The employability strengths American Millennials contribute to the health administration workforce: A workplace readiness study at two California public universities

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined employability, also referred to as workplace readiness strengths in this article, for American Millennial health administration baccalaureates. The primary researcher used data collected from focus groups and interviews conducted at two certified Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA) programs in California, USA. Participants (n = 71) belonged to one of 4 distinct groups: (a) health administration faculty, (b) internship preceptors, (c) alumni, and (d) undergraduate students (interns) enrolled in their internship program. Thematic content analysis was used to evaluate the collected qualitative data, after which descriptive statistics was applied to calculate the frequencies of emergent themes. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies, an employer and university validated list of Career Readiness Competencies for a Career-Ready Workforce, was used as a comparative framework for the workplace readiness strengths provided in the qualitative data. Six strength-based themes emerged, two of which comparatively aligned with two of the NACE Career Readiness Competencies. However, respondents indicated that the rest of the NACE Career Competencies were not overtly expressed by Millennials as workplace strengths and should be embedded into the health administration curriculum. This invaluable information can be used to update the AUPHA health administration curriculum and help their undergraduate students increase their employability index scores.

Keywords
AUPHA, NACE, workplace readiness, employability, health administration, millennial, qualitative, career readiness

Introduction

When the United States 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) expanded health insurance coverage to about 20 million Americans in 2016, it placed a heavy burden on the already problematic healthcare workforce shortage (Anderson, 2014; Cohen et al., 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified the U.S. healthcare workforce shortage (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). The U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics (2022) reported that employment of health services managers is expected to grow by 28% from 2021-2031, exceeding the average for all occupations.

The need for healthcare administrators has prompted universities to be more competitive to entice high school graduates, transfer students, and prospective non-traditional students. In fact, more and more bachelor programs are offering online courses and online degrees to attract prospective students who increasingly prefer the online platform over attending a brick-and-mortar institution (Friedman, 2018). But does that mean that all bachelor's degree holders are employable? The United States Department of Education has determined that employability skills—such as interpersonal skills, critical thinking, workplace and career readiness skills—are necessary for success at all employment levels in all sectors (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, n.d.). In light of this, we posit that people who earn health administration baccalaureate degrees, notably health administration degrees that are certified by the Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA, 2022c), are employable. Employability in this context means that students and graduates can discern, acquire, adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings, and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy (Oliver, 2015).

Career Readiness and Employers' expectations

Established in 1956, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2022a) is a professional association in the United States. Its members include over 9,000 college services professionals, over 3,400 university relations and recruiting professionals, and nearly 300 business solution providers. As such, NACE is considered to be the foremost source of information on college student attitudes, outcomes, and college graduate employment. NACE has generated strategic alliances with organizations across the globe that support and complement its mission (NACE, 2023a). The Australian Association of Graduate Employers (AAGE), the International Network of Employers and University Careers Services (INEUCS), and the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS) are NACE strategic alliances with Australia (NACE, 2023a).

According to Gallup & Strada (2017, as cited in NACE, 2022b), students and families reported that the primary motive for going to college is to improve the student's chances of securing employment. Despite that, only 43% of college seniors said they were prepared for their future careers (Reed, 2018). In the same way, a survey of 217 employers found that 46% of them had to give new college graduates 'remedial training' prior to onboarding, and about 20% of employers said that graduates with four-year degrees needed 'workforce readiness' training (Casner-Lotto, Rosenblum, & Wright, 2009, as cited in NACE, 2022b). Similarly, Australia's NAGCAS published a 2015 Graduate Outlook report that included employer ratings of their graduate recruits (Matthews et al., 2015). NAGCAS asked employers 'how higher education providers could better prepare their graduates for the workplace?' Australian employers said that graduates needed industry-based experience (32.4%), training on a wider set of skills (14.8%), a course focused on workplace readiness (7.9%), and graduates needed to be educated about what they can expect from their jobs (7.4%) (Matthews et al., 2015).

NACE (2022b) recognized that a specific readiness approach was necessary to better prepare college graduates for workforce entry and to address the gap between higher education and 'workplace readiness.' Consequently, NACE launched its Career Readiness Initiative in 2015 to address the essential needs of new college graduates and the professionals who recruit them. The aim was to give persons, the institution of higher education, and employers, a common knowledge of what is needed to establish and develop a successful career, a unified language, and a fundamental set of competencies from which a career is built (NACE, 2022b). NACE offered up the concept of 'Career Readiness' as their focused framework. The preceding is how NACE characterises career readiness for college graduates, for higher education, and for employers:

> *For new college graduates, career readiness is key to ensuring successful entrance into the workforce. Career readiness is the foundation upon which a successful career is launched. Career readiness is, quite simply, the new career currency. For higher education, career readiness provides a framework for addressing career-related goals and outcomes of curricular and extracurricular*

activities, regardless of the student's field of study. For employers, career readiness plays an important role in sourcing talent, providing a means of identifying key skills and abilities across all job functions; similarly, career readiness offers employers a framework for developing talent through internship and other experiential education programs. (NACE, 2023b, para. 1 – 3).

