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Nurse Perceptions of Nonacademic Factors That Influence Undergraduate Nursing Student Retention and Persistence to Graduation

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Walden University

College of Education

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Marianne Gray

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Nurse Perceptions of Nonacademic Factors That Influence Undergraduate Nursing
Student Retention and Persistence to Graduation

by

Marianne Gray

MSN, Governor's State University, 1999

BSN, Governor's State University, 1997

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2023

Abstract

Having an adequate supply of nurses is critical to maintaining the health care system. The problem for this study was that undergraduate nursing students were leaving a local Midwest community college's nursing program before obtaining a degree. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of the program's recent graduates, regarding nonacademic factors that they believe helped to facilitate their success. Jeffreys's nursing universal retention and success model served as the conceptual framework. The research question was focused on identifying nurse graduate perceptions of nonacademic factors that contributed to their success. A basic qualitative research design was used to capture the insights of 12 nurse graduates who graduated between January 2019 and December 2020 through semi structured interviews. A purposeful sampling approach was used to select the participants. Emergent themes were identified through open coding, and the findings were developed and checked for trustworthiness through member checking, rich participant descriptions, and researcher reflexivity. The findings revealed that nursing students faced familial, financial, and work-related challenges that often caused them to leave the program without completing or obtaining their degree. Family, peer, financial and faculty support were shown to facilitate student retention and lead to successful student outcomes. A professional development project was created to provide the nursing school's faculty and administrators with effective strategies to improve student retention and completion rates. This study has implications for positive social change by creating a structure to provide nurse instructors with strategies and approaches for improving student retention and persistence to graduation.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my awesome family, my sons, my daughters, my grandchildren and a host of relatives, friends, colleagues, and students who have lovingly and patiently supported and encouraged me throughout my academic journey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank my doctoral committee chair, Dr. Timothy Lafferty, and committee members, Dr. Jean Sorrell, and Dr. Laura Siaya for their support and guidance as they helped me navigate through the doctoral process and reach my goal.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

The problem under study was that undergraduate nursing students leave a local Midwest community college's nursing program without completing the program or obtaining a degree. The community college, located in the Illinois area, has a diverse student population of approximately 12,000 students. The college provides adult and continuing education and offers undergraduate degree programs in 28 fields of study (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS; 2020) reported that the college has a 60% graduation rate and a 20% retention rate for all first-time/full-time students. The report noted that 84.5% of the school's 2015 fall cohort had not graduated within 3 years and only 60% of the cohort remained in school in the fall 2017. In addition, the report showed that only 15% of the college's 2014 fall cohort had graduated within 3 years.

The college's health and science department housed the school of nursing, which offers a prelicensure nursing program. According to data from IPEDS (2020), the nursing program struggled with student retention and completion rates. The report showed that in 2015 the nursing program had an enrollment of 186 students with a retention rate of 83.33% and a completion rate of 75.34%. In 2016, enrollment was 185, with a retention rate of 85.41% and a completion rate of 78.61% while in 2017, the program's enrollment dropped to 129, with an 82.95% retention rate and a completion rate of 74.19%. Published reports from the U.S Department of Education 2020 College Scorecard showed that nursing enrollment at the school dropped 70% between 2010 and 2018, with a

decrease in the nursing student population from 1,218 to 376. According to data from the Illinois Center for Nursing (2020), student completion rates in the nursing program decreased from 169 students in 2017 to 133 students in 2018 to 102 students in 2019. The Illinois Center for Nursing; also reported a 6% drop in enrollment in nursing students between 2011 and 2014. This drop was substantial because the majority of the state's nursing workforce are graduates of local colleges. Increasing the number of nursing students who successfully completed their programs of study and graduated s significant to meeting the nation's health care needs, (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

The local Midwest college nursing school's faculty and dean discussed reasons as to why students did not obtain their degrees. One faculty member cited nonacademic issues as the reason for students not obtaining their degree. The associate dean agreed that some students could not handle the rigors of school and all the other issues in their personal life and, as a result, drop out of the program. There appears to be a lack of support and resources for students who dropout prior to program completion and degree obtainment. Therefore, in, his study I focused on the perceptions of recent graduates from the program as to what factors helped facilitate their program completion and what kinds of nonacademic support and resources may be needed to facilitate student success.

Rationale

By the end of June 2020, more than 10 million people had tested positive globally for the COVID-19 coronavirus and more than 500,000 deaths had been reported (Adalja,

2020). The COVID-19 pandemic had stressed the health care system and shed additional light on the global nursing shortage as the demand for more nurses continued to grow (Spurlock, 2020). Nurses are 60% of the global health force, so retaining and graduating nursing students is critical to supplying the nursing workforce and maintaining the future of the health care system (Rosa et al., 2020).

I chose to focus on this problem because as a current nurse manager in a health care setting and a former director of a nursing education program, I have firsthand knowledge and experience with nurse staffing shortages and poor nursing program retention rates, which are inextricably tied together. It is my hope that through my project study I will be able to contribute to a body of knowledge that can bridge this gap in practice.

