

Evaluating Persistence Among ASN, TBSN, and ABSN Private University Students



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ABSTRACT

Background: The nursing shortage increases as large populations of working bedside nurses retire. In order to replace those positions, prelicensure nursing programs must continue to graduate prepared nursing students. While prelicensure programs continue to produce future nurses, the graduation numbers are not high enough to combat the future shortage due to high attrition rates from prelicensure nursing programs.

Method: Senior associate degree nursing students, traditional bachelor's degree nursing students, and accelerated bachelor degree nursing students participated in the study. A modified version of the College Persistence Questionnaire was used.

Results: Findings indicated no significance difference among prelicensure student perceptions of persistence in the six areas on the College Persistence Questionnaire. Prelicensure nursing students' ranked degree commitment, institutional commitment, scholastic conscientiousness, and support services above the mean BISR question rank.

Conclusion: To increase graduates, prelicensure nursing programs need to evaluate students who have been successful throughout the program.

KEYWORDS: nursing students, nursing programs, higher education, persistence, student success

EVALUATING PERSISTENCE AMONG ASN, TBSN, AND ABSN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Due to the growing need for bedside nurses, ensuring prelicensure nursing students complete the program of study is paramount to the healthcare facilities. American Association of Colleges of Nursing ([AACN], 2017) stresses the importance of improving retention efforts both in education and in the nursing workforce to counter the worsening of these vacancies. One way to improve retention rates for prelicensure nursing students is to determine students' perceptions of persistence. Retention in a prelicensure nursing program is important to increasing the number of graduates and decreasing the nursing shortage.

To close the continuous gap in nursing programs, and fill the shortage of bedside nurses, a closer evaluation of successful prelicensure nursing student perceptions of persistence factors needs to occur. Davidson et al. (2009) determined students could be identified early in the program for risk of attrition by evaluating the following areas: academic integration, degree commitment, institutional commitment, scholastic conscientiousness, support services, and social integration. Evaluation should be completed in all prelicensure nursing programs to determine all student perceptions of persistence among prelicensure nursing programs. The College Persistence Questionnaire created by Davidson et al. (2009) was used to determine perceptions of prelicensure nursing student persistence in those high-risk areas. This information provides nursing programs insight into prelicensure nursing student perceptions of success.

This study utilized a modified version of the Davidson et al. (2009) College Persistence Questionnaire for senior level nursing students in the ASN, TBSN, and ABSN nursing programs. Students from a private university setting who are currently in their senior year of prelicensure nursing courses were asked to participate in the study in order to gain insight into their perceptions of persistence. The findings from this study assist in determining student perceptions in the areas of persistence at a private institution and supports nursing faculty understanding on how to intervene for students in nursing programs at private institutions.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Attrition

Student attrition from a prelicensure nursing program remains a critical issue. Nursing curricula can be difficult and result in failure from a program. Prelicensure nursing students who leave a program of study typically do so in the first or second year (Lott et al., 2018). According to Masango (2014), attrition rates have been higher in the ASN degree programs than in the TBSN programs. Literature findings suggest prelicensure nursing students' history of academic performance, health, support systems, finances, English as a second language, employment during the program, academic commitment, incorrect career choice, and lower scores in prerequisite courses determine factors leading to student attrition (Harrell & Reglin, 2018; Kubec, 2017; Masango, 2014; Merkely, 2016). Prelicensure nursing programs can be overwhelming to those ill-prepared for college courses or lack understanding of the nursing profession. Regardless of the program, nursing faculty must adequately prepare nursing students to learn, but also teach them how to be successful on NCLEX-RN (Kaddoura et al., 2017).

A student's financial situation or academic failure can lead to stress and a lack of coping (Jinks et al., 2014). A deficit in coping skills can become overwhelming without support from nursing faculty. Strong support systems in both faculty and personnel have been determined to encourage student success within a prelicensure nursing program (Kubec, 2017). Harrell and Reglin (2018) discovered students felt an advisor's communication skills, and caring personality was of the most important aspects of a close relationship.

A variety of retention strategies focus on preparing the nursing students for the first semester of nursing classes (Fontaine, 2014; Kinney et al., 2017; Merkley, 2016). Though, prelicensure nursing students should be prepared for the first semester of class, the focus should also remain on those individuals enduring throughout the program. A poor grade in a class or exam can be an early indicator of a future problem, and an immediate need for remediation to be successful (Kaddoura et al., 2017; Ott et al., 2018). Those students who are falling below the passing average should be identified early, and interventions for success should be performed. An academic advisor should be knowledgeable, prepared, encourage the student to make positive choices, and contact students early to establish trust (Abshire et al., 2018; DeYoung, 2015; Schmidt & MacWilliams, 2015) and track and intervene early if needed.

Persistence

Several studies have reviewed general factors of persistence concerning at-risk factors for attrition, though factors for persistence vary, a few concepts are noticed. A student's internal commitment to an institution or program of study can directly impact the decision to persist or to abandon the degree (Davidson et al., 2015; Schunk et al., 2014). An internal tie to the institution promotes pride and involvement on campus. The comradery of peers on campus can create a support group for the student.