NACE's Career Readiness framework targets transferable skills for careers requiring at least an associate's or baccalaureate degree (NACE, 2022b). More information about the NACE Career Readiness Competencies can be found under the Conceptual Framework subheading in this article.

NACE posted results from a 2020 job outlook survey listing key attributes that employers say they look for when reviewing resumes from college graduates (NACE, 2020). Of the top 20 attributes, employers are primarily looking for problem solving skills (91.2%), the ability to work in a team (86.3%), a strong work ethic (80.4%), analytical quantitative skills (79.4%), written communication skills (77.5%), verbal communication skills (69.6%), technical skills (65.7%), interpersonal skills (62.7%), and computer skills (54.9%; NACE, 2020).

Millennials are the largest generation in the United States workforce (Fry, 2018). About half of Millennial college graduates were confident that their college degree had prepared them for the workplace; however, employers have said otherwise (Bauer-Wolf, 2018; Wyman, 2018). Some argue that employers' expectations are unrealistic in assuming that recent graduates who are new to the industry should be able to immediately work at industry level on day one of hire (Cappelli, 2014; Hirsch, 2019). Cappelli (2014) contended that it is the employers' responsibility to invest the time and resources training college graduates to meet industry standards because the overarching goal for most employers is utilizing the employee as a resource to benefit the organization. Despite the relevance of Cappelli's argument, employers do generally expect colleges and universities to prepare their students to be workplace ready and higher education capitalizes on that expectation (Carlson, 2022; Hansen, 2021; Finley, 2021; Fischer, 2022). Carlson (2022) expresses this point most effectively:

> *Employers have long seen colleges as providing the training…that would signal the competencies, behaviours and mind-sets, or tenacity and grit that separate promising job applicants from the rest. Colleges have long profited from the perception that to get a good job, you need the experiences and skills that one gathers while earning a college degree. That dynamic has driven [college] enrollments for decades.* (Carlson, 2022, p. 5)

In the recently published Chronicle of Higher Education report, Carlson (2022) cites a study conducted by Gallup/Lumina Poll, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Cooperative Institutional Research Program. The Poll asked the question, 'Do colleges prepare graduates for work?' The study found that 95% of chief academic officers (senior leaders in postsecondary education) rated their institution as very/somewhat effective at preparing students for the world of work, 13% of Americans strongly agreed that college graduates are well-prepared for success in the workplace, and 11% of business leaders strongly agreed that graduating students have the skills and competencies their businesses need (Carlson, 2022, p. 15). We agree with Carlson that the difference of opinion is undeniable.

Work values and strengths of Millennial college graduates

Millennials (born between 1980-1996) make up about a quarter of the U.S. population and are the most diverse generation (Augustin & Stumpf, 2018; Dimock, 2019; Frey, 2018). Millennials constitute the largest generation with college degrees (39%) compared to the Gen X generation (29%), the Late Boomers (25%), and the Early Boomers (24%) (Bialik & Fry, 2019; Frey, 2018). The U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics (2022a) indicated that the unemployment rate for people with a bachelor's degree and higher, and age 25 and older, was 1.8% as of September 2022.

As reported by Deloitte (2019), Millennials are global citizens who have the power to make or break whole enterprises. What Millennials think and what they do (or don't do, for that matter) have transformed and challenged traditional workplace norms. Millennials have a set of work values that are similar yet distinct from those of other generations (Beal, 2016; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2013).

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The following examples describe what those values are; however, we caution against stereotyping. Put differently, one should not assume that these examples represent the values of all Millennials.

Broadly speaking, Millennials value work-life balance, seek meaningful employment, are creative, and have a propensity for being civic minded (Bentley University, 2017; DeVaney, 2015; Jenkins, 2018). Millennials are inclined to apply flexibility when encountering new things (Lub et al., 2012). When they come in contact with something they do not know, they will search the internet and learn it. Millennials tend to drive workplace innovation primarily due to their strong technological background. They value working in teams using a mix of non-traditional innovative approaches such as video conferencing and meeting in open office spaces that allow for unfettered engagement because they believe that the collaborative approach is the most productive method for tackling a problem (Economy, 2019; National Association of Colleges and Employers Staff, 2019). Millennials are intensely passionate about diverse and inclusive environments that are culturally relevant, and they tend to be compelled to respond when faced with what they perceive to be an injustice (Shwarting, 2018).

Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA)

The Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA, 2022c) is made up of a global network of colleges, universities, organizations, and others who are committed to improving health and healthcare delivery through excellence in healthcare management and policy education. Universities and colleges that have health administration baccalaureate programs can apply and pay a fee for AUPHA to conduct a rigorous peer review of their program, curricula, educational outcomes, and faculty (AUPHA, 2022b). Employers, external stakeholders, and prospective students view degree programs with a AUPHA certification as establishing higher educational and curricula standards than those programs that are not AUPHA certified (AUPHA, 2022b). There are nearly 250 AUPHA certified programs worldwide, including in the U.S. (AUPHA, 2022a). AUPHA's global associations have merged to create the Global Healthcare Management Faculty Forum (Glandon, 2019). Yearly before the AUPHA Annual Meeting, the Global Healthcare Management Faculty Forum hosts the pre-conference Global Symposium. Colleagues from Europe, Asia, and Australia have consistently attended these gatherings (Glandon, 2019).