Retaining and graduating student nurses is a problem within nursing education programs across the country. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN; 2019) reported that the national nursing school dropout rate was 20%, with some undergraduate nursing programs reporting dropout rates as high as 50% with students leaving their programs of study during their first semester. According to predictions from the (AACN, 2019), there will be a national nursing shortage in the United States by the year 2022 due to the need for 1 million additional nurses because of the aging nursing workforce and the needs of the growing baby boomer population. The American Nurses Association (2019) reported high nursing student attrition rates was problematic for students, colleges, and society because nursing graduates are the pipeline to the nursing workforce. This study aimed to gain a better understanding of the nonacademic factors

that may help facilitate student success at the local Midwest college's nursing program. A better understanding of the factors that facilitate student success may be incorporated or implemented into the program to mitigate students at risk and improve student outcomes.

There are many factors affecting a student's decision to remain in or drop out of nursing school. Spight (2020) noted that student retention in postsecondary education is an important issue for students, families, college administrators, and other stakeholders. Fagan and Coffey (2019) argued that poor student completion and graduation rates negatively affect the student and the college's reputation, income sources, and federal funding. They found that many students underestimate the rigors of nursing school and often drop out if it becomes overwhelming.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of the program's recent graduates regarding nonacademic factors that they believe helped to facilitate their success. Identification of such factors may be helpful to other students. I used the findings from this study to develop a professional development project that can be implemented for at-risk nursing students, thereby increasing their chances for successful outcomes.

Definition of Terms

Academically vulnerable students: who are academically unprepared for college due to socioeconomic status, belonging to an underrepresented group, or having poor postsecondary education success (Karp, 2016).

Attrition: The exit from a program of study before successful completion (Tinto, 2012). *Persistence*: The ability to stay enrolled and graduate from an institution of higher learning (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020).

Program completion rate: The percentage of students who graduate within a specified time frame (Blaggs & Rainer, 2020).

Retention: The number of students in and graduating from a program of study (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020).

Significance of the Study

Prior studies have examined nonacademic factors and student retention. Priode et al. (2020) examined nonacademic factors that influence retention among nontraditional nursing students and found that gender, ethnicity, family and work responsibilities, socioeconomic status, lack of supportive resources, psychosocial factors, and financial obligations as factors contributing to poor retention within this student population. In a similar study, Bowman, Miller, et al. (2019) explored the link between noncognitive attributes and second year college student retention. This study examined the interrelationship among the noncognitive variables, academic self-efficacy, time management, self-efficacy, and academic grit to determine retention. They found that noncognitive variables are more malleable in young adulthood and attempts to improve these attributes may be more successful in improving retention in younger traditional college students.

Although similar studies may exist, their current study is significant because more needs to be known about the perceptions and experiences of nurses who have graduated

from this local community college. The identification of nonacademic factors that may have affected their success can be used to develop resources and strategies to help future students persist to graduation. With this study, I hope to contribute to the local college's existing body of knowledge by offering faculty and administration a professional development project and set of best practices that will lead to successful outcomes for its nursing students.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study as:

RQ: What are recent nurse graduate perceptions of nonacademic factors that facilitated their retention and persistence to program completion and graduation?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study was the Jeffrey's (2015) nursing universal retention and success model. The model can serve as a guide for nurse educators because it offers an A-Z list of actions ideas that can be further developed and implemented for all levels of nursing students to help improve student retention and outcomes. The part of the model that will guided this study was the section that focuses on environmental factors that are external to the academic process that can influence a student's retention and success.

With the model, Jeffrey's 2015 built on prior retention theories and provided a framework that looks at the many challenges that affect the retention and success of nursing students. The model is focused on student retention rather than attrition and it

offers ways to identify students at risk, utilize strategies that promote successful student outcomes, and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used. In the model, personal, academic, and environmental factors affecting student retention are presented. Jeffreys's posited that decisions regarding retention and persistence to graduation are the result of specific student characteristics interacting with the student's profile characteristics, affective factors, academic, environmental, outside surroundings factors, academic and psychological outcomes, and professional integration factors. Jeffreys (2015) described student profile characteristics as those that existed prior to the student starting the nursing program, such as ethnicity, age, gender, primary language, enrollment status, and first-generation college student status. Student affective factors pertain to the student's cultural values, attitudes, self-efficacy, and belief in their ability to succeed. Academic factors include class attendance, study habits, study hours, positive behaviors, and perceptions. Environmental factors are those that exist outside the academic process but may influence a student's retention, such as financial status, childcare, and transportation. Outside surrounding factors are considered those factors beyond the control of the student and the academic institution that can influence the student's retention, such as weather forecasts: political and national events. Academic and psychological outcomes affect student retention and success through cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) student satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and stress levels. Professional integration factors involve socialization into the academic environment and professional role. In the model Jeffreys suggested that student involvement with professional organizations promotes commitment and persistence behaviors. This model was applicable to this study because

it offers a greater understanding of the multidimensional levels related to student retention and a model for analyzing strategies that may be helpful in optimizing student outcomes (Jeffreys, 2015).