Motivation can influence one's decision to continue in a program of study or to quit. Motivation is a student's push to set goals, and then find ways to meet those goals (Rose, 2011; Schunk et al., 2014). Not all students have the motivation to complete prelicensure education. Identifying those students, would assist faculty in determining ways to increase motivation or intervene early to prevent academic failure and suggest student withdrawal.

Success in a prelicensure nursing program is determined by a student's ability to retain and apply information to examinations. Students in a nursing program all experience the same exposure to stress in the classroom and during clinical (Jones et al., 2016). Students who know others are experiencing the same difficulties or who have been through those difficulties can offer support and reassurance to new students (Abshire et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016). Forming a relationship with peers can assist a student in becoming successful. A disability, diagnosis, history or event, lack of required academic skills, or perhaps even failure of a concept can increase student stress and cause the student to decide to leave the program. Appropriate interventions can result in success if identified early on in the students' academic career.

Institutions often survey students to determine their satisfaction with supplies, learning, cost, and preparation for a career (Chen & Lo, 2015). A student is the consumer of both knowledge and program resources, therefore they are the ones directly impacted by decisions within the program. Concerns or stress can stem from the type of prelicensure nursing program a student is enrolled in.

Prelicensure nursing programs have struggled in creating programs or requirements to assist faculty in retaining nursing students. The retention of prelicensure nursing students is important to increasing the number of educationally prepared registered nurses entering the nursing workforce. Faculty focus on student academic skills, mentoring relationships, and supportive services to keep students invested in the program.

One factor noted during the literature review is the lack of studies considering the ABSN programs for student persistence. These programs are slightly more intensive than those of the ASN, and TBSN programs. The college persistence survey reviews several areas of concern for at-risk student attrition. A few areas have been evaluated in previous ASN and TBSN student persistence studies. To create a well-rounded guide to prelicensure nursing student persistence all prelicensure nursing programs should be reviewed using the college persistence survey. One area assessed in the survey is financial impact on students. Impacts of the cost of a private institution could alter persistence in a prelicensure nursing program and should be reviewed. Students have not been evaluated at a private institution in any prelicensure nursing program.

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METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a survey method for prelicensure nursing students in ASN, TBSN, and ABSN programs at a private institution. Components of the College Persistence Questionnaire, adopted with permission of the developer, Dr. William Davidson, were used in the survey. A quasi-experimental ex post facto research design was used by the researcher to obtain information from the participants. An online questionnaire was created and distributed to senior prelicensure nursing students using Qualtrics at the end of their didactic course. The students were asked to participate as a cohort at the end of a virtual senior level nursing course. IRB approval was obtained prior to collection of data.

At the time of the survey, students were more than halfway through their nursing program. Senior students from each nursing program: ASN, TBSN, and ABSN were asked to participate in the study during a virtual meeting in the online course setting. Students were asked to reflect on their previous experiences during the program, financial costs during the program and each semester, support from family and the institution, along with past advising sessions. In reviewing students who have successfully matriculated into the last year of their nursing program, the study identified factors that contributed in persistence to the senior semester.

Kruskal-Wallis H test was utilized for the study. Survey results were measured on a 5-point Likert scale and the number of participants were limited for each program. Three different groups were reviewed during this study: ASN, TBSN, and ABSN across six sections of the College Persistence Questionnaire. Each category was examined between each program group.

Additionally, a BISR score was calculated to determine mean value or average score possible for each question set. To perform BISR score calculation, the Likert score of the answered questions in each area was totaled and as well as the number for a minimum score and a possible highest score of questions from the area. A minimum score is counted as one and therefore would result in the total number of questions for the section. The highest possible score is calculated using the highest Likert score possible of five multiplied by the number of questions. This was calculated for each area on the College Persistence Questionnaire. The mean value of the answered questions is the resulting BISR score. Using the Likert score the mean score is 3. Therefore, for each question set the total number of questions is multiplied by 3. The range of the mean for the areas of academic integration, degree commitment, institutional commitment, support services, and social integration is between 1 and 5.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Senior prelicensure nursing students in the last year of nursing courses from a private University in North Carolina were surveyed. A sample size of 21 ABSN students, 16 TBSN students, and 34 ASN students were asked to participate in the study. Students consisted of both traditional and nontraditional students. The prelicensure programs consist of seven males and 64 females. Demographics consist of 56 Caucasian students, seven African American students, two Asian American students, four Hispanic American students, and two who identify as other. Several of the students consider English as a second language and were born outside of the US. Several students were considered working students, and some were student athletes. Students have had an assigned academic advisor during their time in the program. Nursing academic advisors are currently instructors who teach in the prelicensure nursing program.

INSTRUMENTATION

The College Persistence Questionnaire is a 53-question survey to address the areas of institutional commitment, degree commitment, scholastic conscientiousness, academic integration, support services satisfaction, and social integration. The survey utilizes a five-point Likert scale: 1 (Very dissatisfied); 2 (Dissatisfied); 3 (Neutral/No Opinion); 4 (Satisfied); and 5 (Very Dissatisfied). The instrument has been evaluated and tested to ensure reliability and validity (Davidson et al., 2009).

