beyond our university, state, region, and even country, which then allows individuals to have greater levels of understanding, respect and acceptance for any element of diversity they may one day encounter. Another alumni focus group member encapsulated his experiences beautifully when he shared:

> Debate forced me to reconcile with different ideas, to be more micro-politically aware, specifically regarding how discourse shapes reality and impacts people. It forced me to become more aware with how I engaged with the world, how my language impacts the world and certain groups of people.
For these individuals, however, it is not enough to simply understand diversity, it is important to have such a deep understanding of it that you can work with diverse individuals in the production of a better world, which was identified by UCM administration as being a key component to having a worldly/global perspective. This ability to work effectively with diverse groups of people was the second sub-theme to emerge under the *worldly perspective* in regards to participants as professionals. Respondents representing LAE, Mock Trial and DECA all commented on how their involvement provided an environment in which working with diverse groups of people was part of the norm. All four of these programs instill valuable leadership traits within participants that will carry over and impact their actions within the professional realm.

In summary, when *engaged learning* is paired with the teaching of diversity, graduates are then prepared to enter the global society. They become the voices of empathy, understanding, and reasoning. They become the innovative problem solvers who research the impacts of a decision on others. They are the individuals capable of leading and creating cohesion amongst diverse groups of people. They employ a diverse skill set that includes both knowledge-based and applied skills, making them the desired employees of the 21st century (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

The second Learning to a Greater Degree tenant that was most prevalent under the participants as professionals theme was that of *future-focused academics*. When students leave UCM and join the workforce, administrators hoped that graduates would be able to “add value to an employment opportunity as soon as they walk out the door.” Under this pillar, two additional sub-themes emerged linking to participants as professionals. First, being involved on a competitive academic team significantly bolstered networking
opportunities and, secondly, illustrated how the skills acquired are used daily within the professional lives of the respondents.

The first sub-theme to emerge, which was also the most common sub-theme throughout this entire study, was how involvement on the participating competitive academic teams led to increased networking opportunities with professionals or scholars within the field, thus increasing one’s ability to secure a job post-graduation. The coaches of each respective team commented on how involvement on a competitive academic team led to countless networking opportunities within the professional and academic fields to which non-competitors would likely not have access.

Involvement did not just help individuals secure jobs through networking opportunities, however. Within those jobs, participants are often more successful due to the skills gleaned through participation. Respondents associated with the speech and debate team shared numerous stories identifying how the skills obtained while participating have impacted their professional lives. One respondent explained, “The team teaches both public and interpersonal communication skills that are necessary for any post-graduation path, whether it be in academia or the work force.” The majority of alumni who are currently in the workforce agreed. One alumnus responded, “Everything I did to prepare for competition was a skill that I use every day to lead my team and serve my customer base. I can't think of any better preparation for a professional life than being on a speech and debate team.”

Similar sentiments were shared from alumni of DECA, LAE, and Mock Trial as well. Within these three competitive settings, the judges are typically professionals within their respective field, thus exposing competitors to countless opportunities to connect
with professionals. Participants identified numerous internship opportunities that came out of a networking experience associated with the team. In short, the opportunities afforded to participants are not only aiding in securing employment, they are also propelling participants to greater levels of professional growth due to the skills they possess.

**Discussion**

In order to answer the posed research question, the tenants of the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars had to first be operationalized as a means to measure whether or not the UCM mission statement was being fulfilled. Camelia and Marius (2013) identified how difficult it can be to measure the fulfillment of mission statements due to the language often being vague or overly philosophical. However, when universities implement some sort of learning contract, such as The Learning to a Greater Degree contract, as a means to fulfill the mission, operationalizing and measuring effectiveness and fulfillment can be achieved. Within learning contracts, oftentimes, more tangible, or in this case, measurable goals are identified. Essentially, the learning contract provides the specifics that are lacking in the mission statement. It is the specifics that can be operationalized and measured. By using the four pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract, as well as the elaborations provided through interviews with University administration as the catalyst for the questions asked in the interviews and on the surveys, respondents were able to provide specific examples and, therefore evidence in support of each pillar. It could be argued, if the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars are being fulfilled, then so is the mission statement, as the learning contract is essentially a more detailed, specific explanation of the mission statement.
The data analysis provided an evident answer in response to the first component of the Research Question which asks whether the four competitive academic teams that participated in the study effectively contribute to the fulfillment of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and mission. Overall, based upon the data collected and results provided, it is clear the four participating teams fulfill the learning contract. The coaches, current competitors, and alumni competitors all provided countless accounts of how participation on their respective competitive academic team engaged them in a way that a traditional classroom could not, which allowed participants to advance their content and applied knowledge within their professional fields. Additionally, they highlighted the many ways service learning and contributing to a culture of service is engrained in the team’s philosophy by providing specific examples of the service projects completed. Finally, ample evidence was provided that highlighted how the very nature of the teams and competitions advanced an understanding of diversity and further prepared students to excel in their given fields, which were elements of the worldly perspective and future-focused academic pillars identified by administrators. Analyzing how participation on a competitive academic team impacts participants as students, as citizens, and as professionals provided strong support affirming there is no question that the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars and subsequent mission statement are being fulfilled and advanced by team participation.

Although the data from this study is rich with evidence showing how UCM’s competitive academic teams contribute to the fulfillment of the mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree pillars, it is also important that it be the correct type of data needed to provide evidence to HLC and other various stakeholders. When speaking with
members of the administration regarding how the University reports data to the HLC, one administrator explained, “…we create artifacts that demonstrate to others what we do… it goes beyond course grades and letter grades.” Essentially, artifact-based or antidotal evidence is acceptable, and perhaps even favored, by administration and the HLC. Therefore, this case study should be considered acceptable based upon the amount of antidotal data collected, answering the final portion of the posed research question.

**Limitations**

While completing this study, the researcher identified several observations that could be considered limitations that likely impacted the magnitude and scope of the study. Particularly, the observations, or limitations that occurred within this study included three key areas: small sample sizes, securing alumni participants, and the varying degrees of faculty/coach involvement.

When originally designing this study, the researcher desired to secure at least 20 survey responses for each team, per population (current competitors and alumni). Upon further investigation, that target proved unrealistic due to the current size of several of the participating academic teams. For example, the Mock Trial team had only 10 members due to their current coaching and resource restrictions. DECA and forensics also had teams of less than 20 people, so although the survey response rate was high regarding percentage of responses based on population size, many of the populations were smaller than the researcher anticipated, which made it impossible to reach the targeted response rate for current competitors. Although this likely did not skew the results in any way, it is important to note that some teams had far less data to report simply due to being smaller
in size. Unfortunately, at times this led to an unbalanced representation within the study’s larger results section.

Issues regarding response rates were exacerbated when securing alumni participants, both for the electronic survey and focus group. The researcher was quite surprised by the lack of connection or communication many teams had with their alumni participants. One team in particular essentially said they had no ability to send the electronic survey to alumni members because they had kept no account or records of their alumni upon graduation. Thus, the data collected gave a limited view of the lasting impact participating on competitive academic teams had on its participants, as the majority of alumni participants have only been out of school for under three years (with the exception of one team that had representation ranging from 1994-2015).

Finally, the sheer differences regarding faculty/coach involvement altered the study to a minor extent. Based on the parameters identified by the researcher, in order for a team to be considered as a participant in this study, they needed to have at least one dedicated faculty member serving as the coach. Although this parameter was met by each team, the varying degrees of coach involvement ranged from two devoted faculty members who received release time, to an adjunct status faculty who is only responsible for coaching and worked off campus, to devoted faculty members who self-identified their roles as more of an advisor rather than a formal coach. These degrees of involvement were likely an influencing factor in the data gathered and subsequent results gleaned.
Conclusion

In times of financial instability and unpredictable levels of support, it is critical co-curricular programs such as forensics are equipped with program-specific data that highlight the benefits students gain from participation, as well as how the activity contributes to the overall success of the institution. We must not forget the suggestions made by Astin (1999) and pleas advanced by Bartanen (1998) to engage in further research analyzing the relationships that exist between co-curricular programming such as forensics to campus pedagogy and desired student outcomes, as it may provide evidence to the institution that is usable in meeting the HLC’s accreditation standards, as well as provide program survival and longevity.

It is the hope of the researcher that this study will be adjusted and replicated on other campuses as a means to highlight the importance and value competitive academic teams offer to the greater university community. As the results of this study have demonstrated, competitive academic teams can be a valuable asset in the production of data and evidence to support the HLC accreditation process, which benefits not only the teams themselves, but also all interested and invested stakeholders; the same individuals who are often in charge of making the difficult decisions regarding funding. Validating the critical role that competitive academic teams/programs serve to both support and supply substantive data and evidence of the university’s mission and/or learning contract is paramount to the future success and survival of such programs.
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Section VI

Scholarly Practitioner Reflection

As I reflect back on the dissertation process, to say it is overwhelming is an understatement. However, it largely an overwhelming feeling of a positive nature. I was fortunate in that I had completed a thesis while obtaining my master’s degree, so I was familiar with the research process. To be honest, I figured my experiences with writing a dissertation would be similar. Of course there were many shared elements between the two, however, my experience was vastly different, and had far more of a profound impact on who I am today as an educational leader and scholar.

I distinctly remember being asked why I wanted to pursue a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis when I was being interviewed as a candidate for this program three and a half years ago. I told the two interviewers that as a speech and debate coach, I wanted to be a leader in the community by providing support to teams who were facing budget cuts and/or unsupportive administration. When I spoke those words, I truly meant them, but I honestly did not know how I would ever achieve such a goal, especially in the midst of my own team receiving budget cuts due to the implementation of a new funding structure. Conducting this research, however, helped me realize the words spoken at my interview were not just superfluous; they in fact could be accomplished. When I think about how the dissertation process has influenced me as an educational leader, two key areas emerge: first in my own role as a coach/educator, and secondly, as a potential future administrator.

To begin, this process reaffirmed my adoration for coaching a competitive academic team. From my dissertation topic’s inception, I knew it would be difficult, yet
critical to remain aware of my own personal biases. Therefore, I only interviewed the head coach of the forensics team and made sure I did not interject any of my own thoughts into the data. When I conducted the forensics focus group and analyzed the data from the electronic surveys, I was astounded by the impact forensics has on participants. The astonishment did not end there though, the data collected from each of the other three participating teams was equally as impactful. To hear students speak so highly of the opportunities they have been afforded through participation on a competitive academic team was truly humbling. Furthermore, to learn of how these experiences still impact alumni on a daily basis was extremely moving. In education, we all know that we likely will be unaware of the impact our teaching and/or presence has on students. This study made me aware of how an educator, coach, and team can change someone’s life for the better. It made me extremely proud to be a part of a university community that supports the presence of competitive academic teams.

Secondly, this process made me shift my own perspective regarding how I view the other competitive academic teams on campus. When the new funding process was implemented, suddenly, all of the academic teams on campus were competing against one another for funding. This created an environment similar to how Bolman and Deal (2008) described the political frame. Teams viewed each other as enemies rather than allies, which impacted funding, coach attitudes, and team mentalities. This study helped me to see how disadvantageous it is for the competitive academic teams to view each other so negatively. Ultimately, the coaches of each competitive academic team have one goal; to prepare their students for success, which spans far beyond winning a tournament. Coaches want their students to succeed in life. We are all bonded in the desire and should
capitalize on that bond. While funding might continue to be a contentious issue, it is not one we should let divide us. Each competitive academic team provides its own unique merit to the UCM community, and we should celebrate that. I am indebted to this process showing me how visceral the political climate can be, but more importantly, how to overcome it. I now see myself as an advocate for all competitive academic teams on campus, not just my own.

My own perspective as an educator/coach was broadened once again while analyzing the results of this study and compiling the discussion/implications section. It was not until I tried answering the second research question that I realized the importance of data sharing. When overwhelmed and overtaxed, it can become very easy to begin blaming others for the lack of recognition competitive academic teams sometimes feel. However, this study helped me to realize we cannot blame others for what they do not know. When information is being collected for the HLC, the committees or teams of individuals responsible for compiling the data must first have access to the data. Therefore, as a coach, I must do my own part to ensure viable, usable data is readily accessible to university administration, interested stakeholders, and accreditation teams. Although this sounds like a rudimentary realization to make, it had a profound impact on my future actions as a coach.

Finally, in addition to data sharing, I was also reminded of the importance of program goals and objectives. Prior to this study, I had never spent time considering how my own team, let alone other competitive academic teams align with the UCM mission statement and Learning to a Greater Degree pillars. Although much of what competitive academic teams do is by nature in alignment, thoughtful reflection upon one’s coaching
strategies, philosophy, and practice is critical. Sometimes, one can become overly focused on the competitive part of competitive academic teams, unfortunately then overshadowing the academic component. When winning is the only goal, one must question the pedagogical implications. By delving so deeply into the definition and explanation of the four Learning to a Greater Degree pillars, I now know how important it is to continue to balance competition and pedagogy, as they are complementary to one another. I now know I can do an even better job fulfilling the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and UCM mission through team participation, which benefits our students, my own educational and coaching practices, and the larger UCM community.

While I have no intentions of pursuing an administrative position within the very near future, it is something I have considered further into my career. Should that ever happen, engaging in this research has positioned me to better understand how important it is for administrators to stay knowledgeable of the programmatic happenings on campus. Although extremely difficult, due to the enormity of an administrator’s job, voices who feel they are heard contribute to a more positive educational environment. When voices feel stifled or unsupported, our students are the ones harmed. If I should ever pursue an administrative-level position, my goal would be to stay connected to the proverbial trenches, so the voices of minority or underrepresented groups are heard. Additionally, this study solidified how important mission fulfillment is, and as such, how it should be a guiding factor in administrative decision-making.

The dissertation process also provided me with keen insight as to how I have been influenced as a scholar. One lesson that resonated with me from our coursework was how important action is to leadership. We must put our words into action to influence positive
change if we want to lead in our communities. When I reflect back on the words I spoke at my interview, I know one way I can lead within the larger forensics community is through scholarship.