Review of the Broader Problem

I obtained the literature reviewed for this study from databases accessed through the Walden University Library including CINAHL PLUS, ProQuest Nursing and Allied Health, and Ovid Nursing Journals, and the Google Scholar search engine. The following keyword terms were used in the search for literature, *nursing students, nursing student retention and persistence, nursing program completion and degree obtainment, nursing student attrition, academic outcomes, academic success, barriers and challenges for nursing students, facilitators of nursing student success, community college retention, and persistence rates.*

In the literature review for this study, I focused on a gap in practice related to the academic and nonacademic factors that influenced nursing students to remain in school to obtain their degrees or to drop out prior to completing their program of study. The academic factors reviewed were grades and study habits. The nonacademic factors reviewed were student employment and family/personal challenges. Identifying barriers to student retention and persistence may help to develop strategies that can be implemented to contribute to successful student outcomes. Successful nursing graduates are the pipeline to the nation's nursing workforce, and having an ample supply of nurses in the workforce is critical to the health, safety, and welfare of the United States. Merkle (2016) noted that persistence to graduation rates of undergraduate nursing students has

been studied and well documented. However, in this study will I focused on those nonacademic factors that may impact community college nursing student success.

Retention and Persistence

A review of the literature revealed numerous studies on college student retention and persistence. Retaining students from enrollment to program completion and degree obtainment is an ongoing challenge in higher education. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020) reported over 31 million students enrolled in institutions of higher learning across the United States. According to a study by the American College Testing Service (2016), the nation's overall college attrition rate is 32%, and the persistence to degree completion rate is 45.3%. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center also noted that the nation's community college persistence rate was 60%, and; almost 20% of schools reported having a comprehensive plan aimed at improving student retention or persistence.

Karp (2016) explained that although researchers sometimes use the terms retention and persistence interchangeably, they are two very distinct variables. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020) defined retention as the percentage of college students who enroll during a fall term of 1 year and remain enrolled at the same institution during the fall term of the following year. Persistence was defined as the percentage of students enrolled in an institution who remain there to degree completion within a specific time frame.

Fagan and Coffey (2019) reported that nearly one third of all nursing students drop out of school or do not complete their programs. The retention of nursing students is

especially significant because persistence to program completion is inextricably tied to having an ample supply of nurses in the workforce and has implications for alleviating the global nursing shortage (Fagan & Coffey, 2019). Stephenson et al. (2020) found nursing student attrition statistics troubling and problematic for nursing students, academic institutions, and the health care industry. Students who drop out of school prior to degree obtainment are often left with feelings of inadequacy or failure and suffered from emotional distress and experienced economic insecurity. Stephenson et al. also noted that academic institutions incur the financial and reputational consequences of student attrition, and the health care industry is affected by attrition through workforce shortages and disproportionate numbers of health disparities.

Hofwegen et al. (2019) conducted a study on the correlation between nursing program admission criteria and program completion rates. Their findings suggested that students with higher GPAs in science courses upon admission were more likely to persist in the program and graduated at a higher percentage rate than those with lower admission GPAs. In a similar study, Ott et al. (2018) explored the demographic variables of coursework, full-time status, and high school GPA as predictors of nursing student retention and persistence. Their findings revealed that the most successful students were full time, older, and had higher high school GPAs.

Harrell and Reglin (2018) studied retention and persistence within second year nursing students and they found that many second-year students fall into what they referred to as the “sophomore slump.” The “sophomore slump” occurred when the student began to drift away from their program of study because of less attention received

from faculty and staff compared to that received during their first year of school. Harrell and Reglin also noted that during the “sophomore slump,” the student often expresses frustration with the program, shows decreased academic commitment, and is at greatest risk for dropping out of the program. Tovar (2015) found higher persistence and completion rates among students who participated in first-term courses that included goal setting and degree planning.

Priode et al. (2020) identified supportive and restrictive factors that contributed to nursing student retention and persistence. They reported that the support and encouragement of family and friends were the most significant factors that contributed to student retention, whereas low exam scores, financial hardships, and job responsibilities were found to be the most restrictive factors and contributed to student attrition. Their findings indicated the need for administrators and faculty to check in regularly with students outside of the classroom environment to increase retention and bolster persistence.

Ma et al. (2020) researched persistence in male nursing students and discovered that academic satisfaction was important for persistence and success in male students. Their results showed that male nursing students often faced gender stereotypes and bias; thus, they needed more emotional support from career advisors and faculty to persist and achieve academic satisfaction and success.

Bowman, Jarratt et al. (2019) studied the relationship between student friendships and retention and found that students who lived and socialized on campus, developed on-campus friendships, consumed meals on campus daily, and utilized social media to

communicate with friends yielded higher retention and graduation rates than students who did not live on campus. Their findings suggest that student retention is linked to students' friendships, social engagement, and various social networks. Bowman, Jarratt et al. concluded that students at risk can be identified early by observing similar behaviors. In a similar study, Karp (2016) looked at the development of social relationships and student retention she found that social relationships promoted student success by helping integrate the student into the college environment and connect with peers. The findings indicated that socially integrated students had lower attrition rates and were more successful in progressing to degree completion. Karp also cautioned that social relationships weaken over time and must be nurtured to continue.