RESULTS

A Kruskal-Wallis H test indicated no significant difference among ASN, TBSN, and ABSN prelicensure student perception for the areas of academic integration, degree commitment, institutional commitment, support services, and social integration.

The BISR score for the question of academic integration was 27. In the area of academic integration, ASN students rated academic success higher as a factor for persistence whereas ABSN and TBSN students rated academic integration slightly lower than the BISR mean score for this question. Student perceptions of persistence in the area of degree commitment did show a difference when comparing the mean ranks and the BISR score among the ASN, TBSN, and ABSN prelicensure programs. The BISR mean score for degree commitment was 18. Students in all prelicensure nursing programs have higher than average degree commitment perceptions, yet TBSN student perceptions are slightly higher than those of the ABSN or ASN students. The BISR mean score for institutional commitment was 21. While there was not a significant difference in prelicensure student perceptions on institutional commitment, students in all programs scored higher than the mean BISR score. This indicates prelicensure nursing students do commit to the program when enrolled.

The descriptive statistics of each prelicensure program for scholastic conscientiousness indicate the majority of the prelicensure nursing students reported never missing class, submitting assignments late, being tardy for class, or forgetting important

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assignments there is not a difference in student perceptions. Students in these programs ANS, TBSN, and ABSN are conscientious of their grades and class requirements for success. Prelicensure nursing students perceive scholastic conscientiousness as a factor of persistence for success.

The BISR score for support services was 24. This indicates prelicensure nursing students rate support services available as a factor in persistence within the nursing program. The BISR mean score for the question of social integration was 27. These results indicate students do perceive social integration as a factor for persistence in a prelicensure nursing program.

CONCLUSIONS

The predicted nursing shortage will impact not only the medical field professionals but also patients, families, and healthcare facilities. A third of the 2.7 million current working bedside nurses will retire leaving a gap in the nursing profession (Buerhaus et al., 2017; Marc et al., 2018). While determining those who are at-risk of leaving the program can be helpful, institutions need insight into the reasons for student success (Lott et al., 2018; Schwegler, 2019). Student perceptions on why they were able to persist in a prelicensure nursing program would help institutions identify success factors and create interventions for future students. The findings did not indicate significant differences between the student cohorts of ASN, TBSN, or ABSN students in the areas of academic integration, degree commitment, institutional commitment, support services, or social integration.

Previous studies indicate the importance of faculty engagement, feedback, and quality of instruction for to students to have an impact on the student's success throughout the prelicensure program (Abshire et al., 2018; Betts et al., 2017; DeYoung, 2015; Kubec, 2017; Schmidt & MacWilliams, 2015). With life and work experiences and additional responsibilities, ASN students may consider academic integration as important to their persistence in a program (Bowie & Carr, 2013; Doggrell & Schaffer, 2016; Shellenbarger & Hoffman, 2016).

Prior research studies determine a student's motivation and plans attribute to their desire to obtain a degree (Pence, 2011). While all students perceived the level of degree commitment as an impact on their persistence, it could be attributed to that students were a few weeks away from graduation. Results determined no significant difference in the perceptions for institutional commitment. Student perception of institutional commitment could stem from the fact they have already experienced higher education and are now seeking a professional degree from the institution (Schrum, 2015).

Descriptive statistics revealed a majority of students in ASN, TBSN, and ABSN programs reported not being tardy, submitting late or forgetting assignments. There was a slight difference in number of times a class was missed due to illness. Pace of the prelicensure program for ABSN students could be the reason students reported not missing class (Schrum, 2015).

Students' do perceive supportive services as a factor for their continued persistence in a prelicensure nursing program. Communication while a student is enrolled in a prelicensure program is key to the student's success and preparation for the next semester (Harrell & Reglin, 2018; Merkely, 2016; Schmidt & MacWilliams, 2015; Shellenbarger & Hoffman, 2016). While there was not a significant difference among the ASN, TBSN, and ABSN student perceptions of social integration, there was a surprising finding that ABSN prelicensure students scored only slightly above the BISR mean. This indicates that while all prelicensure nursing students perceive social integration as a reason for their persistence in the program, ABSN students do not find this to be as important for persistence. This finding is different than what the research supports for peer relationships. Findings on relationships indicate this should be one of the most important aspects to students persistence (Jones et al., 2016). The reason for the slight difference in what the previous research determined and the findings in this study could be related to the students being close to graduation. The prelicensure nursing students might not recall the past use of supportive services or perhaps forgotten. Another factor to consider is student interpretation of relationships with others on campus.

SUMMARY

The success of prelicensure nursing students throughout a program is imperative to address the future bedside nursing shortage. By understanding the areas prelicensure nursing students perceived to contribute to their persistence in a program higher education institutions can focus on those areas. While other research studies indicate relationships among students and faculty are imperative to success, particularly within an ABSN nursing program, the prelicensure nursing student perceptions prove otherwise.

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