Looking back, one of the most difficult sections of this dissertation to complete was the scholarly review, which usually comes rather easily to me when engaged in scholarly writing and research. However, there is so little research available on competitive academic teams, and even less available on analyzing the importance of mission statement alignment, which made the process of constructing a cogent argument within the scholarly review quite difficult. Although this lack of research made identifying the gap in the literature an easy task, I was astonished by how little research has been done on collegiate competitive academic teams. Perhaps this could be an impact of the lack of data sharing as mentioned above. In order to assist other teams and programs, whether at UCM or another campus, research that highlights the advantages competitive academic teams possess must be conducted and made available. When looking specifically at research regarding forensics, which was easily the most robust field of research of the four participating teams, the scholars who have written and published the most about the benefits are all nearing retirement. This is not to say they will cease to publish, but it is alarming. If I want to be a leader for the greater forensics community, I must continue to engage in research that can be used to support other programs, as well as my own. I may not be able to supply monetary resources, but I am capable of supplying knowledge-based resources, which may aid in other’s quests to secure support. Essentially, this process showed me how important it will be for me to continue to be a publishing scholar within my field.
Secondly, engaging in this process has bolstered my confidence in being a leader within my field tremendously, which is something for which I am extremely grateful. Before this, I had never taken on a research project of such magnitude. My master’s thesis was a large undertaking, but only consisted of four interviews with professors and an electronic survey for students. In the communication field, we often implement a much more narrow methodology. Due to this, I will admit I was extremely overwhelmed by the thought of triangulating and analyzing data from five focus groups, nine interviews, and eight different survey populations. While engaged in the process however, I found myself analyzing data in greater detail than before; making connections I likely would not have been able to make with less data. With every emerging theme, my confidence arose, and I felt myself once again, evolving into a stronger, more capable leader and scholar. As an educator, it has better equipped me to assist my own students through the research process. I am now excited by the prospect of being on a thesis committee or assisting our graduate students with a research project. The dissertation process has made me a well-rounded scholar, and I now have the confidence in my own research skills to not only share them with others, but also engage in research that will benefit my discipline.

Within my results, one overarching theme was how participation on competitive academic teams gave students an opportunity to turn theory into practice. When I reflect upon my own dissertation process, I could easily say the same. Completing this study made theory become practice, and will continue to influence my own actions as an educator, coach, and scholar. Overall, the dissertation process has solidified what we have learned regarding leadership and teamwork throughout our two years of
coursework. I now feel like I am truly able to work with other coaches on campus as an advocate for all of UCM’s competitive teams, to lead my own team in pedagogical and competitive success, and to aid the larger forensics community in the acquisition of support. Essentially, the theoretical words I spoke at my interview can now become practice, thanks to the ELPA program and dissertation process.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR COACHES OF
COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC TEAMS

Preliminary/Introductory Questions:

1. Please state your name, title, and how long you’ve been coaching.
2. Please begin by explaining the purpose/goal of the activity you coach.
3. Please explain the logistical nature of your activity (how does competition work, how do you prepare students, daily operations, etc.).

Learning to a Greater Degree Questions:

To be read to the interviewee- This next group of questions applies specifically to how your activity supports the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars. I will begin by reading the definition of each pillar before asking you questions about your team.

ENGAGED LEARNING refers to opportunities that ready graduates to “. . . enter the workplace prepared with practical, hands-on experience (p. 1). Examples of engaged learning at UCM include events such as The State Farm Marketing and Sales Competition, which “gives students an opportunity to test their knowledge and skill in selling insurance to young adults. . .” and the Integrative Business Experience, where students create a product to market and sell to the campus and community (p. 1).

1. Based on the definition provided, does involvement in your activity promote engaged learning? If so, how?
2. Can you identify any specific experiences that occur while engaged in this activity that may promote engaged learning? If so, please share them.
3. Do you think your activity/program advances engaged learning for the participants in a way that may be unique to your activity? If so, how?
4. Do you think participation in your activity provides a unique link to engaged learning in terms of the larger University community? If so, can you provide any examples?
**WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE** implies that “UCM prepares students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities...” (p. 1). These study abroad opportunities vary from semester long experiences with partner universities overseas to shorter, two week study tour expeditions, often linked to specific departments or programs and/or topics of study.

5. Based on the definition provided, does involvement in your activity promote fostering a worldly perspective? If so, how?

6. Can you identify any specific experiences that occur while engaged in this activity that may promote a more worldly perspective? If so, please share them.

7. Do you think your activity/program advances the development of a worldly perspective for the participants in a way that may be unique to your activity? If so, how?

8. Do you think participation in your activity provides a unique link to obtaining a more worldly perspective in terms of the larger University community? If so, can you provide any examples?

**CULTURE OF SERVICE** refers to the many hours UCM students, faculty and staff devote to service and volunteering in an attempt to teach the importance of civic engagement and generosity.

9. Does participation in this activity include any events or opportunities that promote building a culture of service amongst participants? If so, what types/how?

10. (If applicable) Are there unique instances of building a culture of service present within your activity that benefit the larger University or local community? If so, what do those events typically look like?

**FUTURE-FOCUSED ACADEMICS** denotes UCM’s incorporation of new technologies and teachings that “...expose students to real-world applications...” (p. 1). Examples include UCM’s music technology program that trains students in the most current technologies and practices within the field, and the professional pilot training
program, which “. . .enables students to experience jet aircraft systems from the cockpit of a Boeing 737 and Redbird simulators” (p. 1).

11. Does participation in this activity include elements of future focused academics that expose students to real world applications? If so, how?

12. (If applicable) Are there examples of elements of future focused academics present within your activity that specifically prepare participants for professional success post-graduation? If so, what are those specific skill sets?

**General Questions**

13. Does participation on this team benefit students in any other ways not mentioned? If so, how?

14. Based on the answers you provided, can you think of any other examples that are unique to your activity that reinforce the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars and University mission? If so, how?

15. Can you think of any challenges that might mitigate your ability to most effectively align your program outcomes with the University mission and Learning to a Greater Degree contract? If so, please share those.
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR UCM ADMINISTRATORS

Preliminary/Introductory Questions:

1. Please state your name, title, and how long you’ve been at UCM.
2. Please begin by explaining the relationship between UCM’s competitive academic teams and your position (for example, one or more is housed in your college, you oversee financial distribution, or no relation).

Learning to a Greater Degree Questions:

To be read to the interviewee - This next group of questions applies specifically to the relationship between the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars and UCM’s competitive academic teams (Mock Trial, Forensics, DECA, LAE). I will begin by reading the definition of each pillar before asking you questions.

ENGAGED LEARNING refers to opportunities that ready graduates to “. . . enter the workplace prepared with practical, hands-on experience (p. 1). Examples of engaged learning at UCM include events such as The State Farm Marketing and Sales Competition, which “gives students an opportunity to test their knowledge and skill in selling insurance to young adults. . .” and the Integrative Business Experience, where students create a product to market and sell to the campus and community (p. 1).

3. Based on the definition provided, how does UCM exhibit fulfilling engaged learning to HLC?

4. Based on the definition provided, do UCM’s competitive academic teams (namely the four in this study) promote engaged learning? If so, how?

5. Do you think UCM’s competitive academic teams advance engaged learning in a way that is unique to the University community? If so, how?

WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE implies that “UCM prepares students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities. . .” (p. 1). These study abroad opportunities vary from semester long experiences with partner universities overseas to shorter, two week study tour expeditions, often linked to specific departments or programs and/or topics of study.

6. Based on the definition provided, how does UCM exhibit fostering a worldly perspective to HLC?
7. Based on the definition provided, do UCM’s competitive academic teams (namely the four in this study) promote a worldly perspective? If so, how?

8. Do you think UCM’s competitive academic teams advance promoting a worldly perspective in a way that is unique to the University community? If so, how?

**CULTURE OF SERVICE** refers to the many hours UCM student, faculty and staff devote to service and volunteering, in an attempt to teach the importance of civic engagement and generosity.

9. Based on the definition provided, how does UCM exhibit creating a culture of service to HLC?

10. Based on the definition provided, do UCM’s competitive academic teams (namely the four in this study) promote a culture of service? If so, how?

11. Do you think UCM’s competitive academic teams advance a culture of service in a way that is unique to the University community? If so, how?

**FUTURE-FOCUSED ACADEMICS** denotes UCM’s incorporation of new technologies and teachings that “. . . expose students to real-world applications. . .” (p. 1). Examples include UCM’s music technology program that trains students in the most current technologies and practices within the field, and the professional pilot training program, which “. . . enables students to experience jet aircraft systems from the cockpit of a Boeing 737 and Redbird simulators” (p. 1).

12. Based on the definition provided, how does UCM exhibit using future-focused academics to HLC?

13. Based on the definition provided, do UCM’s competitive academic teams (namely the four in this study) promote future-focused academics? If so, how?
14. Do you think UCM’s competitive academic teams advance future-focused academics in a way that is unique to the University community? If so, how?

General Questions

15. How important is the integration of the four pillars into these activity’s goals/objectives?

16. Are there any other ways UCM’s competitive academic teams could further the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars and University mission? If so, how?
Instructions: This survey includes 26 questions that vary between closed and open-ended responses, all asking about involvement in competitive academic teams at UCM and their alignment with the Learning to a Greater Degree contract. Please choose the appropriate response from the provided answers or, to the best of your ability, answer in your own words when not provided with specific responses. This survey should not take any more than 15-20 minutes to complete, so please finish the survey in one sitting. You may opt out of the survey at any time by simply closing out of the program. Thank you for your participation.

General Questions:

1. Which competitive academic team do you compete on?
   
   Mock Trial  Speech & Debate  DECA  LAE

2. How many years or semesters have you competed?

3. What is your major?

4. What is your current academic standing in school?
   
   Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior  Other

5. What are your plans after graduation?

6. What prompted you to join the team?

Learning to a Greater Degree Questions:

This next group of questions applies specifically to how your activity supports the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars. The definition of each pillar will be provided before asking you questions about your team.

ENGAGED LEARNING refers to opportunities that ready graduates to “. . . enter the workplace prepared with practical, hands-on experience (p. 1). Examples of engaged learning at UCM include events such as The State Farm Marketing and Sales Competition, which “gives students an opportunity to test their knowledge and skill in selling insurance to young adults. . .” and the Integrative Business Experience, where students create a product to market and sell to the campus and community (p. 1).
7. Based on the definition provided, involvement in this activity promotes engaged learning.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

8. My learning/academic performance have been positively impacted by my involvement on the team.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

9. There are specific experiences that occur within this activity that promote engaged learning.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

10. If this activity has provided you with experiences of engaged learning, please list those experiences:

11. Please provide any other comments concerning engaged learning and your activity:

**WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE** implies that “UCM prepares students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities. . .” (p. 1). These study abroad opportunities vary from semester long experiences with partner universities overseas to shorter, two week study tour expeditions, often linked to specific departments or programs and/or topics of study.

12. Based on the definition provided, participation in this activity fosters a worldly perspective within participants.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

13. Involvement in this activity has helped shape/change my perspective.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
14. There are specific experiences that occur within this activity that promote the
development of a worldly perspective.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

15. If this activity provided you with experiences that contributed to your worldly
perspective, please list those experiences:

16. Please provide any other comments concerning obtaining a worldly perspective
and your activity:

CULTURE OF SERVICE refers to the many hours UCM students, faculty and staff
devote to service and volunteering in an attempt to teach the importance of civic
engagement and generosity.

17. Participation in this activity includes events or opportunities that promote building
a culture of service amongst participants.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

18. My involvement in this activity has altered the way I think about civic
engagement/serving my community in a positive way.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

19. If this activity provided you with specific experiences that contributed to a culture
of service on the UCM campus, please list those experiences:

20. If this activity provided you with specific experiences that contributed to a culture
of service BEYOND the UCM campus, please list those experiences:

21. Please provide any other comments concerning a commitment to a culture of
service and your activity:
FUTURE-FOCUSED ACADEMICS denotes UCM’s incorporation of new teachings and technologies that “...expose students to real-world applications...” (p. 1). Examples include UCM’s music technology program that trains students in the most current technologies and practices within the field, and the professional pilot training program, which “...enables students to experience jet aircraft systems from the cockpit of a Boeing 737 and Redbird simulators” (p. 1).

22. Participation in this activity includes elements of future focused academics that expose me to real world applications that will help me after graduation.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

23. There are unique skill sets that participation in this activity teaches/reinforces that will be important to my professional career.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

24. If participating in this activity gave you unique skills that were developed beyond what would be learned in a classroom environment, please list those skills:

25. Please provide any other comments concerning future focused academics and your activity:

Closing Question:

26. Does participation on this team benefit you in any other ways not yet mentioned?

   If so, please list how?

Ending Announcement: Thank you for completing this survey. If you would be interested in continuing your participation, the researcher will be facilitating focus groups with the intent of gathering deeper data regarding your competitive academic team’s ability to advance the Learning to a Greater Degree Contract. If you would be willing to participate in the focus group, please send a brief email to Nikki Freeman at nfreeman@ucmo.edu. The focus group will likely take one hour of your time.
APPENDIX D
ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR ALUMNI COMPETITORS

**Instructions:** This survey includes 26 questions that vary between closed and open-ended responses, all asking about involvement in competitive academic teams at UCM and their alignment with the Learning to a Greater Degree contract. Please choose the appropriate response from the provided answers or, to the best of your ability, answer in your own words when not provided with specific responses. This survey should not take any more than 15-20 minutes to complete, so please finish the survey in one sitting. You may opt out of the survey at any time by simply closing out of the program. Thank you for your participation.

**General Questions:**

1. Which competitive academic team did you compete on?
   
   *Mock Trial  Speech & Debate  DECA  LAE*

2. How many years/semesters did you compete?

3. What year did you graduate?

4. What was your major?

5. What is your occupation?

6. What prompted you to join the team?

**Learning to a Greater Degree Questions:**

*This next group of questions applies specifically to how your activity supports the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars. The definition of each pillar will be provided before asking you questions about your team.*

**ENGAGED LEARNING** refers to opportunities that ready graduates to “. . . enter the workplace prepared with practical, hands-on experience (p. 1). Examples of engaged learning at UCM include events such as The State Farm Marketing and Sales Competition, which “gives students an opportunity to test their knowledge and skill in selling insurance to young adults. . .” and the Integrative Business Experience, where students create a product to market and sell to the campus and community (p. 1).
7. Based on the definition provided, involvement in this activity promoted engaged learning.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

8. My learning/academic performance were positively impacted by my involvement on the team.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

9. There are specific experiences that occurred within this activity that promoted engaged learning.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

10. If this activity provided you with experiences of engaged learning, please list those experiences:

11. Please provide any other comments concerning engaged learning and your activity:

WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE implies that “UCM prepares students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities. . .” (p. 1). These study abroad opportunities vary from semester long experiences with partner universities overseas to shorter, two week study tour expeditions, often linked to specific departments or programs and/or topics of study.