Bowman, Miller et al. (2019) examined noncognitive attributes and student retention from the first to second year of college. The noncognitive attributes studied were academic self-efficacy, time management, self-discipline, and academic grit. Their findings suggested that the noncognitive attributes have a positive effect on students academically and socially and can lead to retention and successful student outcomes.

Stephenson et al. (2020) examined the relationship between college student retention and low self-control. Students with low self-control or low ability for self-regulation were found to have an 8% higher attrition rate than students with high levels of self-control. Stephenson et al. found that students with low self-control often struggle with time management, procrastination, low motivation, anger management, and cheating tendencies. Low self-control often causes the student to focus on short-term gratification instead of long-term goals. Stephenson et al. concluded that students with low self-control

often engage in nonproductive behaviors that lead to poor grades and the eventual withdrawal from school.

Trate-Troester (2020) studied the correlation between qualifying categories of nontraditional community college students and discovered that 40% of community college students were categorized as nontraditional based on age, enrollment status, employment status, or having dependents or family responsibilities. Nontraditional students were considered most at risk due to issues related to income, childcare, and transportation. Trate-Troester reported these findings as major barriers to retention and persistence for nontraditional community college students because they had higher attrition rates than 4-year college students. In a similar study, Ellis (2019) examined the persistence of nontraditional students in course completion versus degree obtainment findings that nontraditional students participated more frequently in course activities and completed their courses more often than traditional students. Ellis also noted that nontraditional students showed greater persistence in the short term and suggested that early intervention from administrators and faculty may help nontraditional students manage challenges and remain in school.

Burke (2019) examined the retention and persistence of college students in the online environment and found that instructor engagement and communication, individual student determination to succeed, and; the flexibility of the school's courses and programs contributed to student persistence and program completion. Burke noted that students cited lack of instructor interaction, poor communication with instructors, and unclear expectations as reasons for withdrawing from a course or dropping out of the

school. Everett (2019) acknowledged that many nursing students leave their program during the first year of study and recommended that college faculty and administration develop a shared approach to improve student retention and persistence.

Heller and Marchant (2015) studied first-year college students enrolled in orientation courses who were taught how to study, how to use support services, and how to navigate college had higher GPAs and higher persistence rates. They suggested that students who demonstrated stronger academic commitments and an understanding of the correlation between their coursework and future career showed greater persistence and remained in the program to completion. Bailey et al. (2015) reported that a more holistic and multifaceted approach was needed to help nursing students with persistence. Their suggested approach included support services for emergency financial assistance, supplemental nutrition assistance programs, and temporary assistance for needy family benefits. Schippers et al. (2015) studied European college students and reported that the students who set clear goals, developed a plan for achieving those goals, and created strategies for handling challenges demonstrated higher persistence to completion rates than those students who did not. Cipher et al. (2017) noted that academic and nonacademic barriers contribute to student retention and persistence.

Academic Barriers

Cipher et al. (2017) found that numerous academic barriers can affect student retention and persistence. Merritt (2021) cited academic failure as the primary cause of attrition among nursing students, noting low GPA, failing grades, poor study habits, poor note-taking skills, poor test-taking skills, poor time management, and poor critical-

thinking skills as other academic factors that lead to attrition or students dropping out of school. Lewis (2019) found that more at-risk students attended community colleges than universities. Horton (2015) noted demographic variables that put students at-risk included being a first-generation college student, a nontraditional or returning student belonging to a minority group, being educationally or economically disadvantaged, or, being identified as needing English as second language services. Merritt advocated for the early identification and intervention of students at-risk to increase retention and persistence. Donnell et al. (2018) noted that mentoring, counseling, having an empathetic touch, and investing time in students proved to be effective interventions for dealing with students at risk.

Mcdermott et al. (2020) studied academic distress as a barrier to student retention and persistence and found that nearly 20% of all nursing students suffered from this. They explained that academic distress is associated with mental health issues and depression and occurs when the student stops believing that they can complete the program, which is oftentimes due to external or internal factors. McIntyre et al. (2018) reported that the desire for academic achievement and success can cause severe psychological stress and can lead to academic distress in students. They also noted that attrition rates were found to be highest among students who did not have emotional support or resources to manage academic distress.

Poorman and Mastorovich (2018) studied grades and GPA as barriers to nursing student retention and persistence. They found that many students were emotionally tied to their grades and expected to receive an A grade in every course. Students became upset

or distressed when the grade they received was different from the grade that they expected. Poorman and Mastorovich reported that many students were more concerned with the grade they received than learning about the subject matter. They concluded that higher grades and higher GPA led to greater student satisfaction and motivated students to persist to program completion.