The criteria for AUPHA Undergraduate Program Certification include an experiential internship requirement built into the curriculum as part of completing the baccalaureate degree. Students complete the internship in the last semester before they graduate. The purpose of the internship is to bridge the academic didactic world and the health administration work environment (Wilson & Nowak, 2019). According to the AUPHA certification guidelines, 'programs must require each student to complete a faculty-supervised internship of not less than 120 hours' (AUPHA, 2017, pg. 2). The aim of this approach is to familiarize the soon-to-be health administration graduate with the healthcare workplace environment and bring alive the practice of health administration. An additional goal is for undergraduate students to enhance their critical thinking skills by applying their classroom learning on the job during internship projects under the guidance of internship preceptors. Preceptors are active healthcare practitioners supervising these interns at their participating facility (Wilson & Nowak, 2019).

Research questions

The following research questions informed this study:

1. How do undergraduate Millennial interns from two AUPHA certified health administration programs describe their perceptions of their own workplace readiness strengths for the healthcare industry?
2. How do healthcare administration faculty in two AUPHA certified health administration programs describe their perceptions of workplace readiness of their Millennial graduates entering the healthcare industry?

3. How do Millennial alumni who are graduates of two AUPHA certified health administration programs describe their perceptions of their own workplace readiness for the healthcare industry?
4. How do healthcare administrators who also serve as internship preceptors for two AUPHA certified health administration programs describe their observations of the workplace readiness of Millennial interns and Millennial graduates entering the healthcare industry?

Significance of this study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it centres on health administration, a field in allied health that operates the business side of healthcare and as a profession was experiencing a workforce shortage long before the COVID-19 pandemic (Flaherty et al., 2019; Littlejohn et al., 2012; Lowell & Gerova, 2004). Second, this study includes representatives from several essential stakeholder groups, namely academics, students, and industry representatives/practitioners. These stakeholders bring critical voices, perspectives, lived experiences, and meaning to this research. Third, we approach this study on Millennial college graduates using the asset-based mindset to highlight the strengths they bring into the healthcare workplace. Fourth, our study captures responses from two public California postsecondary institutions that house health administration undergraduate programs certified by AUPHA. The information collected could serve as quality improvement feedback for all AUPHA-certified programs.

Conceptual framework

We used the NACE (2022b) *Competencies for a Career-Ready Workforce* as a comparative framework to investigate workplace readiness in our study. From 2015-2021, NACE surveyed over 600 of their employer members and over 80 colleges and universities to create a set of competencies by which new college graduates can successfully launch their careers. The result of their efforts was the development of career readiness competencies for what employers' value in new college graduates.

NACE includes equity and inclusion on their most recent competencies list, both of which are incredibly essential in today's workplace. However, we did not evaluate for equity and inclusion in our research because, at the time of our study, NACE's previous list did not include these competencies. Figure 1 displays the career readiness conceptual model for the NACE competencies and the definition of each competency is provided in Table 1.
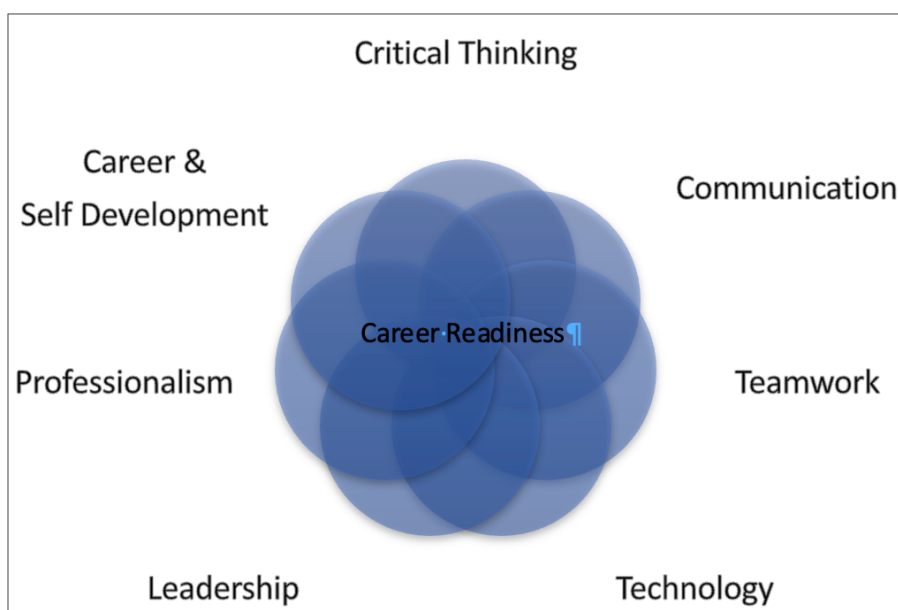
Figure 1: Conceptual Model: NACE Competencies for Career Readiness

Table 1: NACE Competencies Defined

Competency	Description
Critical Thinking	Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.
Communication	Clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with inside and outside of an organization.
Teamwork	Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.
Technology	Understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.
Leadership	Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.
Professionalism	Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.
Career & Self-Development	Proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and without one's organization.