12. Based on the definition provided, participation in this activity fostered a worldly perspective within me.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

13. Involvement in this activity helped shape/change my perspective.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
14. There are specific experiences that occurred within this activity that promoted the
development of a worldly perspective.

   *Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree*

15. If this activity provided you with experiences that contributed to your worldly
perspective, please list those experiences:

16. Please provide any other comments concerning obtaining a worldly perspective
and your activity:

**CULTURE OF SERVICE** refers to the many hours UCM students, faculty and staff
devote to service and volunteering in an attempt to teach the importance of civic
engagement and generosity.

17. Participation in this activity included events or opportunities that built a culture of
service amongst participants.

   *Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree*

18. My involvement in this activity altered the way I think about civic
engagement/serving my community in a positive way.

   *Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree*

19. If this activity provided you with specific experiences that contributed to a culture
of service on the UCM campus, please list those experiences:

20. If this activity provided you with specific experiences that contributed to a culture
of service BEYOND the UCM campus, please list those experiences:

21. Please provide any other comments concerning a commitment to a culture of
service and your activity:
FUTURE-FOCUSED ACADEMICS denotes UCM’s incorporation of new teachings and technologies that “. . . expose students to real-world applications. . .” (p. 1). Examples include UCM’s music technology program that trains students in the most current technologies and practices within the field, and the professional pilot training program, which “. . . enables students to experience jet aircraft systems from the cockpit of a Boeing 737 and Redbird simulators” (p. 1).

22. Participation in this activity included elements of future focused academics that exposed me to real world applications that helped me after graduation.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   No Opinion   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

23. There are unique skill sets that participation in this activity teaches/reinforces that are important to my professional career.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   No Opinion   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

24. If participating in this activity gave you unique skills that were developed beyond what would be learned in a classroom environment, please list those skills:

25. Please provide any other comments concerning future focused academics and your activity:

Closing Question:

26. Did participation on this team benefit you in any other ways not yet mentioned? If so, how?

Ending Announcement: Thank you for completing this survey. If you would be interested in continuing your participation, the researcher will be facilitating focus groups with the intent of gathering deeper data regarding your competitive academic team’s ability in advancing the Learning to a Greater Degree contract. If you would be willing to participate in the focus group on the UCM campus, please send a brief email to Nikki Freeman at nfreeman@ucmo.edu. The focus group will likely take one hour of your time.
APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR CURRENT COMPETITORS

Preliminary/Introductory Questions:

1. Please briefly comment on how long (how many years/semesters) you have participated on this team, as well as what your major is and what year you are currently in.
2. Why did you decide to join this team?

Learning to a Greater Degree Questions:

To be read to the focus group - This next group of questions applies specifically to how your activity supports the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars. I will begin by reading the definition of each pillar before asking you questions about your team.

ENGAGED LEARNING refers to opportunities that ready graduates to “. . . enter the workplace prepared with practical, hands-on experience (p. 1). Examples of engaged learning at UCM include events such as The State Farm Marketing and Sales Competition, which “gives students an opportunity to test their knowledge and skill in selling insurance to young adults. . .” and the Integrative Business Experience, where students create a product to market and sell to the campus and community (p. 1).

3. Based on the definition provided, does involvement in your activity promote engaged learning? If so, how?
4. Are there specific experiences that occur within this activity that promote engaged learning?
5. Has your learning and academic performance been impacted by your involvement on the team? If so, please share how.
6. Can you think of any other ways your activity could promote engaged learning? If so, how? What prevents your activity from being able to achieve that?

WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE implies that “UCM prepares students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities. . .” (p. 1). These study abroad opportunities vary from semester long experiences with partner universities overseas to shorter, two week study tour expeditions, often linked to specific departments or programs and/or topics of study.
7. Based on the definition provided, does participation in this activity foster a worldly perspective within participants? If so, how?

8. Are there specific experiences that occur within this activity that promote the development of a worldly perspective? If so, please share what those experiences typically look like.

9. Has involvement in this activity shaped/changed your perspective? If so, how?

10. Can you think of any other ways your activity could further develop a worldly perspective? If so, how? What prevents your activity from being able to achieve that?

**CULTURE OF SERVICE** refers to the many hours UCM students, faculty and staff devote to service and volunteering in an attempt to teach the importance of civic engagement and generosity.

11. Does participation in this activity include any events or opportunities that promote building a culture of service amongst participants? If so, what types/how?

12. Has involvement in this activity altered the way you think about civic engagement/serving your community? If so, how?

13. Can you think of any other ways your activity create a culture of service? If so, how? What prevents your activity from being able to achieve that?

**FUTURE-FOCUSED ACADEMICS** denotes UCM’s incorporation of new teachings and technologies that “. . . expose students to real-world applications. . .” (p. 1). Examples include UCM’s music technology program that trains students in the most current technologies and practices within the field, and the professional pilot training program, which “. . . enables students to experience jet aircraft systems from the cockpit of a Boeing 737 and Redbird simulators” (p. 1).
14. Does participation in this activity include elements of future focused academics that expose you to real world applications that will help you after graduation? If so, how?

15. Are there unique skill sets that participation teaches/reinforces that will be important to your professional careers? If so, how are those skill sets uniquely developed through participation in your activity?

16. Can you think of any other ways your activity could utilize future focused academics? If so, how? What prevents your activity from being able to achieve that?

**General Questions**

17. Does participation on this team benefit you in any other ways not yet mentioned? If so, how?

18. What do you like most about participating in this activity/being a part of this team?
APPENDIX F
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR ALUMNI COMPETITORS

Preliminary/Introductory Questions:

1. Please briefly comment on how long (how many years/semesters) you participated on this team, and when you graduated.
2. Why did you decide to join this team?

Learning to a Greater Degree Questions:

To be read to the focus group- This next group of questions applies specifically to how your activity supports the Learning to a Greater Degree pillars. I will begin by reading the definition of each pillar before asking you questions about your team.

ENGAGED LEARNING refers to opportunities that ready graduates to “...enter the workplace prepared with practical, hands-on experience (p. 1). Examples of engaged learning at UCM include events such as The State Farm Marketing and Sales Competition, which “gives students an opportunity to test their knowledge and skill in selling insurance to young adults...” and the Integrative Business Experience, where students create a product to market and sell to the campus and community (p. 1).

3. Based on the definition provided, did involvement in your activity promoted engaged learning? If so, how?
4. Were there specific experiences that occurred within this activity that promoted engaged learning?
5. Was your learning and academic performance impacted by your involvement on the team? If so, please share how.
6. Can you think of any other ways your activity could have promoted engaged learning? If so, how? What prevented your activity from being able to achieve that?

WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE implies that “UCM prepares students to work in a world that continues to become more globalized by offering study abroad opportunities...” (p. 1). These study abroad opportunities vary from semester long experiences with partner
universities overseas to shorter, two week study tour expeditions, often linked to specific departments or programs and/or topics of study.

7. Based on the definition provided, did participation in this activity foster a worldly perspective within participants? If so, how?

8. Were there specific experiences that occurred within this activity that promoted the development of a worldly perspective? If so, please share what those experiences typically looked like.

9. Did involvement in this activity shape/change your perspective? If so, how?

10. Can you think of any other ways your activity could have developed a worldly perspective among participants? If so, how? What prevented your activity from being able to achieve that?

**CULTURE OF SERVICE** refers to the many hours UCM students, faculty and staff devote to service and volunteering in an attempt to teach the importance of civic engagement and generosity.

11. Did participation in this activity include any events or opportunities that promoted building a culture of service amongst participants? If so, what types/how?

12. Did involvement in this activity alter the way you think about civic engagement/serving your community? If so, how?

13. Can you think of any other ways your activity could have created a culture of service? If so, how? What prevented your activity from being able to achieve that?

**FUTURE-FOCUSED ACADEMICS** denotes UCM’s incorporation of new teachings and technologies that “. . . expose students to real-world applications. . .” (p. 1). Examples include UCM’s music technology program that trains students in the most current technologies and practices within the field, and the professional pilot training
program, which “. . .enables students to experience jet aircraft systems from the cockpit of a Boeing 737 and Redbird simulators” (p. 1).

14. Did participation in this activity include elements of future focused academics that exposed you to real world applications that helped you after graduation? If so, how?

15. Are there unique skill sets that participation taught/reinforced that are important to your professional careers? If so, how were those skill sets uniquely developed through participation in your activity?

16. Can you think of any other ways your activity could have utilized future focused academics? If so, how? What prevented your activity from being able to achieve that?

**General Questions**

17. Did participation on this team benefit you in any other ways not yet mentioned? If so, how?

18. What was your favorite part of participating in this activity/being a member of this team?
APPENDIX G
COUNCIL FOR COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC TEAMS

Purpose: To encourage and promote co-curricular engagement of students by providing support for university competitive academic teams.

Team criteria

a. The team must be engaged in a competition that is organized/overseen by a regional/national organization external to this university
b. Faculty from the sponsoring department must serve as the team’s advisor/coach
c. The competition preparation and participation must provide educational experience relevant to the student’s academic program
d. Competition must require team engagement by requiring collaborative or cumulative effort of multiple students
e. All UCM team competitors must be enrolled students of the University of Central Missouri

Recognized Teams for Academic Year 2013-14

CSPA
Death March Team
DECA
Flexo
Kennedy Center
LAE
Marketing and sales
MO Math
Mock Trial
Model UN
Modeling
National Collegiate Sales
National Intercollegiate Flight Team
Phi Beta Lambda
Programming (ACM, CCS)
Ranger Buddy
Ranger Challenge
SIFE
Talking Mules
Expectations for Funded Teams

- Students will pay for their own meals; no university funding will be used and no per diem will be paid for student meals. Students may individually assume this cost or may collectively fundraise to cover this cost.
- The sponsoring department must provide at least 10% of the budget required to support the team for a competition.
- The sponsoring college must provide at least 10% of the budget required to support team for a competition.
- Teams will file a report following each competition.
- All funds will be managed by the academic department that sponsors the team through a university budget.
- Teams will meet all filing and reporting deadlines or will not be eligible for funding for a year.
- Teams will NOT apply for funding from the Student Funding Committee, Student Government Association, or any other funding entity supported by the Student Activity Fee.

Recognized teams are eligible to request funding for travel and publicity and recognition support for efforts. The following time line will be used to make funding decisions:

- In late Spring for Fall, up to 25% of the Council’s annual budget will be awarded to team’s competing August 1-Dec 31
- In mid Fall for late Fall and early Spring; up to 50% of the Council’s annual budget will be awarded to teams competing Oct. 1-March 1
- In late Fall for Spring, up to 12.5% of the Council’s annual budget will be awarded to teams competing January 1-May 15
- In mid Spring for late Spring and Summer, up to 12.5% of the Council’s annual budget will be awarded to teams competing March 1-July 31

Funding Guidelines

a. Council funding may be used to support
   i. Travel expenses by team members and/or the coach to include airfare, mileage and vehicle rental
   ii. Lodging
   iii. Registration fees for the competition
   iv. Coach(es)’ meals
   v. Shipping of materials required for competition
b. Council funding may not be used for
   vi. Student meals
vii. The purchase or rental of equipment and materials needed for the competition
viii. Team uniforms
ix. Awards
x. Scholarships
xi. Any expense incurred by an individual who is not a team member or coach
Team’s Name: 

Sponsoring Department(s): 

College(s): 

Primary Advisor’s Name: Phone #: 

Campus Mailing Address: Email: 

Individual responsible for team financials: Phone #: 

Campus Mailing Address: Email: 

Team Budget #: 

**Competition Information** *(This must be completed for each competition for which the team is seeking funding)* 

Name of Competition ____________________________ 

Sponsoring/Hosting Organization ____________________________ 

Location to which team will travel ____________________________ 

Dates of travel ____________________________ 

Level of competition (e.g. state or national) ____________________________ 

Briefly explain what was required for the team to qualify for this competition 

Approximately how many UCM students do you expect to participate?
**Income Information:**

Do students have to pay dues to a regional or national association to compete?

- NO dues are required
- YES regional dues are required
  – $ (Circle one: per semester, year, or competition?)
- YES national dues are required
  – $ (Circle one: per semester, year, or competition?)

Are there any other fees students are required to pay to compete?

- NO
- YES (please explain ____________________________)

What financial support is the sponsoring department providing?

- $ (Circle one: per semester, year, or competition?)

Does the department place any restrictions (other than university policy) on its support?

- NO restrictions exist
- YES (please explain ____________________________)

What financial support is the College providing?

- $ (Circle one: per semester, year, or competition?)

Does the College place any restrictions (other than university policy) on its support?

- NO restrictions exist
- YES (please explain ____________________________)

What financial support will the team receive from the foundation?

- $ (Circle one: per semester, year, or competition?)

Will the team participate in fundraising?

- NO
- YES (amount to be raised? ______________________)

Are there any other sources of financial support for the team to participate in this competition?

- NO
- YES (please explain ____________________________)

**Total EXPECTED Income:** $
Estimate expenditure Information
For each expense indicate a total amount needed and then provide explanation of amount. (E.g. Ground transportation $150 for 1-day rental of minivan and $100 gas)

Registration: ______________________________$

Airfare: ______________________________$

Ground Transportation: ______________________________$

Lodging: ______________________________$

Other: ______________________________$

Total: ______________________________$
APPENDIX I
UCM COUNCIL FOR ACADEMIC TEAMS
TEAM TRAVEL REPORT

Team’s Name:

**Competition Information**

Name of Competition ________________________________________________

Sponsoring/Hosting Organization _______________________________________

Location to which team travelled ______________________________________

Dates of travel ______________________________________________________

Please list all student team members who participated in the competition and provide the 700# for each. Indicate any team officers and individual awards winners too. (You may attach a spreadsheet or document if you prefer)

Please provide a summary of outcomes (team awards earned, qualifications, problems encountered)

Please provide a brief summary of any efforts to recognize and publicize the team’s participation?

Do you want assistance recognizing and publicizing the team’s participation?

YES

NO
**Actual Income Information**

Department Support: ______________________________$

College Support: ______________________________$

Foundation Support ______________________________$

Fundraising: ______________________________$

Other Support: ______________________________$

Total Support: ______________________________$

**Actual expenditure information**

For each expense indicate a total amount and then provide explanation of amount and copies of receipts to support.