Lewis (2019) examined the impact of course failure as a barrier to retention and success in nursing students, noting that many students suffered emotional, social, and financial consequences due to failing and repeating a course. Lewis found that students who failed and repeated a course were often consumed with feelings of loss and grief in addition to being charged again to retake the course. These students often needed emotional support from faculty and friends to continue and were at risk for additional course failures or dropping out. Macintosh-Franklin (2021) studied the relationship between formative assessment and retention. Findings from the study showed that students who consistently received feedback from their course instructors had higher final grades than those students who did not. The study concluded that higher final grades led to greater student achievement and satisfaction and greater retention and persistence. Ahmady and Shahbazi (2019) researched critical thinking and decision-making skills in nursing students to determine their impact on persistence. Their study found that students with higher level cognitive abilities were better at problem solving and decision making and consequently developed stronger critical thinking skills. Students who demonstrated stronger critical thinking skills had greater academic achievement and were most likely to persist to degree obtainment.

Ingraham et al. (2019) examined faculty-student nurse relationships as barriers or facilitators to student persistence and academic success. Findings from their study revealed that faculty support in the academic and clinical areas had a positive impact on student outcomes and success. Ingraham et al. noted that nearly 50% of students felt that faculty were inaccessible, unapproachable or did not respond to student's communication in a timely manner. Students who did not feel the social, emotional, or academic support of faculty frequently either voluntarily or involuntarily withdrew from the program.

Quinn and Peters (2017) researched test anxiety as a barrier to nursing student persistence and program completion. Test anxiety was defined as the impact of anxiety that a student experiences before or during an exam that affects their ability to concentrate or perform well on the examination. Duty et al. (2016) noted that over 50% of nursing students studied expressed feelings of test anxiety prior to taking a nursing exam. They reported that test anxiety results in lower student exam scores, lower student GPAs, interferes with student progression in the program and often contributes to poor student retention rates.

Williamson and Muckle (2018) studied technology as a barrier to academic success in nursing students. Technology integrated into the classroom enhances learning and facilitates student achievement. Williamson and Muckle found that millennial students welcome technology, but for older students' technology can be a barrier that creates stress, increases costs, and creates technical problems for them.

Parker et al. (2020) examined the impact of virtual learning and doctoral nursing student retention. They discovered that persistence to program completion was

challenging, as over 70% of online doctoral students do not finish their programs of study. Their study found that many doctoral students were unprepared for the virtual environment, lacked the ability to produce scholarly work and, exhibited high levels of anxiety related to online courses resulting in poor retention and completion rates within this student population.

Pence and Suerth (2020) studied the influence of multidimensional variables such as age, motivation, learning strategies, and cumulative GPA on nursing students. Findings from their study suggested a correlation between age, motivation, and persistence. They found that older students were more extrinsically motivated but had higher dropout rates than younger students.

Ibrahim and Qalawa (2016) studied incivility between nursing faculty and students as a barrier to retention and persistence. Many of the students in their study complained of feeling belittled, made to feel stupid and, feelings of powerless after communication and interactions with some of their faculty members. Ibrahim and Qalawa cautioned that incivility in the learning environment from faculty towards students can negatively impact student performance and lead to unsuccessful outcomes for students including an increase in student attrition rates.

Banks and Dohy (2019) looked at barriers to retention in minority students and discovered opportunity gaps such as lack of access to academic resources and support, negatively impacting student performance and outcomes. They reported that feelings of isolation and not belonging can lead to student disengagement, underperformance and, the decision to drop out of the program for many students.

Nonacademic Barriers

Cipher et al. (2017) defined nonacademic barriers to student retention and persistence as a multitude of circumstances that can affect a student's ability to remain in or drop out of school. Mooring (2016) noted ineffective coping skills, inadequate college preparation, poor study habits, and lack of emotional support as some of the more common nonacademic barriers cited by students.

The nursing universal retention and success model (Jeffreys, 2015) noted family and personal stressors as the most detrimental nonacademic barriers to a student's academic performance and persistence. The AACN, (2019) reported family responsibilities, childcare problems, and unexpected personal or family crisis as other nonacademic barriers which impede or terminate a student's academic program. Scheller et al. (2019) identified poor time management, lack of social support, poor stress management, and lack of mentoring support as additional nonacademic barriers and challenges for nursing students.

Nikolaidou et al. (2019) explained that the balance between school and personal life is a nonacademic barrier that some students are unable to successfully navigate. For some students trying to maintain good grades and keeping up with their studies, while balancing their personal or family responsibilities, becomes overwhelming. The student may feel forced to drop out of school just to relieve some of the pressure

Jeffreys (2015) noted the stress of childcare arrangements, family responsibilities, and the pressures of taking time away from family to study or complete schoolwork can lead to feelings of guilt or anxiety for many students. Without adequate emotional or

psychological support, the student may either be forced to withdraw from school or drop out. Merritt (2021) cited conflict with employment schedules, psychological stressors, financial hardships, and lack of family support as frequent barriers to student retention and persistence.