Adapted from National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 2023b.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative design to collect a high level of detail from perspectives about workplace readiness from the participants' point of view (Creswell, 2018).

Ethical procedures

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the primary author's university approved the study's Human Subjects Protocol (IRB #: 1415-010-b).

Study sites for focus groups/interviews

The study was conducted at two public California postsecondary institutions that have health administration undergraduate programs certified by the AUPHA. These sites are labelled Study Site 1 (SS1) and Study Site 2 (SS2).

Recruitment procedures for focus groups/interviews

The primary researcher recruited participants from four populations at both study sites: (a) healthcare administration Interns who were undergraduate students enrolled in an internship course the last semester before graduating, (b) part time and full-time (tenure line) healthcare administration faculty (c) healthcare administration alumni, and (d) healthcare administration internship preceptors who were healthcare administrators supervising Interns.

Several methods were used to recruit participants. Interns were recruited through classroom announcements, emails, and flyers. Interns were offered a $10 Amazon gift card as an incentive to participate. Oral announcements and emails were used to recruit healthcare administration faculty from both study sites. Emails, phone calls, and Facebook were used to recruit alumni working in the

healthcare industry. To recruit internship preceptors the primary researcher partnered with each site's undergraduate program internship coordinator. The internship coordinators forwarded the recruitment email to their respective lists of internship preceptors. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants.

The primary researcher and research assistant used a registration tool called Eventbrite to enrol all focus group and interview participants. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Subjects Protocol-approved informed consent form was emailed to each participant. All participants were instructed to read the form, sign it, and return it to the research team. Email reminders were sent, and all participants submitted a consent form.

Focus group/interview participants and interview questions

A total of 71 participants took part in focus groups and interviews, with two to five participants in each focus group. In SS1, face-to-face focus groups and interviews were conducted at the campus in a closed learning laboratory built to resemble a comfortable living room space. In SS2, face-to-face focus groups and interviews were conducted in a closed conference room. The primary researcher also conducted online focus groups using the Zoom remote web-conferencing service. When only one participant showed up to a focus group, whether it was face-to-face or online, then the focus group automatically became a one-on-one interview. Each group was made up of participants who shared the same group identifier, e.g., alumni, intern, full time faculty, etc. There were no groups with mixed identifiers. See Table 2 for participant breakdown by group.

Table 2: Participants by Group

	Site 1	Site 2	Total
Interns	9	7	16
Full Time Faculty	4	3	7
Part Time Faculty	5	2	7
Alumni	16	8	24
Preceptors	8	9	17
Total	**42**	**29**	**71**

Focus group/interview questions

There were two scripts for the focus groups/interviews: one script for faculty, alumni, and preceptors, and the other script for interns (see Appendix A and Appendix B for focus group/interview questions). The faculty/alumni/preceptor script had a total of nine questions and the interns' script had a total of eight questions. The additional question faculty, alumni, and preceptors were asked was, 'Is there anything that you (administrators/faculty/alumni) see lacking in skills from [Millennials] the recent college graduate?' Two questions were modified slightly depending on the script used. As an illustration, interns were asked, 'As an intern, what strengths do you bring to the workplace?' and they were asked, 'Imagine I am your boss and I asked you to perform a task that does not align with your strengths. What would you do? How would you respond?' Faculty, alumni, and preceptors were asked: 'What strengths do recent college graduates bring into the workplace?' and not asked the 'Imagine I am your boss...' question. Questions were themed under three subheadings: (a) workplace strengths of college graduates; (b) workplace training, skills, and behaviours/attitudes of college graduates; and (c) personal dimensions of educational curriculum.

To establish workplace roles for the preceptors and the alumni, the following demographic questions were asked:

  Are you currently working in the healthcare industry?
  How long have you been working for the healthcare industry?
  What type of organization do you work for?
  What is your position title?

All focus groups and interviews were semi-structured, which allowed for follow-up responses. Focus groups/interviews lasted from 30-60 minutes. All face-to-face focus groups and interviews were audio and video recorded. All Zoom focus groups and interviews were audio and video recorded. Primary researcher and her research assistant also took notes of anything that seemed significant, such as observed behaviour. All recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Data coding

All identifiers were eliminated to protect participant confidentiality. The primary researcher used thematic content analysis to evaluate the qualitative data and afterwards applied descriptive statistics to calculate the frequencies of emergent themes.

The following steps were used to perform the manual content analysis. First, transcripts were skimmed for comprehension on the first read. For the second read-through, the primary researcher circled key words and terms that represented workplace strengths and entered them onto a spreadsheet under their corresponding questions. These words were coded and then categorized to determine themes.

Descriptive statistics

Simple descriptive statistics were used to calculate the frequency and the proportion for each group for all themes that were tagged with a master code. Incorporating descriptive statistics allowed the primary researcher to quantify themes by respondent group (see Tables 6 and 7). Bar charts were created to display frequencies for each theme (see Figure 2).