Registration: ______________________________$

Airfare: ______________________________$

Ground Transportation: ______________________________$

Lodging: ______________________________$

Other: ______________________________$

Total: ______________________________$
APPENDIX J
CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE- FULL RESULTS

Contribution to Practice

Data were collected via electronic survey, focus group, and interview during a three month period. Nine individuals, consisting of coaches of the participating academic teams and current administrators of Dean level status or higher were interviewed. The focus groups, consisting of current and alumni competitors had a total of 28 participants, and the electronic surveys targeting the same population received 55 responses (current competitors, n=30, alumni competitors, n=25). The current competitors ranged from participating on the team from one to four years, as did the alumni respondents. Alumni were represented graduating between the years of 1994 and 2015.

After the data were gathered, the researcher analyzed the information gathered to identify overarching themes that became prevalent through the triangulation process. Data analysis illuminated three overarching themes: involvement with competitive academic teams impacted participants as students, as citizens, and as professionals. Upon further analysis, the researcher found these themes to be highly correlated with the pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and subsequent mission statement. The first theme, that of participants as students, aligned with pillars one and four (engaged learning and future-focused academics). The second theme, participants as citizens, shared similarities with pillars two and three (worldly perspective and a culture of service). The final theme, participants as professionals, aligned with pillars two and four (worldly perspective and future-focused academics). Under each of the three overarching themes, sub-themes also emerged that will be discussed further.
Theme 1- Participants as Students

When analyzing the data, the researcher found copious amounts of evidence supporting how the University’s competitive academic teams impacted participants as students. As mentioned, this theme shared a direct correlation with the pillars of engaged learning and future-focused academics. Regarding how involvement advanced engaged learning within students, two prevalent sub-themes emerged. Competing on an academic team gave participants an opportunity to practice and apply skills learned in their classes outside the classroom walls, and how involvement impacted academic success.

Engaged learning. When asked to explain how engaged learning differs from other styles of learning and why it is superior and/or preferred, university administration identified the practical application, or transferability, of learning as a critical process that will better prepare students to be successful both as an undergraduate student and lifelong learner. Three administrators likened it to the difference between giving a quiz and actually demonstrating a skill. The mentality being, if you are not able to actively engage in the process, then it is difficult to prove whether the learning objective was actually met. Another administrator compared it to high-impact learning, stating:

Engaged learning means students actualize what they learn. It is the translation from theory into practice. When individuals are engaged in the learning process, not only is the learning deeper and longer lasting with multiple impacts, they get to experience what it means. It becomes a habit of mind.

These elaborations provided by the participating administrators were especially prevalent amongst the data collected.
While explaining how the participating competitive academic teams advance engaged learning, numerous respondents from the interviews, focus groups, and surveys articulated that the competitive atmosphere that accompanies competitive academic teams served as opportunities for students to practice and apply skills they learned in class and in practices in a setting outside of the classroom, which was the first sub-theme to emerge under engaged learning. As two of the coaches from different teams explained, competitive academic teams serve as a lab, of sorts, similar to that within the science field. Within their classes, students learn various skills and techniques that will help them to be successful, such as how to think critically, write effectively, and create engaging presentations. The practices and competitions the competitors participate in serve as the lab setting, where the students engage in the process of applying the knowledge and skills they have learned in their classes, which deepens their understanding of the concepts. One coach remarked, “This is a student’s opportunity to apply practical knowledge and skills outside of the classroom. It helps them develop a work product.” While another commented, “It is essentially practicing skills they will use in their future careers with a safety net.” One administrator likened the competitive aspect to what motivated high achieving students to further hone the skills learned in the classroom that will contribute to their further success. These thoughts of being able to practice and directly apply knowledge into a more realistic setting (competitions) were further supported by the current and alumni members of each competitive academic team.

When asked about the types of skills and techniques participation in Mock Trial reinforced, respondents identified learning how to take complex information that is unorganized and turn it into organized presentation that is informative and convincing, as
well as how to interpret law as skills used consistently within the activity. Further, students identified research skills, understanding the rules of evidence and how to analyze facts and law together as being skills that directly transfer from the classroom. One respondent explained, “Mock Trial is a perfect example of engaged learning. It is the real world application of what we learn in class, we get to practice what we might do in the future.”

The participants involved with LAE felt the same way regarding how being a member of the team enhanced their ability to apply course content. Numerous respondents within the focus group and surveys explained that the competition areas within LAE, which include criminal law, policing, corrections, LAE knowledge, juvenile justice, crime scene investigation, physical agility, and firearms competition. These categories are all directly linked to the Criminal Justice Department’s curriculum, as well as to their future careers in law enforcement. Once student explained, “LAE takes [what we learn] from theory to practice. I know a lot more about the required class content because of my involvement.” Another student remarked, “Participation gets you more acquainted with everything in the criminal justice field, and it starts us off early. It is a hands-on approach to learning rather than class and lecture.” More specifically, one survey respondent explained, “When we participate in competitions, we apply what we have learned in our classes to real world examples. An example of that would be when we participate in Crime Scene Investigation. We take the concepts we’ve learned from our classes and actually apply it to solve the crime.” There was a direct pipeline present between the classroom and LAE competitions. Students learned skills in their classes and
then applied said skills within a simulated realistic environment for their LAE competitors.

Although the forensics team is less tied to a specific major or unique skill set associated to a particular career, respondents shared that involvement prepared them for a wide skill set they will need later in life to be successful, regardless of professional field. Specifically, skills such as critical thinking, speaking and thinking with limited preparation, understanding and interpreting arguments, communicating effectively, and enhanced presentation skills were identified as skills that directly transfer from the classroom experience. One respondent stated:

The Talking Mules promotes engaged learning because it gives me the opportunity to further develop my professional speaking skills while encouraging the Socratic way of thinking in which, instead of simply asking for the answer to my question, I research for the answers I seek.

Reflecting back, one alumnus survey respondent provided a similar statement:

By constantly having to recall and apply classroom lessons, my academics were enriched, and it led me to a heightened understanding of most topics that we discussed in class. My knowledge never had a chance to grow rusty, since it was being used so often.

Ideas similar to this were shared by numerous respondents. Both the current and alumni competitor populations for forensics had the largest range of majors and professional fields, yet the majority attributed their time in forensics to enhancing the concepts they learned in class. For example, those with a background in political science attributed
participating in debate as a way to enhance and deepen their knowledge on politics and international and domestic affairs.

Finally, individuals involved with DECA agreed that being involved on a competitive academic team not only further advanced their knowledge of course content while providing an atmosphere to practice skills that were beneficial to students, but also later in life. One student remarked, “Our competitions are set up as real life simulation. We get to role play within our field.” This role play simulation gives the participants in DECA an opportunity to practice what respondents referred to as “creative problem solving” through the application of various marketing and sales presentation techniques they had learned in class to numerous simulated business world situations. Perhaps one DECA alumnus summarized it best:

My involvement in DECA, both as a member and an officer, provided an opportunity to translate textbook knowledge into applicable experience. Further, I developed skills outside of the classroom that proved valuable immediately after graduation including leadership, team management, and presentation skills. My participation in DECA reinforced the idea that education has to leave the classroom to provide an adequate opportunity for a student.

Regarding engaged learning, one administrator expounded, “One should conceive of these competitive teams as an extension of the classroom. Sometimes we see them as separate levels of engagement, but they represent a continuum.” Students must first engage in the classroom and acquire the pertinent knowledge they need to be successful. However, in order for the knowledge to advance from simply memorized content to applicable skill, the student must grapple with and apply the knowledge until it becomes
skill. Based on the data collected, it became clear these competitive academic teams provided an extension to the classroom, advancing theory to practice and deepening participants’ knowledge-based skills.

The competitive setting acted not only as a lab to practice transferrable knowledge from course content, but also as an atmosphere for advanced learning, which was characterized unable to occur within a classroom (Hinck, 2003). This type of learning encompassed both hard and soft skills: practical techniques that will be useful in their future professions, as well as many social-based skills. Being a member of a competitive team bolstered students’ abilities to develop social skills that are applicable to future life situations and changing circumstances due to the amount of time and preparation that go into a tournament season (Hinck, 2003). Essentially, rather than focusing on learning one skill at a time, the competitive setting integrates numerous skills together, creating a more dynamic, evolving learning experience (Chebator, 1995). Many respondents from each of the four participating teams remarked on how the learning that takes place within these activities spans far beyond what can be taught in a traditional classroom setting. The very nature of competitive academic teams advances the findings of Kosloski and Ritz (2014), who found that many co-curricular activities such as competitive academic teams provide participants with unique opportunities to “. . . take part in many educational activities outside of the classroom. . . all reinforcing the learner’s curriculum” (p. 154). One administrator explained that for certain students the thrill of competition propels their motivation, thus furthering their advancement of knowledge and skill even further, as it will aid in securing a better competitive record. The unique, out-of-class experience that competitive academic teams provide contribute to a well-rounded academic program that
occurs both within classroom settings and also beyond, truly contributing to the high academic standards the HLC mandates for accreditation and the excellence University administration desire.

While participants in Mock Trial thought much of their course curriculum in the Political Science Department was directly tied to Mock Trial, they believed that the setting of the activity provided something unique to participants that could not be experienced in a traditional classroom. For example, one focus group respondent claimed, “The setting of Mock Trial is different of that of the classroom. It forces us to learn in a different way. Every day is a test, and we have to apply information differently.” Another focus group respondent elaborated:

Our practices teach us how to write cases and speeches and conduct cross examinations in ways that real attorneys use in real trials. I get to interact with lawyers and judges through my involvement. It feels like a class that isn’t offered at UCM.

On a more personal level, one respondent shared a story of his individual growth, stating that he used to be much more arrogant and less open to criticism. After several years working with his coach and volunteer judges who are often local attorneys or judges, he began to understand how important audience adaptation was. He specifically identified that his involvement with Mock Trial helped him grow socially. He concluded, “I’ve learned how to work with people in a way that doesn’t occur within the classroom.”

Many LAE survey respondents felt similarly and identified the ability to transfer content knowledge into a laboratory-like setting as being the opportunity that allowed them to understand the practicality of what was being taught in their courses. One
individual commented, “I believe LAE provided me with more practical experience than a classroom could provide, such as first hand practice of crime scene investigations.” This idea was echoed throughout the focus group as well. Although participants were exposed to a wealth of classroom knowledge from highly qualified professors and law enforcement professionals, the competitive setting of LAE deepened participants’ understanding of what they were learning due to the experiential and applied learning that occurred, which enhanced student engagement levels.

These thoughts were also shared amongst past and current members of the forensics teams. Again, although not directly tied to a specific content area, the wealth of skills practiced in forensics enhanced the majority of learning experiences. One alumni survey respondent explained:

My courses just made more sense after I was involved with the Talking Mules. I was able to think quickly and efficiently through my coursework, and I not only knew the structure of writing a paper, but I understood how the structure worked to create a persuasive and logical stance.

There was also evidence of how involvement in forensics spanned beyond the transfer of hard skills into a real world setting, but also taught and/or reinforced the importance of soft skills as well. Numerous respondents from both the focus group and survey populations identified forensics as a key component in the development of interpersonal soft skills. One current member explained, “We spend a lot of time creating and synthesizing something that argues a point or goal. Simply by doing that, you engage parts of your brain that make you a better human being and member of society.” Many of the soft skills identified were similar to those marked as traits needed to successfully
Individuals involved in DECA also agreed their experiences practicing for and competing in DECA had advanced their knowledge in ways a traditional classroom setting is less capable of doing. One member from the focus group reported, “DECA has taught me so much more about the business world, far beyond what we learn from textbooks. We actually experience how things work in the real world.” This statement mirrored a sentiment that was shared by respondents from each team; participation took their learning from theory to practice, and allowed participants to understand not simply why a technique was used, but how it was used effectively in a real-world setting. Additionally, similar to the shared experiences from individuals from other teams, the social engagement naturally present within the activity promoted a deeper learning of self and personal interactions. One member, who identified as having a learning disability that makes it difficult to read social cues, explained, “DECA has helped me experience the interpersonal side of interactions, like learning to read signs and non-verbal cues - things you can’t experience from a text book.” This respondent attributed DECA with teaching him proper professional social skills. His strengthened ability to understand signs and non-verbal cues will transfer towards bettering the relationships in his personal, non-professional life as well.

It is clear that involvement on one or more of the participating competitive academic teams enhanced learning in several ways. To begin, the teams act as laboratories, giving participants an environment to apply the knowledge they learned in their classes, which allowed them to bring theory to practice. This is a key component to
engaged learning as identified by University administration, and thus a critical component to advancing the UCM mission statement. These teams served as the bridge that connected textbook knowledge to practicality. Furthermore, the competitive atmosphere of these teams taught students in ways difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom setting, which is unique to a competitive setting that occurs outside of the classroom (Galagan, 2010; Hinck, 2003). When students applied course or learned content to a realistic context, participants not only deepened their understanding of the material and skills, but they also improved their own interpersonal and social skills as well, which are many of the skills identified by Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) as being traits to improve employability.

The second sub-theme present under engaged learning is that of how participation on competitive academic teams impacted overall performance in the classroom and on campus. Although three respondents out of the entire alumni and current competitor populations stated that involvement may have impacted their classroom performance in a negative way due to time management and commitment levels, the overwhelming majority of respondents spoke to an improved academic performance due to involvement. Numerous individuals representing each participating team identified their involvement on a competitive academic team as a determining factor of their classroom and academic successes. This thought was reiterated by the coaches, who all spoke to the academic achievements of their competitors. Additionally, two of the coaches produced evidence in the form of published studies in journals, showing competitors having a higher GPA within their major than their non-competitor peers. However, competitors’ academic performance was impacted in more ways than just GPA.
For example, numerous respondents from Mock Trial explained that not only did the team serve as a laboratory allowing them to practice skills learned in class, the activity itself taught them skills they then used in their course work, which allowed them to excel in the classroom setting. Essentially, a cyclical learning experience was created. One alumnus respondent shared how the Mock Trial experience benefitted his time as a student at UCM, and continued to benefit his as a student in law school. The respondent wrote, “I excelled academically due to my ability to take things I learned from Mock Trial and use them in the classroom, both as an undergraduate and as a student of law.” This was reiterated by several alumni members of the forensics team as well. One respondent explained, “I was used to being challenged with practical experiences by my team and was therefore able to manage challenges in course work, organization and time-management so much better.” While another shared, “The debate team gave me focus and taught me how to research better, comprehend more of what I read, and organize my study habits. As a result, my grades improved and it motivated me to want to be more.” While another expounded:

The dedication you learn from participating on the team was translated also into my academic life which translated to good grades and having strong relationships with my professors. I’m a better leader in my classes and within group projects now. I’ve gotten request to present to other classes within my department because of my experiences and abilities to speak.