Bickerstaff et al. (2017) discovered that retention and persistence can be influenced by the student's level of comfort with the institution's cultural norms and the student's level of self-motivation and self-confidence. Students who felt comfortable within the institution developed a sense of belonging, showed greater self-confidence and, were more motivated to persist to degree obtainment. Various researchers (Cho & Serrano, 2020; Crone et al., 2020; Priode et al., 2020; Van Rhijn et al., 2016) have studied retention and persistence within nontraditional students. Nontraditional students are generally categorized as being older than 24, having dependents, working full time while enrolled, and being financially independent. In addition to the barriers that traditional students face, nontraditional students are also challenged with family responsibilities, time constraints, financial pressures, and job obligations. Crone et al. (2020) cited positive attributes for nontraditional students with children or spouses included being highly motivated and having good support systems. While negative attributes included issues with attendance and time management due to family obligations. Cho and Serrano (2020) found that nontraditional students were less likely to persist to degree obtainment due to life demands outside of school. Priode et al. (2020) found that emotional support from family and academic advisors led to better outcomes for nontraditional students. Van Rhijn et al. (2016) recommended policy changes at the

institutional level that offer increased social support, to improve persistence and retention within the nontraditional student population.

Multiple studies suggest that working either full time or greater than 20 hours per week while attending school were nonacademic barriers to retention and persistence for nursing students (Garcia-Vargas et al., 2016; Salamonson et al., 2020; Warner et al., 2020). According to reports from the National Center for Education Statistics, (2017) 43% of all full-time and 78% of all part-time students enrolled in college were employed more than 16-20 hours per week. Many nontraditional nursing students who work in addition to attending college full time were identified as having financial difficulties.

Christiansen et al. (2019) noted that nursing students cited financial security as the main reason for working. The findings revealed that students who worked while enrolled in nursing school spent less time engaged in studying and academic coursework, and frequently had conflicts between their work schedules and clinical requirements. Findings from Salamonson et al. (2020) showed that students who worked greater than 20 hours per week showed a decline in academic performance, failed courses, delayed program completion, and often did not persist to degree obtainment. The study concluded that student employment greater than 20 hours per week was a nonacademic barrier to persistence and program completion.

Garcia-Vargas et al. (2016) reported that most nursing students work while enrolled in their program of study due to economic necessity. However, there are some students who work to gain additional clinical skills or enhance clinical performance. Warner et al. (2020) argued that some full-time students benefited from working in the

health care sector while in school as, they showed improvement in their clinical and critical thinking skills. The findings concluded that students who participated in their study were more persistent and completed the nursing program. Crawford et al. (2020) reviewed the benefits of part time work for nursing students. The study results showed that working in the health care sector part time can enhance students' communication and interpersonal skills, improve their ability to multitask and build confidence. Crawford et al. cautioned that students should be carefully guided by faculty and advisors on setting up work schedules and course loads so that both are manageable. Salamonson et al. (2020) warned that full-time employment while in nursing school can be a challenge and a barrier to persistence for nursing students. They reported that 53% of the participants in their study complained of feeling fatigued and overwhelmed with both work and school, and that working reduced their amount of study time which had a negative impact on their schoolwork.

Recent studies (Maroto et al., 2015; Reeder et al., 2020; Tate-Troester, 2019) examined "food insecurity" as a nonacademic barrier to college student success. "Food insecurity" occurs when a college student does not have daily access to nutritionally adequate food or meals. Because the student is not able to receive adequate nourishment, they have poor grades, lower GPAs, and poor retention rates. Tate-Troester (2019) found that 25% of community college students admitted to experiencing food insecurity at some time. Reeder et al. (2020) noted that students with food insecurities often face homelessness, economic hardships, or struggle with mental health issues and depression. This population of students is at a greater risk for dropping out of school (Reeder et al.,

2020). Maroto et al. (2015) reported that students who experienced “food insecurity” were often from low income, underrepresented or, nontraditional populations and were less likely to persist to degree obtainment.

Implications

This project study has implications for the local community college’s nursing program because, the findings from the study are intended to identify nonacademic factors that facilitate retention and persistence based on the perceptions of recent nursing graduates. Identifying nonacademic facilitators that improve retention and persistence may help the program develop strategies that can assist students to remain in school and graduate. Academic barriers can include poor study habits or test-taking skills, low grades, and insufficient critical thinking skills. Nonacademic barriers may include family responsibilities, lack of emotional support, financial challenges and being employed greater than 20 hours per week. Most colleges offer academic support to students however, nonacademic support is often not available. When nursing students voluntarily or involuntarily drop out of school prior to program completion they often suffer emotional distress and economic hardship. Schools of nursing suffer financial and reputational consequences when students leave school prior to degree obtainment and the health care sector suffers additional staffing shortages and increased patient workloads. Increasing nursing student retention and graduation rates at the local community college can have a positive and significant impact on the lives of students, the college, and the community.