Results

The following is a summary of the findings. At the time of the study, 22 (92%) out of the 24 alumni were working for the healthcare industry whereas all 17 (100%) of the preceptors were working for the healthcare industry (see Table 3). With reference to number of years working in the healthcare industry, alumni responses ranged from less than a year to 15 years. Preceptors were working in the healthcare industry from 2-37 years. Both alumni and preceptors worked in diverse sectors within the healthcare industry and held positions that represented an assortment of administrative roles, from Patient Care Advocate to President & CEO (see Table 4).

Results are summarised and organised as follows: Employers (see Table 3), Position Titles (see Table 4), Themes-Workplace Strengths (see Table 5), Themes-Frequencies by Group (see Table 6), Themes-Proportions by Group (see Table 7).

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Table 3: Employers

Alumni	Preceptors
Academic Medical Centre	Acute Care Community Based Hospital
Bioinformatics/biotech	Acute Care Facility
Community Hospital and Health System	Acute Care Hospital
Healthcare Non-Profit for Grant Funded	Assisted Living Community
Public Health Projects	Consulting Firm
Health Insurance	Health Care System
Health System	Health Hospital System
Home Care Company for Seniors	Home Health & Hospice
Home Health	Hospital (2)
Home Healthcare Company	Large Hospital System
Hospice	Medical Group
Hospital (2)	Non-profit Faith Based Organization
Managed Care	Non-profit Organization consisting of 23 Hospitals
Management and Consultant Company	Non-profit Organization for Women's Breast Health
Management Service Organisation	Organisation that represents 43,000 doctors, medical students, and residents
Non-profit Institute	
Non-profit Children's Hospital	Senior Level Communities in Memory Care
Non-profit Hospital	
Outpatient Clinic Centre	
Radiation Oncologist	
Senior Living	
Transitional Care Program	

Table 4: Position Title

Alumni	Preceptors
Assistant Director of Development and Outreach	Administrative Director of Performance Improvement
Clinic Manager	
Clinic Supervisor	Chief Compliance Officer
Clinical Quality Associate	Director of Emergency Medical Services
Contract Specialist	Director of Human Resources
Contract Specialist and Provider Services	Director of Information Systems
Director of Advanced Clinical Applications	Director of Strategy and Performance Excellence
Financial Counsellor	
Home Healthcare Administrator	Director of the Institute Diabetes Program Cancer Registry and Women's Centre
Human Resource Coordinator	
Lead Patient Coordinator	Director of Volunteer Services
No Response	Leader of Service and Performance Management Group
Partial Project Manager to the Chief Medical Officer	
Patient Care Advocate	Manager of Missions Programs
Patient Care Coordinator	President and CEO
Practice Manager	Program Manager
Program Director, soon to be Regional Director of Operations	Retirement Counsellor
	Senior Analyst
Program Specialist	Support Services Administrator
Project Coordinator	Surgical Services Director
Project Manager	Vice President
Referral Specialist	
Regional Sales and Marketing Director	

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Regarding the results of the thematic coding, there was a total of 135 coded items from each participant group regarding workplace strengths for Millennial college graduates. The next section reviews each theme.

Discussion

There were six themes for workplace strengths: (a) new knowledge, (b) tech savvy, (c) transferable work skills, (d) positive attitude, (e) willing to learn, and (f) Microsoft knowledge Table 5 provides examples of the types of inclusions for each theme.

Table 5: Master Code List: Themes for Workplace Strengths

Theme	Example
New knowledge	'fresh ideas'; 'innovative thought'; 'fresh eyes'
Tech savvy	'embrace technology'; 'raised on the internet'; 'technical ability'
Transferable work skills	'adaptable'; 'go-getters'; 'flexible'
Positive attitude	'enthusiastic'; 'no problem saying 'yes''; 'positive energy'
Willing to learn	'want to learn'; 'having an open mind'; 'interested'
Microsoft knowledge	'PowerPoint'; 'Word'; 'MS Office'

Theme 1: New knowledge

The total frequency count for the theme 'new knowledge' was 34, making it the primary workplace strength cited for all groups across themes (25%). Of each group, the alumni participants were the largest group (at 35%) to comment on this as a strength that Millennials bring into the workplace. As one alum put it, 'They're right fresh out of school in terms of theory…they bring those fresh ideas to the baby boomer world' (Participant A10). Another alum said:

> If they're new to a field they often, um, [you know?] just fresh eyes on, on problems, they come up with some innovative solutions that maybe wouldn't be considered by someone who's, you know, been at it for some time. (Participant A4)

Participants see the value in the potential new knowledge that Millennials graduates bring to the workplace and how that new knowledge can be leveraged to positively influence an organization (Ngotngamwong, 2019).

Theme 2: Tech savvy

Remarks about being 'tech savvy' accounted for the second highest number (25) of coded comments (18.5%). Alumni and preceptors made the most comments around this theme, some of them using this exact phrasing to describe this Millennial workplace strength. One preceptor commented, 'a lot of them are also tech savvy … Many of them actually picks thing [sic]up pretty quickly, especially with technology.' (Participant P2). Another preceptor said:

> A lot of [Millennial] college graduates that I've had as interns are very tech savvy, which I love because we do a lot of social media activation marketing, outreach, um, and so that's one of the things I really have seen um expanding when it comes to um, uh, the talents that my interns are bringing in. (Participant P8)

These comments reflect the digital skills employers are avidly seeking from prospective employees to advance their businesses (McKendrick, 2018; Ngotngamwong, 2019).