Although many of these quotes came from members of only two teams specifically, the skills identified as leading to academic success were identified by respondents from each of the four participating teams. The skills that were reinforced and learned via
participation on competitive academic teams are skills that push the participants towards success and lead to increased opportunities within the classroom. Ultimately, the majority of respondents believed that involvement on a competitive academic team pushed them to excel as an academic. As a current member of LAE shared, “I take classes and coursework more seriously, because I know it will help me succeed in LAE.”

Because members of competitive teams work so hard to uphold rigorous academic standards, they naturally began to develop soft skills such as time-management and organization skills, which benefitted their own academic success, but also contribute to a higher academic profile and retention rates (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993, 1999; Ting, 1997; Frye, 1999; Duque, 2014). The data showed that individuals involved with one of the four participating teams viewed their experience as a competitor as being critical to their academic success and advancement of knowledge and skill. Participation on such teams reinforced skills learned in the classroom, advanced knowledge to a greater understanding, and also produced some of the University’s most committed and driven students. Clearly, the competitive academic teams advanced engaged learning in a unique way with countless benefits.

However, yet another layer emerged from this sub-theme. Not only did participation bolster the majority’s ability to succeed in the classroom, it also led to feeling like a successful and valued member of the campus community, which contributed to greater personal growth. Numerous respondents representing each of the teams identified involvement on their respective team as making them feel “a part of something bigger than myself,” leading to feeling more engaged within their own campus community. According to Astin’s (1984) work on student development theory, when
students feel a strong tie, or sense of belonging to the larger university community, they often experience higher levels of academic success, more satisfaction with their learning environment, and perhaps most importantly, the development of life skills that will lead to successful professional and personal lives. When students are engaged not only in their learning experience, but also in their larger university community, it is beneficial to both the student, and the institution (Kuh, 2009).

Respondents from each respective team commented on how involvement with a competitive academic team contributed to feeling more engaged in their collegiate experience. Numerous respondents commented on how their team served as a support system in an environment where immediate family was removed. The level of support garnered from participation further increased personal investment in the activity and engagement in the collegiate experience. For example, one member of LAE explained, “The prestige of our LAE team…now this is a serious deal, I know I need to work hard to uphold it.” On a more personal note, one member of the DECA team explained, “There is a sense of family that helps us excel as a team. We are mutually invested in each other’s successes and failures, so we push each other.” A current member of the LAE team felt similarly, explaining:

LAE gives me a feeling that I belong to something bigger than myself. I know I have a family here on campus that truly cares about me. I know I could ask any member for help in a class and they would be there to help me.

However, this level of support spanned beyond student members of the team, creating a unique bond with faculty members that also impacted students and pushed them to succeed. One alumnus of the forensics team reflected:
Through the dedication and compassion of the coaching staff on the debate team, I was able to grow as an individual, both inside and outside of the classroom. I was encouraged to set goals that were slightly beyond what I thought I could accomplish, and was then given the help and guidance to reach (and go beyond) what I thought was possible. No other professor in my time at UCM had nearly the impact on me as my coach.

The data once again supports Astin’s (1984, 1985, 1993, 1999) claims regarding the importance of student engagement levels in relation to academic and personal success in college. Furthermore, the findings reiterated that relationships with faculty members are often the strongest influencing factor on one’s academic success and overall retention rates (Burris, Ashorn, Akers, Fraze, Brashears & McCulloch, 2010; Kuh & Hu, 1999; O’Keeffe, 2013).

The relationships forged between coaches and/or faculty and competing members of a team benefit all stakeholders involved. Students feel valued and are encouraged to achieve success, coaches receive a higher level of investment from the student’s involvement, and the university experiences higher levels of student engagement, leading to increased satisfaction and retention rates (Astin, 1984; Duque, 2014; Ting, 1997). Often, an engaged campus experience is the determining factor in one’s ability to succeed. As one alumnus of the forensics team stated:

Honestly, I think the debate team kept me in college and helped me to graduate. My freshman year, I was pretty lost. I did a lot of partying and skipped a lot of class. As a result, my grades suffered and I was really close to dropping out. I was
recruited to join the team out of [the coach’s] class. He set tough standards, but he wouldn't let me quit on myself.

One comment made by a coach summarized the importance and interconnectedness of the two engaged learning themes perfectly. The coach explained, “Participation gives students the opportunity to work hands-on with other students and faculty in applying what they learn in a setting outside of the classroom.” As Galagan (2010) explained, the most effective learning occurs in both formal and informal settings, such as outside of the classroom. Within that unique experience, a higher level of interpersonal connection exists, which contributes to a student’s perception of value and worth not only to him or herself, but to the team, the faculty/coaches, and university community. In order for a mission statement to be fulfilled, a university must first retain students who feel positively about their collegiate experience (Duque, 2014). The sense of belonging, along with the relationships created within competitive academic teams, assisted in obtaining pleased, engaged students; ergo, they assisted in advancing the mission statement.

**Future-focused academics.** The second pillar prevalent under the participants as students theme was that of future-focused academics, which denotes that UCM is actively preparing students to be ready to not only join the professional ranks upon graduation, but be prepared to excel in it. Although much of the rhetoric used by the University to define future-focused academics tends to rely heavily on the use of new technologies (which will be discussed further in subsequent sections), University administration believed the definition to be much broader. One administrator explained, “Future-focused academics means there is an understanding of the dynamic nature of our world and the
need to prepare our students to adjust to the ever changing dynamics of this world.”

Another administrator further elaborated:

In the purest sense, what [future-focused academics] means to me is that we are preparing students for careers and employment opportunities that may not even yet exist. We are providing our students with skills that are broad, general, and adaptable enough for jobs that we might not even know about yet. When they graduate, students should have the ability to adapt to a changing environment.

This administrator continued by adding a second tier to the definition which spoke specifically to making sure students do have the skills they need to not only succeed in industries as they are now, but also based on predictions of change. Essentially, future-focused really revolves around the ability to be highly adaptable within any given professional situation.

These reflections directly coincide with the advancements of the Human Capital Theory to include more focus on social capital, which focuses on acquiring skills that will benefit individuals professionally and personally (Rastogi, 2002; Rodriguez & Loomis, 2007; Scott, 2004). Under this mentality, society reaps the benefits of individuals who are not only prepared for a certain job, but are also contributing members to a better society through the engagement of ethical choices and moral actions (Rastogi, 2002; Rodriguez & Loomis, 2007; Scott, 2004). Under Scott’s (2004) “Citizen-Model University,” students are trained in the skills they need to be able to face the societal challenges present in the twenty-first century. Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) identified these traits as applied skills, or those dealing with critical thinking, problem solving,
leadership, teamwork, innovation, ethics or professionalism. Essentially, the traits the University administrators identified as necessary to be future-focused.

Based on the definition provided, along with the elaborations from administrators, and research on desirable 21st century skills within the workforce, each of the participating academic teams identified characteristics of future-focused academics present within their activity that helped participants succeed as students, again pointing to two sub-themes: how the teams cultivate the skills needed to be adaptable and future-focused, and also how it bolstered academic success post-undergraduate career. When the coaches were asked about how future-focused academics influenced their students, each coach seemed to share in a much broader definition with the administrators that pointed to the specific skills one may need to be successful in our evolving world, thus creating the first sub-theme. One coach in particular commented:

This group of kids, these are the future thinkers and leaders. If we can get them to start thinking about how they can change the world, when they get out into the real world, they aren’t content to just sit back and just take what the status quo gives them. They want to be movers and shakers and want to change the world. Our activity by its very nature, plus our emphasis on advocacy, teaches them to research and talk about new ideas, but also teaches them how to put those new ideas into actions.

The coaches and also several administrators agreed that competitive academic teams were an environment outside of the classroom for students to learn the skills needed to one day change the world. Furthermore, the atmosphere provided a safe space to practice and apply said skills so that when students did enter the workforce they were more
prepared than their peers. This opportunity dramatically impacted their ability to grasp, retain, and apply such important skills while they were still on campus, making them stronger students and leaders, while simultaneously preparing them to enter the constantly evolving workforce and world.

This sub-theme was supported by survey and focus group respondents as well, especially from the alumni population, who still use the skills they obtained to adapt to their surrounding worlds. One alumnus of the forensics team explained, “Speech and debate by its very nature is always relevant, since the topics are constantly updated by the national conversation. This participation in civic conversation is undoubtedly useful post-graduation.” While another wrote:

We are learning a technology that is thousands of years old- the human voice. It allows you to understand how you fit in the world, and how you can use your voice to change the world. And that is a skill that is not likely to change in the future.

Although these two quotations were both spoken specifically about the forensics team, the skills identified within the quotations apply to each of the participating competitive academic teams, once again showing how participation on competitive academic teams advanced future-focused academics by preparing students with the skills needed to be highly adaptable and capable of contributing to positive change within society.

The data fully support Scott’s (2004) “Citizen-Model University” and advancement of social human capital. Not only are participants advancing their basic knowledge and skills, which are referred to as those affiliated with educational coursework such as writing and communication skills, they are strengthening their
applied skills, or the ones that will, as one administrator explained, “... prepare students to engage in the evolving world, but also to participate in creating the world.” Through participation, students engaged in practices of critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork/collaboration, leadership, and professionalism, all of which are identified as skills needed by college graduates (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

Participants on competitive academic teams practiced their adaptability skills on a regular basis. By nature, the topics and studies analyzed, marketing pitches made, and speeches given, forced participants to be acutely aware of their audience and surroundings and adapt accordingly. However, the data showed that participants are move beyond simply adapting; they are leading. Every team held a winning record and sent competitors to deeper levels of competitions this year, making it clear participants can not only adapt, but can excel and lead with confidence while adapting to the situation surrounding them.

The second sub-theme, that of how team involvement influenced one’s academic success post-undergraduate career, was especially prevalent in two of the four participating teams, although comments were made from respondents representing each team regarding the prospect of attending graduate school. For many competitors on academic teams, obtaining an advanced degree is desired, or even necessary, in order to meet their professional goals. One University administrator linked this to future-focused academics quite clearly. When asked to explain what future-focused academic encompassed, this administrator explained:

We want to make sure that students engage in the academic rigor we provide, but it is equally important that they realize they will be life-long learners, following
up on emerging issues and being active in creating the future and always prepared to make adjustments as new professional opportunities emerge.

A similar thought was articulated by every coach as they spoke to the skills the competitive academic teams hone, which often ended up placing our students at the top of their graduate-level classes. One coach shared, “We push all our members to present, to publish, and to write, all while they learn about ethics [within the field], and teamwork, among many other skills.” While another stated, “If you are asking, ‘is what you are doing today going to apply to tomorrow?’ Then yes, [this team] provides direct knowledge that will help them advance to the next stage of training [in the profession].”

It is quite rare that undergraduate students are pushed to delve into such rigorous research efforts and pursue publications. However, when skills such as those are naturally a part of a competitive academic team’s culture, students who are members of a competitive academic team are further developed in the skills that readily transfer to their ability to succeed in their current, and future classroom settings.

When specifically considering Mock Trial, numerous current competitors commented on the amount of high impact learning, which ultimately helped them succeed while a student here. Additionally, several alumni respondents commented on how the training they received while participating in Mock Trial propelled them to the top of their courses in law school. One alumni respondent in particular shared, “Mock Trial prepared me for the future more than any other class, organization, or activity that I took part in. It taught me legal principles that most of my classmates in law school had no clue about.” Several respondents noted that their skills in argumentation, case theory, writing opening and closing statements, and conducting examinations were exponentially
above those of their peers in law school. One alumnus in particular stated, “… in law school, I was able to receive the highest grade in my Evidence course, and I believe this is because I already had the necessary background knowledge from my Mock Trial experience.” Numerous alumni of the Mock Trial team have gone on to pursue a degree in law at extremely prestigious institutions. One respondent remarked, “Mock Trial helps students get into higher ranking law schools that are nationally recognized. Our students are going to schools that you wouldn’t necessarily think would be the next step from someone who graduated from a Division II school.” This speaks to the level of preparation and success of the Mock Trial team both in competitive and classroom settings.

Although pursuing an advanced degree is not nearly as necessary within the realm of the other three teams, many respondents, including coaches and current competitors, addressed how participation on competitive academic teams increased the propensity to obtain an advanced degree. Competitors were more confident in their abilities to handle the rigors of graduate level coursework due to the skills acquired during their time with the team. Two coaches in particular specifically spoke about the amount of individuals they have helped get accepted into advanced degree programs, and how their students are consistently at the head of the class. Alumni respondents who had obtained an advanced degree furthered this conclusion by explaining how they were better prepared both in technique and mental strength to handle the level of critical thinking and increased research and writing loads that accompanies graduate level coursework. One alumni focus group respondent who is currently finishing graduate school argued:
Participation has definitely increased my abilities in graduate school. I’m used to heavy and rigorous reading load. Additionally, the theoretical knowledge I acquired during my time competing directly applied to my coursework. Debate helped narrow my interest in graduate school and helped me identify what I wanted to be my research focus.

One could argue the levels of engagement participants of competitive academic teams experienced with critical thinking, research, writing, and presentation are the very skills that encouraged them to be life-long learners, which was a trait identified by administration as being future-focused. When speaking on debate, one alumni articulated:

I would say that debate by its very nature is future focused. Maybe not in the use of technology (besides research tools and databases), but in the way you are trained to think. We were always exploring the potential impacts of a given decision or policy proposal. This method of analytical thinking, of exploring all the possible outcomes of a decision, is at the core of future-focused thinking. This is what debate and forensics does. It teaches students to consider a situation from a variety of perspectives (ethical, financial, practical, etc.) and then reach a conclusion about which approach would be the best, given the information. These ways of thinking, accompanied with the skills taught and reinforced through participation on competitive academic teams, are the traits that propelled students who participated on a competitive academic team to the top of their graduate classes and prepared them to be the forward thinkers who are adaptable to our evolving world that the administration spoke about.
When comparing the sentiments to the foundational skills and goals of the Human Capital Theory, there is a direct link showing how involvement on competitive academic teams contribute to the preparation of individuals for life through the development of personal, social, relational, and work-related skills that will truly benefit society (Becker, 1993; Chang, 2013; Mincer, 1974, Psacharopoulos, 2006, Schultz, 1961). However, the traits acquired span beyond the traditional views of human capital and support Scott’s (2004) advancements on the theory to include a more interpersonal element under the “Citizen-Model University” (p. 162). Essentially, under Scott’s model, obtaining the traits to benefit society is worthy, but utilizing said traits to make a positive difference in the world is desired, which led to the next emerging theme.