Utilizing the data collected from this study, I created and presented the local community college's faculty and administration with a project study student retention plan that will offer guidance in the development of strategies to improve student outcomes.

Summary

Section 1 reviewed the literature on undergraduate nursing student retention and persistence in nursing education programs. As the literature revealed, there were numerous academic and nonacademic factors that created barriers to program completion and nursing student success. The identification and development of nonacademic strategies aimed at facilitating nursing student retention and graduation are critical to offsetting the nation's nursing shortage, supplying the nursing workforce, and meeting the health care needs of society. Jeffreys nursing universal retention and success model (Jeffreys, 2015) was selected as the framework for this study to emphasize how personal, academic and/or environmental factors can impact a nursing student's success or failure. The Nursing Universal Retention Success ((2015) framework is relevant to this qualitative study because it offers methods to identify those factors and it offer strategies that may promote successful student outcomes. Section 2 of this study will address the research design used for the study, the role of the researcher, the criteria, selection and protection of the participants, the methods for data collection and analysis, validity, and the study's findings. Although this study was like previous studies on student retention and success, this study was different because it provided a greater understanding of

factors that contributed to student retention and success from the perspectives of those who recently graduated from the nursing program.

Section 2: The Methodology

The local community college had a problem with retaining and graduating nursing students. The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives and lived experiences of students who successfully completed the nursing program and determine what factors facilitated their success I chose a basic qualitative research study design for this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that qualitative research seeks to gain an understanding of how people think, feel, and interpret their life experiences. The research design is correlated to the research question because both focus on the experiences and perspectives of the participants in this study. In this section, will provide an overview of the qualitative research design used for the study as well as explain the rationale for choosing the design, my role as the researcher, the selection and consideration of the participants, the methods for data collection and analysis, and the study's validity. The section also contains a discussion of the study's findings.

Research Design

The problem was that undergraduate nursing students leave the local Midwest community college's nursing program without completing the program or obtaining a degree. In this study, I explored the perceptions of recent graduates about nonacademic influences that may have contributed to their successful outcomes. Because the focus of this study was the lived experiences of a particular group, the use of a qualitative research design aligned with the study's goals.

Taylor et al. (2015) wrote that qualitative research is a research approach that is concerned with how people think, feel, and behave. Qualitative researchers are interested

in learning about the perspectives and meanings that people associate with events and things in their everyday lives. To collect data for this study, I listened as the participants shared their perceptions in in-depth interviews. Data analysis was inductive, going from specific to general categories. I present the findings later in this section in a rich narrative report.

There are several different kinds of qualitative research. Basic qualitative research is the most common type and was selected for this study because it provided firsthand information from the experiences of the participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that basic qualitative research allows the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge about the subject being studied. Lodico et al. (2010) stated that basic qualitative researchers use interviews and observations to collect and analyze data. The basic qualitative research design supported this study and allowed me to conduct interviews and gather data about the participants for the study. Colorafi and Evans (2016) explained that basic qualitative research is best suited for the health sciences because it affords the researcher flexibility and an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the participant's point of view.

Lodico et al. (2010) noted that ethnography is a qualitative research design used to describe a culture or group. The focus of ethnographic research is on the societal norms and behaviors of a particular culture. Using this design, the researcher spends time within the culture or group or may become an active participant within the group to obtain a true perspective of the group's culture. The ethnography design did not align

with the purpose of this study because I did not spend time within a specific group to learn more about its culture.

Another design used in qualitative research is the case study approach. Case study research focuses on the interactions of small groups or individuals within a specific setting and documents the experience (Lodico et al., 2010). Case study research can be focused on a group, organization, or institution (Merriam, 2009). In the case study approach, the researcher seeks to gain information about the phenomena being studied through multiple forms of data collection sources (Lodico et al., 2010). The case study approach was not appropriate for this study because interviews were the only method of data collection used for this study.

Participants

I used purposeful sampling to select potential participants for the study. Emails were sent to 200 nurse graduates from the local community college inviting them to take part in the study. Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that purposeful sampling be used to select participants who have knowledge or experience with the subject being studied. Twelve potential participants responded and were selected to participate in the study. I used the following inclusion criteria to select participants: nurse graduates of the local community college who persisted to graduation between January 2019 and December 2020. Boddy (2016) noted that qualitative research saturation can be reached with a small sample size. Malterud et al. (2015) explained that the focus of the study should determine the sample size in qualitative research. A study with a narrow focus needs fewer

participants than a study with a broad focus. Because the current study had both a narrow and specific focus, I determined the sample size of 12 to be sufficient.