Theme 3: Transferable work skills

A total of 23 (17%) coded comments emphasized that Millennial college graduates bring with them transferable work skills. Several interns cited the work they were doing in their internship as well as their classroom knowledge as workplace strengths. One intern stated that he did not have a job but that he was a 'workaholic.' He compared himself with his older college attending brother:

> *Even in my family I am considered the most hardworking one...[my brother] has been in college for like 7 years and still has not graduated…I am [graduating] in four years…I have been doing all summer [classes and I have] been taking all winter classes. Even in my first freshman of college I did not take any breaks during the summer semester. That is just who I am.* (Participant I2)

The intern went onto say that his ability to stay on task is a talent that will serve as a strength in the workplace and make him more employable. To this intern's point, there is literature stating that Millennials tend to work too much (Carmichael, 2016; Jayadeva, 2018).

Theme 4: Positive attitude

Twenty-three (17%) indications were made about positive attitude being a workplace strength for Millennials. A part-time faculty member said that Millennials bring into the workplace a 'motivation and a desire to want to be out in the workforce.' (Participant F4) One preceptor said that workplace strengths for recent college graduates included an 'excitement and enthusiasm to be involved in the workforce and … [a] fire in the belly' (Participant P10). These comments illuminate the positive attitude characterized as a workplace strength. Post (2021) noted that a positive attitude in the workplace matters because it breeds innovation and keeps workplace morale high.

Theme 5: Willing to learn

Of the coded comments, 16.3% (22) described Millennials being willing to learn. One alumnus said that recent college graduates are 'willing and ready to learn,' (Participant A3) and a preceptor said that recent college graduates are 'open and wanting to learn' (Participant P2). A few interns commented that their capacity to ask questions and desire to learn comes from having been in the college classroom where being open to learn is typical learned behaviour.

Theme 6: Microsoft Knowledge

Microsoft knowledge gleaned almost 6% of the coded comments. Alumni, preceptors, and interns made comments about facility with 'Word,' 'PowerPoint,' and 'MS Office' as a Millennial workplace strength. Given that Millennial college graduates were frequently using Microsoft Word and PowerPoint to write their college papers and prepare classroom presentations, it is logical that Microsoft knowledge would be cited as a strength. Simultaneously, it is notable that so few respondents referenced Microsoft knowledge as a strength.

Table 6: Frequencies of Coded Themes by Group – Workplace Strengths

Theme	Interns	Alumni	Faculty	Preceptors	Total Count	%
New Knowledge	9	12	5	8	34	25.19
Tech savvy	2	8	5	10	25	18.52
Transferable work skills	6	9	5	3	23	17.04
Positive attitude	2	8	2	11	23	17.04
Willing to learn	4	7	0	11	22	16.3
Microsoft Knowledge	4	2	0	2	8	5.93
Total					**135**	

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Table 7: Proportion of Coded Themes by Group – Workplace Strengths

Themes	Interns %	Alumni %	Faculty %	Preceptors %
New knowledge	26	35	15	24
Tech savvy	8	32	20	40
Transferable work skills	26	39	22	13
Positive attitude	9	35	9	48
Willing to learn	18	32	0	50
Microsoft knowledge	50	25	0	25

Figure 2 provides a bar chart of each theme disaggregated by respondent group
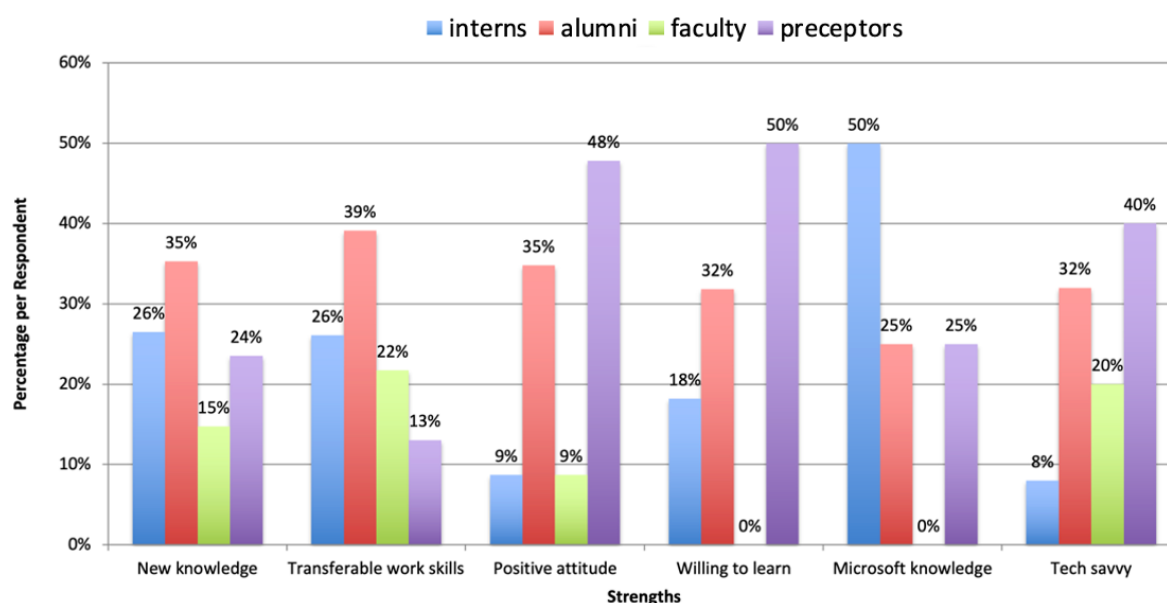
Figure 2: Workplace strengths responses by group