**Theme II- Participants as Citizens**

The second overarching theme to emerge from the data collected revolved around how participation on competitive academic teams impacted individuals as citizens. Within this theme, participants elaborated on how the skills taught and experiences garnered through competitive academic teams contributed to their development into citizens who were civically engaged members of a much larger global community. Under this theme, two pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract were prevalent and connected easily— the worldly perspective and the culture of service. Under each of these pillars, two sub-themes emerged as well, which will be discussed further.

**Worldly perspective.** When discussing how involvement on a competitive academic team impacted one’s worldly perspective, two sub-themes emerged. Participants spoke to the broadening of perspective that occurred via participation, and secondly, to how that broadened perspective led to an increased level of empathy for
others. Before addressing each sub-theme related to the worldly perspective, it must be noted that the specific wording of this definition gave many coaches, competitors, and even administration pause. The definition is focused primarily on preparing students to work in a globalized world by exposing them to study abroad opportunities or similar immersion-based experiences. By nature of the current wording, programs that do not offer study abroad opportunities cannot advance the pillar. However, upon interviews with administration, when the definition was explained in their own words, it became more focused on diversity, inclusivity, and preparedness to relate to individuals from diverse backgrounds. For example, one administrator explained a worldly perspective as “…understanding the context of what you do relative to an informed society.” Similar explanations were shared by other administrators that also included elements of understanding the impacts of decisions to others and the world, and the need to understand the context in which individuals reside, highlighting the interdependent nature of society. While another administrator defined it as “Acquiring a view of the world that encompasses multiple perspectives.”

Based on the broadened definitions provided by the administration, each coach interviewed provided a great amount of support towards the notion of how competitive academic teams impacted the perspective of participants, which was the first sub-theme to emerge under the worldly perspective pillar. Due to their competitive formats, each team travels to different regions of the country to compete, giving participants numerous opportunities to meet/interact with individuals from various universities and industries. Additionally, one team in particular, the speech and debate team, also competes internationally, creating even more opportunities to engage with individuals from
different areas and backgrounds. These activities by nature, expose participants to varying viewpoints and diverse groups of people. Not only do the participants meet and interact with individuals from across the world, they are also judged/critiqued in competitions by individuals with their own varying perspectives. This experience allowed participants to do more than just interact with diverse individuals, they opened themselves to receiving criticism and comments from others, which are essentially rooted in one’s own perspectives. Student competitors were exposed to a plethora of varying perspectives that undoubtedly influenced their own in one way or another. However, in most of the activities, all of the coaches spoke to how the way of thought within the activity also promoted the expansion of one’s perspective. One coach in particular stated:

Students are forced to think about both sides of a problem. The application to that type of thinking is so much broader-- it teaches them to evaluate all sides and develops them into someone who can know the differences and nuances to international and diverse issues. It forces and encourages them to think of every angle before coming to a conclusion.

Engaging in this critical thought pattern trains the brain to consider multiple perspectives before making any decision, affirming that competitive academic teams contributed to a broadened worldly perspective.

The student and alumni respondents also provided evidence to support the notion that their perspectives had been broadened due to their participation on one of the competitive academic teams. Individuals speaking about Mock Trial commented on their perspectives being influenced by their fellow competitors who came from various backgrounds, their coach and volunteer critics from the legal field, and also the teams
they compete against. One respondent shared, “It’s taught me that individuals are important and that each individual perspective is unique. You can’t find a ‘system’ that works for everyone, you have to treat each case with a new view.” Comments such as this, along with the many similar comments shared, show how this activity is not only shaping the competitors’ view of the world, it is also broadening their perspective within the context of their future profession.

Competitors from the LAE team agreed. When reflecting on their recent travels to California for their national competition, one focus group respondent shared, “There’s a lot more to the world than you think. I came from a really small farm community…even Warrensburg seemed crazy big … LAE has really broadened my perspective of the world.” Another focus group member shared an alternative view, “…our travels show us how it is so different. I’m from the opposite. I’m from a big city, but traveling with LAE still has the same effect.” Although it could be argued it is simply the travel experience that has broadened their perspectives, LAE is their current provider of said travel experiences.

Individuals from the forensics team had a great deal to share about how their activity has broadened their perspective. Again, due to the nature of speech and debate, there is a high level of thinking that involves considering multiple perspectives of a given issue. Several students explained that exposure to so many different speeches and topics broadened their perspective regularly. One respondent explained, “The team encourages coming into contact with multiple ideas and perspectives and speaking on them, forcing individuals to learn different ideas that lead to a more worldly perspective.” When that skill is practiced so regularly it becomes commonplace it begins to be a thought process
that is engaged in everyday life, not only within the activity. One current competitor shared, “My horizons, both politically and socially, have been broadened because of my respective team. I honestly feel like I have become a better person because of my new experiences.” Alumni reiterated this, sharing how influential the broadening of their perspective was while they were competing. One alumnus member explained:

    Coming into college, I considered myself to be fairly learned. It turns out I was wrong. Every time you walk into a round, you hear things you never imagined, some that challenge the fundamental precepts of the arguments you are making, as well as your belief system, and it really influences your opinions and perspectives.

Another alumnus member advanced this explanation even further:

    In a lot of rounds, you have a profound moment where you are forced to reconcile with issues and perspectives right now. You have to listen to their arguments and figure out how to respond to them. You realize the world is so much more complex. Debate forced you to engage with diversity every weekend, and it forced me to grapple with issues I wouldn’t have normally.

One experience unique to the UCM speech and debate team is the Montgomery Cup, a two week study abroad experience in the United Kingdom which occurs each spring. This experience takes some of the team’s finest debaters and competitors overseas to compete in a British Parliamentary style debate exhibition tour. Typically, the students debate seven different universities, ranging from Oxford to Glasgow to St. Andrews, and spend the rest of the tour learning about the history and culture of the United Kingdom.
As it is a true study abroad experience, it does fulfill the worldly perspective tenant, but the experience means much more than that to those who attend. The coach explained:

On most study abroad tours, you are a passive receiver of information. Ours is unique because we are not passive learners, we are engaged learners. We do every other thing that every study tour experiences, but we also engage in a debate with other students, scholars, and professors while they learn about the culture.

Current and alumni competitors alike commented on how life-changing the Montgomery Cup tour was for them, as well as how it not only allowed them to engage in a cultural experience that differed from their own, but more importantly, how it opened their eyes to a world that existed beyond their region. One respondent shared:

I had never been on an airplane prior to joining this team-- and there were many others like me. I got the opportunity to travel and engage with students from the United States and Europe, discussing various current events. We saw the world from their perspective and, in turn, were able to grasp an understanding of a perspective we would have never gotten had we not been offered these opportunities from this team.

Clearly, for those who have participated in the Montgomery Cup, a broadened worldly perspective naturally occurs from the experience.

The students involved in DECA felt similarly about their participation bolstering a broadened perspective due to competition. They were one of the very few teams that hosts an international presence at their final competition (ICDC). Several focus group members spoke to their perspectives being changed by the various competitors and judges they met within their field. One in particular explained, “ICDC brings competitors
from universities around the world, as well as judges from national and international companies together. Everyone gets to mingle during the week-long conference/competition.” In addition, they are judged by professionals in the industry with varying perspectives, which not only opens competitors up to learning about a new perspective, but encourages them to learn how to adapt to meet the needs of differing perspectives, as was especially present in all of the teams’ competitive settings. An alumni member explained that within their competitive roleplay settings, they must be aware of cultural differences and adapt accordingly based on the background of the judge. For example, if the judge represents a culture where it is customary to begin a meeting by asking about family, a competitor must alter the original pitch written to accommodate the needs and expectations of the audience. Due to experiences such as this, members of the DECA team spend time learning about the customs of various cultures within business settings, which also broadened their perspectives.

Many of the traits identified by administrators as being a part of encompassing a worldly/global perspective are the same as those identified by Scott’s (2004) advancements in human capital, as well as the list of traits compiled by Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) highlighting the desired skills of college graduates by potential employers. In order to be a member of a progressive society that places emphasis on an ability to think globally, individuals must engage in experiences that allow them to explore the world through different perspectives. In turn, their own perspectives will broaden along with their abilities to contribute to a more informed global perspective. This is essentially the goal of a liberal arts education (Berg, Czikszentmihali & Nakamura, 2003; Cady, Wheeler, DeWolfe & Brodke, 2011; Ozdem, 2011; Scott, 2004).
Although a liberal arts education does an excellent job of supplying such opportunities, out-of-class experiences such as participating on a competitive academic team further advance learning and opportunities, whether it be through actual study tours abroad, ability to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds, or opportunities to research and discuss how issues impact cultures and/or sub-cultures.

The second sub-theme to emerge under the worldly perspective in context to participants as citizens built upon the idea of broadened perspectives and further supported elements of social human capital. As student’s perspectives were changing and being broadened via participation on competitive academic teams, increased levels of empathy were experienced, ultimately leading to a perspective built on tolerance and acceptance. This increase in empathy was present at both the professional and personal level of respondents. Although this was not something the coaches spoke directly about in detail, it was especially apparent in the responses collected from current and past participants.

Within the context of the professional setting of law, all alumni survey respondents commented specifically on how the training they received while participating in Mock Trial taught them the importance of fair and equal representation for all persons, regardless of background. More specifically, one respondent explained how Mock Trial taught students the importance of “providing adequate representation and defense to all persons in all situations, regardless of personal belief,” as well as how to “serve others by defending them in a court of law, while remaining professional at all times.”

An increased level of empathy within the professional realm was also experienced by members of the LAE team. One alumni member shared an experience that occurred
within a professional development seminar at the regional competition that had a profound impact on how she viewed and treated others. The respondent identified herself as being particularly closed minded before attending UCM, and while participating in a training session on empathy for offenders, she was forced to take on the role of the other, which was, in this case, the role of the offender. By engaging in this perspective, she explained how her ability to be open minded and empathetic to others dramatically increased. Although this experience was rooted primarily in a professional setting, this new understanding permeated into her personal life as well, causing her to become far less judgmental and closed minded.

Although not as prevalent, evidence of increased levels of empathy was also present in the responses provided by members of the DECA team. Alumni representatives identified specific experiences that occurred within their professional development trainings that had a profound impact on the way they viewed others while participating on the team and, further, how they treat others in their professional lives. One particular alumni shared a story in which he participated in a leadership development training session, which focused on teaching individuals about five different voices, or styles of leadership. The respondent explained, “Not only did I have a better understanding of my own style, I then knew how to work with others who differed from me with a greater level of understanding and respect.” Clearly, instances that occurred within the competitive setting, as well as the professional trainings that are normal occurrences for some of these teams, had a profound impact on an individual’s view of the many voices that make up the world.
On perhaps a more interpersonal/social level, numerous individuals associated with the speech and debate team spoke to how their experiences competing heightened their sense of compassion and empathy for others, especially in settings where contrasting views are present. One individual remarked, “It has increased my patience, kindness, group dynamics, and communication skills. I'm unbelievably grateful.” While another explained, “It has given me a greater appreciation for social differences, and has made me a more patient and caring individual. This will translate into every career that I choose.” The impact of heightened empathy was proven amongst alumni respondents as well. While many spoke to an increase in their own personal levels of tolerance and acceptance, one individual in particular encapsulated the importance of empathy in all aspects of life:

I don’t see the globe as segments anymore, and I’m sensitive to people from all walks of life. My work since graduation has been dedicated to diversity and human rights. I have respect for these issues because I was given the opportunity to learn and engage them as a competitor with the Talking Mules.

Empathy is a trait that is commonly associated with leadership. Those who have higher abilities to empathize with others are viewed as being more ethical, caring leaders who, often, are highly favored amongst those who are being led (Levi, 2013; Northouse, 2013). Therefore, one could assume that an individual who encompasses high levels of empathy, coupled with having a broadened global perspective, would likely be viewed as a leader capable of relating to various and diverse groups of people, regardless of culture, color, sexual orientation, gender, or socioeconomic status. These are the leaders our
evolving society needs, and they are the leaders business executives desire to hire (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Levi, 2013; Northouse, 2013).

By being involved on a competitive academic team, participants learned valuable soft skills such as empathy and understanding that prepared them to be a global citizen who cares about the surrounding world. Furthermore, they acquired the skills needed to be a future-focused leader within society. University administration identified encompassing a worldly/global perspective as having the ability to understand that we are all connected and, therefore, have a responsibility to make decisions that better society. Through their engagements with critical thinking and problem solving, along with an instilled perspective that values diversity and each individual voice, students involved with competitive academic teams had a deeper understanding of how interdependent society truly is and how the decisions made often have global impacts. These traits align perfectly with the evolution of social human capital, as well as with the second pillar that was prevalent amongst the theme of participants as citizens (Becker, 1993; Rastogi, 2002; Rodriguez & Loomis, 2007).

**Culture of service.** The second pillar that aligned with this theme is that of a culture of service. Under this, two additional sub-themes emerged as well. First, involvement on a competitive academic team often taught the importance of service and, secondly, it provided a better understanding of needs that exist, further contributing to a broadened perspective. To begin, it became quite clear that volunteerism, or service learning, was not simply an event that a team participated in occasionally. Rather, service is something woven into the teams’ cultures, which was the first sub-theme present under the culture of service pillar.
While being interviewed, three of the four coaches spoke to the amount of direct service work their respective teams participate in. Some of these experiences were tied specifically to the activity itself while others were more of benefit to the greater good. For example, each year the DECA team plans and hosts a high school DECA tournament as a way to give back to their own community. LAE will assist the Missouri Highway Patrol with different simulations and provide security for countless events as a way to give back and promote service within their own culture and organization. Some service opportunities were also linked to fundraising. The LAE team cleans up the local shooting range and is given a small stipend for the metal/shells they recover. Students in DECA have participated in cleaning yards for a small fee to fund their travels, as well. Alternatively, the teams also participate in several other non-activity related service opportunities. For example, the speech and debate team and LAE have adopted children at Christmas time and participated in the community cupboard initiative. The speech and debate team has also participated in a state-wide anti-bullying campaign, literacy promotion, and other various projects with the United Way. The coaches spoke to the importance of not only talking about change, but engaging in efforts to make change occur.