## Comparing similarities between NACE competencies and emergent themes

We examined for similarities and differences between the definitions of the NACE competencies and our thematic results. We also queried for language and meaning comparing the competencies and themes, always keeping within the context of workplace readiness. We determined there were two themes that were comparatively most like two of the NACE competencies: (a) the theme 'tech savvy' and competency 'technology' and (b) the theme 'willing to learn' and competency 'career & self-development.' The description for the two themes and matched competencies is shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Similarities between NACE competencies and emergent themes

NACE Competency	NACE Competency Description	Emergent Theme
Technology	Understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.	Tech Savvy
Career & Self-Development	Proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and without one's organization.	Willingness to Learn

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The technology competency and the tech savvy theme made for a sensible match, given that being tech savvy implies that Millennials have the ability to comprehend and utilize technology to improve efficiencies, thereby completing tasks and accomplishing goals efficiently and successfully. For the career & self-development competency and the willingness to learn theme, being willing to learn in the workplace is a sound socio-emotional position for learning hard skills and intrinsic soft skills through guided professional and personal development.

As for the five other NACE competencies, respondents from each group indicated that Millennials needed to strengthen their critical thinking, communication, teamwork, leadership, and professionalism in the workplace. To visualize this, the primary researcher took the 129 verbatim responses for each group for the question 'What [training] would you suggest to improve the [health administration undergraduate] curriculum?' and entered these into a word cloud generator (WordClouds.com, 2023). Figure 3 provides the visual result of this word cloud.
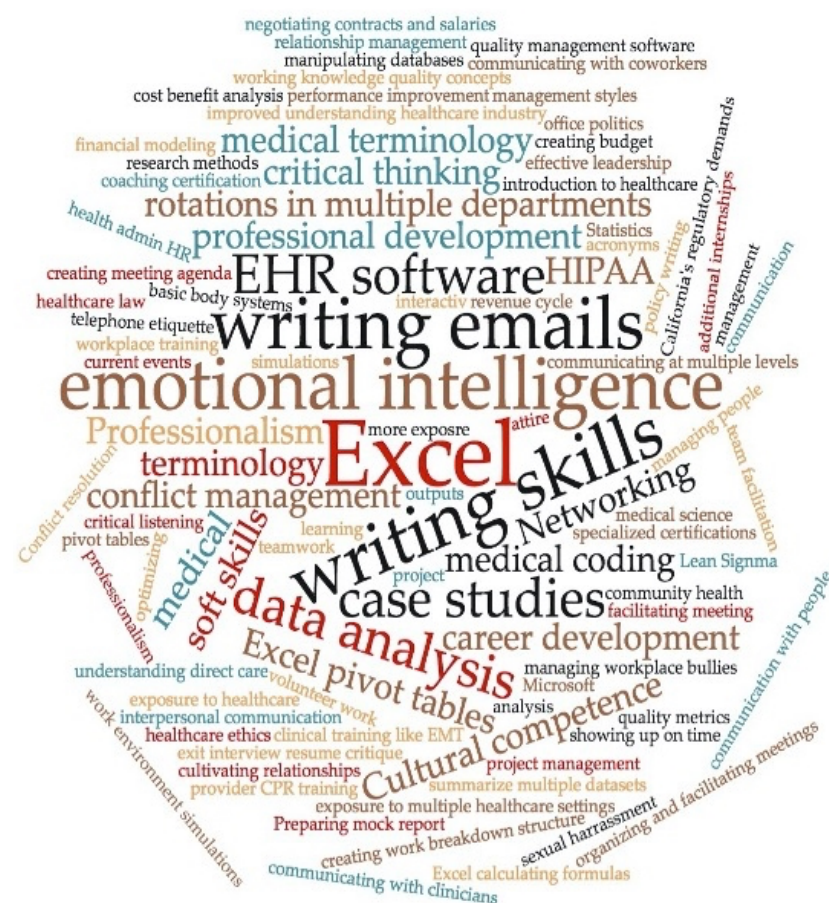
Figure 3: Training Word Cloud

Word clouds are increasingly being used in qualitative research to present data (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014; Mathews et al., 2015; Ramlo, 2011; Sellars et al., 2018; Vrain & Lovett, 2020). Word clouds emphasize word frequency in qualitative data. In other words, the bigger the word is visually presented in the word cloud, the more it was stated by individual respondents. In this case, Figure 3 shows that Excel and writing are much-needed curricular competencies, signalling that Millennials from these two college programs may be demonstrating less strength with Excel knowledge and their writing skills. Interestingly, the five NACE competencies—e.g., critical thinking, communication, teamwork, leadership, and professionalism—show up in the word cloud as suggestions to include in the curriculum.

Conclusion

In this study, we have chosen to empirically review the workplace strengths from Millennials who graduated from two Californian AUPHA certified health administration baccalaureate programs. We surveyed interns, alumni, faculty, and preceptors using focus groups and interviews to glean from their perspectives the workplace strengths they say Millennials bring into the healthcare workplace. Thematic findings of this research indicate that Millennials do offer workplace strengths that enhance the healthcare workforce. When comparing the six emergent themes with seven of NACE competencies for career readiness, it was revealed that only two of the six themes comparably aligned with two of the seven NACE competencies – that of Technology and Career & Self-Development. The data also indicated that the other five NACE competencies (Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, Leadership & Professionalism) used in the comparative review reflected workforce skills gaps amongst Millennials. Representatives from all groups interviewed recommended that the gaps be filled in by the health administration curriculum, indicating that it is the universities' responsibility to indoctrinate these skills as part of attaining the health administration bachelor's degree.

These findings suggest that colleges and universities should evaluate their AUPHA certified health administration programs to identify workplace strengths and resolve workforce skills gaps. Health administration faculty can practically address the gaps by weaving into their academic instruction problem-based learning assignments and case studies. These methods will teach students in the classroom to cooperatively problem solve complex, open-ended, real-world issues in health administration. Experiential learning, also known as service-learning, community-based learning, and internships, is a high impact practice giving students the chance to apply their classroom knowledge in the unscripted real-world setting (The American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2023). They then reflect on their experiences when they return to the classroom (Kolb, 2015).

The internship, a required course in the AUPHA health administration curriculum, can be used to bring together prospective employers, alumni, and preceptors. They can join forces with Internship faculty to offer weekend 'career readiness boot camps' to interns as a means of bridging skills gaps. Alumni can also function as student mentors to help reduce competency issues.

As noted in the literature, colleges and employers must do a better job of working closely together so that colleges teach students the most current business practices thereby increasing their employability index scores (Carlson, 2022; Hansen, 2021). We recommend that AUPHA and NACE establish a strategic alliance to take on this issue so that academic instruction aligns with workplace expectations held by leaders in the healthcare industry.

Savvy businesses recognise that capitalising on their employees' workplace strengths boosts profit, improves performance, and makes their companies stronger (Rigoni & Asplund, 2016; Sorenson, 2014). When employers prioritize understanding their employees' strengths and invest in their professional growth, they create an engaged workforce that is equipped to meet the competitive and demanding challenges of today's healthcare labour market.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions for Alumni, Preceptors, and Faculty

Demographic Questions for Alumni and Preceptors

For Alumni: What year did you graduate from University?

For Alumni/Preceptor: Are you currently working in the healthcare industry?

For Alumni/Preceptor: What type of organization do you work for (industry sector)?

For Alumni/Preceptor: Overall, how long have you been working in the healthcare industry?

For Alumni/Preceptor: What is your position title?

Workplace Strengths & Weaknesses of College Graduates

1. What strengths do recent college graduates bring into the workplace?

2. What weaknesses do recent college graduates bring into the workplace?

3. What do you (administrators/faculty/students/alumni) see are issues/barriers for new college graduates in health administration?

Workplace Training, Skills, & Behaviors/Attitudes of College Graduates

4. What kind of training do you (administrators/faculty/students/alumni) think college students should have as part of their educational curriculum?

5. Is there anything that you (administrators/faculty/alumni) see lacking in skills from the recent college graduate?

6. What skills and qualities make a successful and marketable recent graduate in health administration?

7. What behaviors and attitudes you believe administrators would like to see in the new college graduate in health administration?

8. When administrators are evaluating/interviewing a recent graduate what would you say the administrator is looking for?

Personal dimensions of educational curriculum

9. If you feel that the health administration program at this University needs to be modified to better prepare our college graduates for the workplace, what would you suggest to improve the curriculum?

Closing Questions

We'd like to offer you a final opportunity to add any final thoughts. Is there anything that we missed? Have you said everything that you anticipated wanting to say but didn't get a chance to say?

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions for Interns

Workplace Strengths & Weaknesses of College Graduates

1. As an intern what strengths do you bring to the workplace?

2. As an intern what weaknesses do you bring to the workplace?

3. Imagine I am your boss and I asked you to do (insert workplace skill weakness mentioned in question #2). What would you do/how would you respond?

Workplace Training, Skills, & Behaviours/Attitudes of College Graduates

4. What kind of training do you (administrators/faculty/students/alumni) think college students should have as part of their educational curriculum?

5. What skills and qualities make a successful and marketable recent graduate in health administration?

6. What behaviours and attitudes you believe administrators would like to see in the new college graduate in health administration?

7. When administrators are evaluating/interviewing a recent graduate what would you say the administrator looking for?

Personal dimensions of educational curriculum

8. If you feel that the health administration program at this University needs to be modified to better prepare our college graduates for the workplace, what would you suggest to improve the curriculum?

Closing Questions

We'd like to offer you a final opportunity to add any final thoughts. Is there anything that we missed? Have you said everything that you anticipated wanting to say but didn't get a chance to say?

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