Students and alumni of the three teams mentioned above also supported this sentiment. Participants on the LAE team shared that each year the team engages in over 100 collective hours of volunteer work, reiterating how important it is to their team’s culture. Although acquiring service hours is a requirement to be a member in good standing, one respondent explained, “Our community service really builds a culture among the team rather than having it just be something to do to show we are participating.
in service.” Several individuals commented that their involvement in LAE has made them want to volunteer more because they have a better understanding of the value of service. One focus group member explained:

We get to see how we help people. You see that it effects people, and it’s a good feeling. We do it because we want to, not just to earn service points. It is very satisfying when you actually see change. It also makes you appreciate what you have more.

Whether directly tied to the field of criminal justice or not, service is woven into the fabric of the LAE culture and legacy.

Participants involved with the speech and debate team shared similar sentiments. Their team, along with LAE, have a student leadership position dedicated to the creation of service projects. Within the forensics community, these opportunities are referred to as advocacy projects. One respondent explained:

Advocacy projects are a part of our team culture, and we all care about them. We don’t do it just because we have to. Being an informed person is part of what we have to do as a society, it is our civic duty.

Another shared:

Volunteering doesn’t seem like work, it seems like something we should do to be a good person. We learn how to talk the talk when we advocate for issues in rounds, but forensics also teaches us to walk the walk, so when we hear about a problem, we are more likely to do something about it.

Forensics seems to inherently be service-oriented as the foundation of the activity is to speak about issues and injustices around us that are often unheard of or avoided. One
alumni respondent summed up the relationship between service and forensics perfectly. “Speech and debate helped me realize the critical intersection of speech and action. I now firmly believe there is no action without speech, nor speech without action. The activity made me more considerate of those in my community.”

Although their activity is less tied to the discussion of current events and the injustices plaguing the world, the members of DECA also shared in the thought that involvement promoted a higher level of civic engagement. One alumni respondent wrote:

[Participation in DECA] gives students a good foundation for philanthropy. It has taught me there’s more to being a philanthropist than just giving things away, it is more about an experience. It means a lot to someone and might lead that person to pay it forward. We are in the mindset to help people when we graduate, and it carries on.

With service being such a large part of how these teams operate, there is no surprise to see such high levels of civic engagement amongst participants.

The three teams mentioned above all had a very direct path to service and identified numerous examples of different events they had participated in. Mock Trial, however, shared the same view regarding the importance of service, but the model of service they spoke to was perhaps less direct regarding the specificity of events and service projects. However, the link was extremely direct when placed in the context of the field of law. Both current and alumni competitors alike spoke to the inherency of service within the practice of law. For example, one respondent explained, “The entire [Mock Trial] program is designed to engender the ability to serve society at large, as well as individuals. It teaches students how to provide that service.” One alumni respondent
who is currently practicing law elaborated, “Attorneys are public servants, and Mock Trial taught me how and why public service to the community is important.” Clearly, participants are involved in levels of engagement that are impacting their world view and perspective on service. Although their experience might not seem as clearly identifiable, they truly are making an impact. One current competitor shared:

This activity has changed my view on the importance of serving the community through how it has sculpted my own views of morality and by showing how important it is to advocate for those who need it most.

The value of service is being articulated in its own very unique way within Mock Trial. Nonetheless, participants credited their participation in Mock Trial to teaching them the importance of service.

Whether the type of service engaged in was more professional or interpersonal in nature, each of the participating teams instilled the importance of service to participants and supported the vision administration shared regarding the culture of service pillar. As one administrator explained, “We have an obligation to help make society better by serving those who aren’t as fortunate as we are, to be good citizens.” When this mentality is taught and more importantly, practiced at the university level, there is a higher likelihood that individuals will continue to engage in service-related practices into their post-graduation and professional lives. It is these citizens who are rooted in social human capital who will be the leaders capable of moral deliberation and action (Scott, 2004).

The second sub-theme to emerge under the culture of service pillar seemed to naturally emerge from the first. Once participants experienced the importance of service, they ultimately became much more aware of their surrounding world, and even more so,
the needs that exist within it. Under this sub-theme, the current and past competitors were the primary contributors to supporting data.

By being engaged in such diverse service related experiences, numerous individuals representing each of the four teams commented on how their involvement contributed to a better understanding of civic engagement. Speaking to this sentiment was one respondent’s remarks in particular, “Before I was involved in Mock Trial, civic engagement meant things like voting. But now, I’ve learned that civic engagement is so much more. It’s about sometimes leading, and sometimes working behind the scenes to help others lead.” Nearly the exact sentiment was shared by a member of the forensics team. “Involvement changed my view of civic engagement because I used to think that was just things like voting. It made me realize there are bigger issues happening even within my community that I wasn’t aware of.” The exposure student participants received to service opportunities has not only changed their perceptions on what civic engagement is, but has also provided a better understanding of the needs surrounding them.

Numerous respondents from each team felt their understanding of the needs in the world dramatically increased when they became involved in service projects through their respective teams. One respondent representing the forensics team explained:

I never realized there were so many problems. I know that sounds silly, but at tournaments you hear about all these problems you never knew about. Forensics has increased my awareness of issues around me, which opens the door for a lot more volunteer opportunities.

One member of the LAE team elaborated, “Community service is so important, but seeing it now at college and within a larger community, I've realized that it goes so much
further than what a couple groups can do.” Although the following student participant was speaking to involvement on the forensics team, the words are applicable to the experiences provided by each of the four participating teams:

Speech and debate has shown me how everyone in society is interconnected, and doing community service has shown me that even if an issues isn’t affecting me, it could be affecting someone I know. It’s about making the world better for all people. Not just me.

By participating on competitive academic teams, students experience the interconnected society the administration spoke about. They were able to apply their broadened worldly/global perspective to the importance of service by recognizing the needs of others within the community, region, country, and beyond. One administrator remarked, “We want students to recognize it is important for them to give back to others. We have an obligation to help make society better by serving those who aren’t as fortunate as we are.” By integrating service into the guiding philosophy and actions of the participating teams, competitors have greater opportunities to become a more engaged and informed global citizen which, in turn, teaches them the importance of civic engagement, service, and contributing to the creation of a greater collective society where social human capital is not only desired, but valued and celebrated.

**Theme III- Participants as Professionals**

The final theme that emerged from the data involved how participants were impacted as professionals. This theme is naturally connected to the previous two, as the preparation received as a student and citizen contributed to preparing graduates to enter into the professional setting. This theme was supported primarily by two of the Learning
to a Greater degree pillars: the worldly perspective and future-focused academics. Under these two pillars, two sub-themes emerged linked to how competitors have been impacted by participation as current or future professionals. Under the worldly perspective pillar, participants felt involvement on a competitive academic team increased their overall understanding of diversity and, secondly, prepared them to work with others more effectively because of their better understanding of diversity. Under future-focused academics, two sub-themes were present as well: participants were provided with more networking opportunities and, second, the skills acquired via participation on a competitive academic team directly transferred into the professional setting.

**Worldly perspective.** Although the worldly perspective pillar was already discussed in relation to impacting participants as citizens and broadening perspectives, it went beyond that. The data reported it was apparent that involvement with competitive academic teams not only broadened one’s perspective, but it also made individuals more understanding of diversity, which impacted participants as professionals. This deepened understanding of diversity, along with how it impacted participants’ professional lives, was the first sub-theme to emerge under the worldly perspective. While the coaches of each team spoke in depth about exposing their competitors to diversity in an attempt to help them better understand the complex world in which we live, it was the competitors, both current and past, speaking about their coaches and experiences that advanced this sub-theme the most. Several respondents representing each team spoke to how exposure to diversity was foundational to their team, beginning with the coaching staff. When speaking about the coach for Mock Trial, one respondent reiterated, “Our coach helps us cultivate worldly perspective since we get an opportunity to interact with people actively
practicing law in different fields.” As a coaching staff of only one, great efforts are made by the coach to expose the Mock Trial team to critiques from various law professionals representing different areas within the field. This gives participants a greater understanding of diversity within law, and how that may impact a trial or court case. A similar sentiment was shared by several respondents from the LAE team. Their team is guided by several different coaches/faculty advisors who come from very different backgrounds. Therefore, their competitors have the opportunity to not only interact with individuals from various fields within law enforcement, but also to gain a better understanding of how the diverse fields intersect within the profession. It was abundantly clear in the amount of responses from members associated with LAE and Mock Trial that by having increased exposure to various faculty and professionals, competitors gained a deeper understanding of diversity within their field, which ultimately will be, or already is, an influencing variable on the professional path they chose for themselves.

The idea of cultivating a deeper understanding of diversity spanned far beyond that of exposure to coaches and professionals, however. It was also present in a more general, sociological understanding, which was prevalent in the responses provided by individuals associated with the forensics and DECA teams. Both current and alumni competitors alike commented on how exposure to a variety of types of people, as well as events that are a part of their competitions, had impressed upon them the importance of being a contributing member to a diverse society. One current member of the forensics team expounded:

[In debate], you can’t just study the issues or cultures, you have to understand the issues and cultures. Debate provides an intellectual study abroad. I’ve always
lived in Missouri, and by being on the team, I’m studying and writing cases that teach me about the interconnectedness of the world. It builds respect for other cultures and reduces ignorance. It has made me more open minded and understanding of the world around me.

Several similar examples were provided by alumni of the forensics team. By critically engaging in issues effecting various cultures, ethnicities, sexualities, and genders, individuals felt they had a greater level of understanding and acceptance for all voices, regardless of background, color of skin, or status. As one alumni focus group respondent explained, “Being involved in forensics gave me the opportunity to debate against students from foreign countries that live the hypotheticals we typically speak about.” Experiences such as this provided a deeper look at the world that spans beyond our community, state, region, and even country, which then allowed individuals to have greater levels of understanding, respect and acceptance for any element of diversity they encounter. Upon reflecting on the connection between competing in forensics and knowledge of diversity, one alumnus member wrote:

Debate was the impetus for me to go from casual observer of politics to a true student of them, attempting to take in as much information as I could handle; constructing a world view of how international politics behaves brings all of that information into a system so that you understand not just "what" things are happening, but "why" they happen the way they do. I couldn't have made sense of international politics without broadening and really developing my worldview so that I can understand how things fit.

Another alumnus member encapsulated his experiences beautifully when he shared:
Debate forced me to reconcile with different ideas, to be more micro-politically aware, specifically regarding how discourse shapes reality and impacts people. It forced me to become more aware with how I engaged with the world, how my language impacts the world and certain groups of people.

Sentiments such as this reinforced the administrations’ desires to instill students with a broader global perspective and cultural awareness.

Although fostering a greater understanding of diversity within our evolving world is a valued and honorable trait, involvement on competitive academic teams seemed to advance beyond a simple understanding to an ability to lead and work with diverse populations more effectively. The second sub-theme to emerge under the worldly perspective as it involves participants as professionals was how competing on an academic team had prepared them to be better equipped to lead and work with others, which aligns with many of the traits identified by Casner-Lotto and Barrington’s (2006) research regarding necessary traits of graduates as identified by business executives, including collaboration and leadership skills, professionalism, ethical/social responsibility, and creative problem solving.

While all the coaches did remark on how involvement strengthened leadership skills and one’s ability to effectively work in group settings, it was once again, the responses of the current and past competitors that made this a prevalent theme. An overwhelming majority of survey respondents identified increased abilities to work with others effectively as one of the primary benefits of being involved on a competitive academic team. One individual from the focus group, speaking on behalf of Mock Trial, explained:
There is a diverse group of people in Mock Trial at UCM, including athletes, Greek life students, ROTC students, students that only do Mock Trial, and students in a wide variety of other activities. This creates an atmosphere of diverse opinions from a wide range of backgrounds.

Elaborating on this, another member who was in a leadership position on the team explained that the varying opinions present amongst the team members has forced him to figure out how to listen to, learn from, and lead the team in a way that acknowledges everyone’s differences and celebrates their similarities, essentially bolstering team cohesion and leading to competitive success.

Individuals associated with forensics felt similarly. While it could be argued that association with any sort of team or organization increases one’s ability to work in groups, participants of competitive academic teams seemed to take this skill one step further by directly applying it to how this transferrable skill will impact the world surrounding them. One alumni member shared:

Not only does the activity of debate and forensics inherently include discussions of global issues, requiring a deep knowledge and understanding of the issues that impact our global society, but it also allows participants to experience global societies and have debate interactions with international students. This experience goes beyond simply a surface experience of culture. It is an amazing opportunity to share in challenging conversations with those with a very different world view, and to search and work with them to find solutions to some of the biggest challenges faced by our 21st century world.
For these individuals, it was not enough to simply understand diversity, it was important to have such a deep understanding of it that they could work with diverse individuals in the production of a better world, which was identified by university administration as being a key component to having a worldly/global perspective.

For many participants, their involvement on a competitive academic team also showed individuals how much they truly enjoyed and valued group work. The overwhelming majority of respondents commenting on involvement in LAE spoke to how much they learned both academically and socially through the student study groups, while members of the Mock Trial and forensics teams attributed the ability to work with peers to much of the success their teams attain. One alumni from DECA shared:

DECA helped me realize how much I enjoy working with others. It became evident how more I preferred to be involved with my peers than standing aside, alone. I’ve taken that realization and carried it forward with me into [my current position].

The ability to function in group settings is clearly a skill practiced within many university classrooms; however, the more practice one receives, the better prepared one is to handle situations that may arise. With group work being a fundamental practice within the competitive academic teams, students are likely more prepared than their non-competing peers to effectively work in group settings within the professional setting.

In summary, when engaged learning is paired with the teaching of diversity, graduates are then prepared to enter the global society both University administration and Scott (2004) describe. They are the voices of empathy, understanding, and reasoning. They are the individuals capable of being the innovative problem solvers who research
the impacts of a decision on others. They are the individuals capable of leading and creating cohesion amongst diverse groups of people. They employ a diverse skill set that includes both knowledge-based and applied skills, making them the desired employees of the 21st century (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

**Future-focused academics.** The second Learning to a Greater Degree tenant that was most prevalent under the participants as professionals was that of future-focused academics. When students leave UCM and join the workforce, administrators hoped that graduates would be able to “add value to an employment opportunity as soon as they walk out the door.” However, with many fields becoming oversaturated with qualified individuals, even securing an employment opportunity to add value to can be challenging. Under this pillar, two additional sub-themes emerged linking to participants as professionals. First, being involved on a competitive academic team significantly bolstered networking opportunities and, secondly, the skills acquired are used daily within the professional lives of the alumni respondents in particular.

The first sub-theme to emerge under the future-focused academics pillar in reference to how involvement impacted participants as professionals regarded networking opportunities. Essentially, involvement on the participating competitive academic teams led to increased networking opportunities with professionals or scholars within the field, thus increasing one’s ability to secure a job post-graduation. The coaches of each respective team commented on how involvement on a competitive academic team led to countless networking opportunities within the professional and academic fields to which non-competitors would likely not have access. Although each coach identified networking within the academic field, the coaches of Mock Trial and forensics spoke in
great detail of the opportunities their graduates have received in acquiring internships, graduate assistantships, and admittance into graduate school. Involvement also included networking opportunities in the professional setting as well. Each coach spoke to the ability to connect with individuals within the professional field through the competitive setting, as many of the judges and critics at the competitions are professionals with expert knowledge and experiences. The coaches identified enhanced networking opportunities as one of the most beneficial factors associated with competitive academic teams and work very hard to see to their students’ success as an undergraduate student and beyond. As one coach stated, “We are all about the success and employability of our students.”

The student and alumni respondents also spoke very favorably of the networking opportunities that involvement allowed them and attributed much of those opportunities to their respective coaches. One respondent representing LAE explained:

Our advisors, as well as professionals from other areas, are at the forefront of helping us find out what and how to pursue careers. This includes interview preparation as well as insight into typical job duties for a variety of positions.

However, it was not just the connection to coaches and professionals that advanced one’s networking opportunities. The nature of the activities themselves, coupled with the style of competition, also contributed. When speaking to the opportunities afforded to them via participation in Mock Trial, competitors explained, “I’ve gone before Federal Judges in competitions…I now feel comfortable interacting with law enforcement and judges…and this has opened doors to scholarships and internships.” Many current and alumni respondents from the LAE and forensics teams attributed their admittance into a graduate program to being a part of a competitive academic team that allowed them the
opportunities to network and make connections with various faculty members and universities across the nation. An alumni member of the DECA team explained, “My success in DECA was undoubtedly a role in being hired as a Marketing and Promotions Graduate Assistant… before I’d even finished my undergraduate degree.” This individual has since gone on to secure a full time position within the same office and attributes DECA for much of his professional success.

When speaking with the participating administration about high impact learning, a thought shared by many was the importance of an internship experience that essentially provided students with an opportunity to practice the skills they had learned in their classes in a practical setting that mimicked what their future career may be. One other benefit to participating in an internship identified by administration was the ability to network and possibly secure a job from the experience. Although participation on competitive academic teams is vastly different than participating in an internship, it seems the two experiences share many of the same benefits. While competing on an academic team, individuals were given the opportunity to practice the skills they learned in the classroom in a more practical, realistic setting. They received feedback from professionals, as one would also receive in an internship experience, and they were exposed to more networking opportunities.

The second sub-theme that emerged from future-focused academics as it relates to participants as professionals was how the skills obtained during their competitive careers are now the skills respondents use daily within their professional lives. As has been articulated throughout the results, three of the teams (Mock Trial, DECA, and LAE) are more focused on preparing students to be successful in a specific professional setting,
such as law or business/marketing. Subsequently, the coaches of said three teams each commented on how transferrable the skills acquired during participation were to the actual work place. For example, the coach for Mock Trial explained:

My goal is to create students who are capable of getting into law school and succeeding, and then when they get out, practicing law in a way that is not just good for them, but also good for the practice of law, because, ultimately, we work together in the field.

Similar thoughts were reiterated by the other coaches; ultimately, their goal was to aid in the training of students so when they begin their professional career, a successful transition is more easily attainable. Although forensics has less of a tie to a specific professional field, this sentiment was shared, as many of the soft skills taught through competition are readily transferrable to any professional field.

Current and alumni respondents shared a wealth of information regarding how participation will likely, or already does, impact their professional careers. Due to the fact that many of the competitive elements of each team revolve around actual case studies, simulations, and role plays, students are provided with countless opportunities to engage in guided “practices” to prepare them for actual professional settings they may encounter. Essentially, these teams create safe spaces for students to practice using techniques that will one day, likely be common practice in their professional daily lives. Along with this, students are afforded the ability to fail, to engage in trial and error, and to search for the ultimate best practices within their field, before actually being a part of the field. Therefore, they enter the workforce more prepared and more confident in their skills to be a professional.
The respondents representing Mock Trial showcased this connection perfectly. One respondent explained, “My experience with the mock trial team exposed me to courtroom procedure, learning, and skills that are required as a real-world attorney.” While another shared, “[the competitions are] fairly typical of a normal trial schedule…it sort of represents the physical, emotional, psychological, physiological, every type of impact you can think of when trying a case.” Clearly, the activity provides exceptional courtroom training for participants. Numerous alumni respondents identified their Mock Trial experience as part of the foundational training to their careers in law. One respondent shared, “I use things I learned from Mock Trial myself daily in my job. These competitions are best representation of legal proceedings you can be involved in other than actually being in a legal proceeding.” The hard skills learned through participation are the catalyst to success amongst alumni members. However, many of the skills acquired are useful far beyond one specific field, as one focus group respondent shared, “These tools will be useful whether we pursue law or not. Time management skills, writing skills, and confidence are often things that some students can lack; however these tools are universal no matter what career path one may choose.”

Despite being less tied to a specific field, respondents associated with the speech and debate team shared similar stories and sentiments. Several current competitors explained they could already see a difference in their own personal job-readiness skills as compared to their peers. One respondent explained:

The competitive nature of the activity increases a drive to perform and motivation to work hard to achieve success. In addition, it provided connections to different universities and their particular coaches who taught differently. It gave me insight
to multiple ways of running a team (or business), as well as running a classroom.
Practicing for debates and speeches also promotes self-awareness and helps one
notice speaking and behavior flaws that can be addressed to prepare for potential
debate and job interviews.
Another described the training received a bit differently, “The team teaches both public
and interpersonal communication skills that are necessary for any post-graduation path,
whether it be in academia or the work force.” The alumni who are currently in the
workforce agreed. One alumni responded, “Everything I did to prepare for competition
was a skill that I use every day to lead my team and serve my customer base. I can't think
of any better preparation for a professional life than being on a speech and debate team.”
While another shared, “I use those skills every day on the job and they have helped me to
get ahead. I am the youngest regional sales director in my corporation. I owe it, in large
part, to the skills I learned in debate.” To provide a more detailed picture, one other
alumni wrote:

Participating on the Talking Mules speech and debate team was a crucial part of
my learning experience at UCM. It honed my ability to think critically about a
situation in high stress and time-sensitive environments. My participation also
taught me how to structure evidence-based and accurate arguments and transfer
those into writing. Even further, I am confident in my ability to persuasively
speak for group and individuals, even without preparation. All of the
aforementioned skills are things I use in everyday life to not only function in my
job position, but to progress above others in similar roles.
Similar sentiments were shared by alumni of the LAE and DECA teams, showing how impactful their years on the team were to their now professional lives.

From their years involved with a competitive academic team, alumni were afforded countless opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom and practice the skills that would one day lead to their professional success in a realistic, practical setting. Some of those skills are rooted specifically in knowledge-based content areas, such as the practice of law or business; however, many of the skills garnered are applied and contribute to the creation of a well-rounded professional capable of interacting with others in a positive manner, leading others effectively, and engaging in ethical decision-making. These are, essentially, the 21st century social human capital skills employers desire (Scott, 2004; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). It is graduates who encapsulate those skills that UCM should be proud to claim as alumni, as they are living proof of mission statement fulfillment and advancement of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract.

In the case of competitive academic teams, the data clearly support the advancement of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and subsequent mission statement, thus answering the research questions favorably. Additionally, copious amounts of antidotal evidence were gathered to use for the HLC (or any other) accreditation process. Although some teams may advance particular pillars more than others, they contribute to the well-rounded student experience UCM provides, which produces graduates who embrace service, understand others, and are prepared with the skills to advance within their own personal and professional lives.
Identification of Researcher: This research is being conducted by Nicole Freeman, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program through the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this case study is to operationalize the four pillars comprising the University of Central Missouri’s Learning to a Greater Degree learning contract, and then use the operationalized measurement tools to identify whether or not four of UCM’s most active competitive academic teams advance the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and institutional mission statement.

Request for Participation: I am inviting you to participate in a case study analyzing whether or not your specific academic team advances the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and UCM mission statement. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty.

Exclusions: You must be a coach/advisor of one of the four participating competitive academic teams.

Description of Research Method: This study involves participating in an interview lasting roughly one hour in length. Depending on the results of the interview, there is a possibility for an additional request of participating in a focus group comprised of the academic team coaches. The questions will ask you to reflect on how your team, activity, and coaching practices align with the four pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract.

Privacy: Due to the nature and specificity of this case study, measures to protect privacy, especially coaches’ privacy is difficult, which is why participation is voluntary. Per your permission, I will record the interviews, and will then keep the interview transcriptions secure in a locked filing cabinet. This study has been approved by University of Central Missouri Provost Deborah Curtis and well as IRB.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Explanation of Benefits: You may benefit from participating in this study by utilizing the opportunity to provide feedback about your team’s contributions to advancing the University’s mission, which is also critical for HLC accreditation.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact my advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She can be reached at hutchinson@ucmo.edu or at (816) 405-9306. If
you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4264.

If you would like to participate, please provide your consent by signing your name below.

I have read this informed consent and I agree to participate.

_________________________________________
(Printed Name)

_________________________________________
(Signature)

_________________________________________
(Date)
Identification of Researcher: This research is being conducted by Nicole Freeman, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program through the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this case study is to operationalize the four pillars comprising the University of Central Missouri’s Learning to a Greater Degree learning contract, and then use the operationalized measurement tools to identify whether or not four of UCM’s most active competitive academic teams advance the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and institutional mission statement.

Request for Participation: I am inviting you to participate in a case study analyzing whether or four of UCM’s competitive academic team advances the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and UCM mission statement. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty.

Exclusions: You must be in an administration/leadership role at UCM. Examples of roles include: Deans, Vice Provosts, Provosts, etc.

Description of Research Method: This study involves participating in a focus group lasting roughly one hour in length. The questions will ask you to reflect on the four pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and their relationship to the four participating competitive academic teams.

Privacy: The information that will be collected during the focus group will be recorded pending participants’ permission. The recordings will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet. The transcriptions will be kept confidential, as your actual names will not be used. This study has been approved by University of Central Missouri Provost Deborah Curtis and well as IRB.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Explanation of Benefits: You may benefit from participating in this study by utilizing the opportunity to provide useful feedback regarding UCM’s competitive academic teams contributions to advancing the University’s mission, which is also critical for HLC accreditation.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact my advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She can be reached at hutchinson@ucmo.edu or at (816) 405-9306. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4264.
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Request for Participation: I am inviting you to participate in a case study analyzing whether or not your specific academic team advances the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and UCM mission statement. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty.

Exclusions: You must be a current or former participant on one of the four participating competitive academic teams and at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Description of Research Method: This study involves completing an electronic survey lasting roughly 20 minutes in length. The questions will ask you to reflect on how your team and activity in general align with the four pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract.

Privacy: All of the information we collect will be anonymous. Your name will not recorded, nor any information that could be used to identify you.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Explanation of Benefits: You may benefit from participating in this study by utilizing the opportunity to provide feedback about your team’s contributions to advancing the University’s mission, which is also critical for HLC accreditation.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact my advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She can be reached at hutchinson@ucmo.edu or at (816) 405-9306. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4264.

Your participation in this survey signifies your consent.
Identification of Researcher: This research is being conducted by Nicole Freeman, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program through the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this case study is to operationalize the four pillars comprising the University of Central Missouri’s Learning to a Greater Degree learning contract, and then use the operationalized measurement tools to identify whether or not four of UCM’s most active competitive academic teams advance the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and institutional mission statement.

Request for Participation: I am inviting you to participate in a case study analyzing whether or not your specific academic team advances the Learning to a Greater Degree contract and UCM mission statement. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty.

Exclusions: You must be a current or past participant on one of the four participating competitive academic teams, and at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Description of Research Method: This study involves participating in a focus group lasting roughly one hour in length with other members or alumni from your specific competitive academic team. The questions will ask you to reflect on how your team and activity in general align with the four pillars of the Learning to a Greater Degree contract.

Privacy: The information that will be collected during the focus group will be recorded pending participants’ permission. The recordings will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet. The transcriptions will be made anonymous, as your actual names will not be used.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Explanation of Benefits: You may benefit from participating in this study by utilizing the opportunity to provide feedback about your team’s contributions to advancing the University’s mission, which is also critical for HLC accreditation.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact my advisor, Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She can be reached at hutchinson@ucmo.edu or at (816) 405-9306. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4264.

If you would like to participate, please provide your consent by signing your name below.
I have read this informed consent and I agree to participate.

(Printed Name)

(Signature)

(Date)
VITA

Nicole (Nikki) Freeman was born and raised in Manchester, Iowa, which is where her love for schooling and education began. After high school graduation, Nikki attended college at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa. She majored in English Education with a minor in Speech and Theatre Education. She was also a member of UNI’s competitive forensics (speech) team. As a member of the UNI speech team, Nikki was exposed to the life-changing experiences competitive academic teams offered participants.

After graduating, Nikki worked for five years in non-traditional educational settings such as camps and botanical gardens, which gave her the opportunity to work with students of all ages and backgrounds. She attributes those years to developing her understanding of how much of an impact group dynamics, background, and setting have on education. While working in these settings, Nikki also experienced the administrative side of education and programming, as she often found herself in various educational management positions.

Nikki received an MA in Communication from the University of Central Missouri in 2011. She was then hired by UCM and is currently an Assistant Professor of Communication and the Assistant Director of Forensics. She also serves as the advisor to graduate teaching assistants and the liaison to the Speech & Theatre Education program, allowing her to bridge the education and communication disciplines together daily.

While teaching and coaching at UCM, Nikki completed the Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program through the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri in August of 2016.