Once approval was granted from both Walden University's Institutional Review Board (Approval No. 09-22-21-0235979) and the local community college's institutional review board (Approval No. EXTIRB2022001) to conduct the study, I contacted the community college's dean of nursing to introduce myself and explain the nature and purpose of the study. I asked for a list of potential participants that could be contacted about participating in the study. The local community college responded and informed me that they would contact potential participants to protect their confidentiality. The college emailed information about the study inviting recent graduates to participate. The email included informed consent forms with instructions to sign and return the forms if they wanted to participate. Lodico et al. (2010) reported research ethics means that participants are advised of their rights and provided information on any risks or potential harm from the study. Potential participants were also encouraged to ask questions and express any concerns they had. I addressed ethical considerations in the study by providing the participants with detailed information about informed consent, confidentiality, protection from harm, their rights as participants, and their ability to leave the study at any time without repercussions. Informed consent was obtained from the participants via return email. Once all ethical considerations were met, each participant was scheduled for a virtual interview.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

To establish rapport and a working researcher-participant relationship, I emailed each participant a short biography of myself, which included my contact information and information about the nature and purpose of the research project. I also explained the entire research study process to each participant in detail before starting the virtual interview. I listened attentively and answered any questions they had. The researcher-participant relationship remained professional and engaging. During the virtual interview process, I asked semistructured questions with a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental demeanor. Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential.

Data Collection

Qualitative research offers several methods for collecting data, including interviews, observations, focus groups, or artifacts (Clark & Veale, 2018). One-on-one, virtual interviews using semi structured questions were the only method of data collection used for this study. Moser and Korstjens (2018) noted that one-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information about the participants' perceptions. They suggested that the researcher ask semi structured, open-ended questions to encourage the participants to share their feelings and personal experiences in as much detail as possible. Archibald et al. (2019) reported that advances in technology have afforded researchers the ability to utilize videoconferencing platforms, which allows the researcher to collect and manage data in a more efficient and cost-effective manner. I conducted the one-on-one interviews virtually via the Zoom videoconferencing platform. Each participant was

scheduled for a 1-hour virtual interview session. The virtual interviews were off camera and audio recorded only with the permission of each of the participants.

To prepare for the interviews, I constructed an interview protocol (see Appendix B). Castillo-Montoya (2016) recommended that researchers utilize interview protocols to strengthen the reliability of the data obtained. Interview protocols also provide a structured and consistent process to each interview. Interview protocols help to establish an opening script along with the actual interview questions, follow-up questions, and prompts. The virtual interviews in this study were standardized, and I asked each participant the same set of questions. I developed the interview protocol and interview questions to align with the conceptual framework, specifically regarding personal and environmental factors related to retention and persistence. During the interviews, I asked participants questions regarding their perceptions of nonacademic factors that facilitated their success in the college's nursing program. Notes were taken during each interview and reviewed immediately following the interview.

According to Lodico et al. (2010), one-on-one interviews have proven to be sufficient methods for data collection in qualitative research. Interviews offer researchers the opportunity to obtain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants in the study (Archibald et al., 2019; Lodico et al., 2010; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Archibald et al. (2019) noted that videoconferencing offers a convenient and flexible method for data collection. Through videoconferencing platforms, qualitative researchers can communicate with participants in distant geographical areas, interact with participants in real time, provide security options, and record and store information.

Zoom (2021) is a teleconferencing software app that allows people to interact virtually. Through the Zoom app, people can join meetings via a computer webcam or cell phone. The virtual meetings can be audio or video recorded through the system's app. The interviews were audio recorded for this study. I used both the audio-recorded interviews and the notes taken during the interviews for the data analysis process. All the participants kept their scheduled interview appointments.

The data gathering process began with the interview. I assigned each interviewee a pseudonym to protect their identity. The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their perceptions and experiences while in the nursing program. The audio recordings were stored securely in a file on my personal laptop. Merriam (2009) recommended that researchers keep inventory of the data collected through computer software and a hard copy. To keep track of and manage the data, I created an electronic research log that was used for interviews, notes, and my thoughts. Once an interview was completed, it was input into the research log. The collected data were also stored in a digital file system as a backup source.

Karagiozis (2018) cautioned the primary role of the researcher in qualitative research is the use of self for the collection of data and analysis. My role as the researcher in this study was to collect and analyze the data and report the findings. I did not hold a position at the local Midwest community college. In 2017, I briefly served as a nursing education specialist at the college; however, I did not hold a faculty or supervisory role in that position. I did not know or have any association with any current or recent graduates of the program.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that the researcher gather and organize the data into a format for greater visualization and analysis before starting the analysis process. Data analysis is an interactive process in qualitative research in which the researcher vacillates between data collection and analysis to produce detailed findings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). According to Braun and Clark (2006), the researcher moves back and forth between the various phases of analysis writing down ideas, extracting codes and themes, and analyzing the data to get a detailed report. As the data were collected, I simultaneously began organizing and coding it while reading and rereading the transcripts.

I used a thematic analysis approach to analyze the data for this study. Braun and Clark (2006) defined thematic analysis as a step-by-step approach that allows the researcher to identify patterns through an inductive process. Thematic analysis includes six phases to determine, examine, and report themes from the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). In Phase 1 of thematic analysis, I became familiar with the data by reading, reviewing, and transcribing the data (see Braun & Clark, 2006). Taylor et. al. (2015) recommended reading and rereading the transcribed interviews and notes multiple times for a thorough analysis. Data and notes from each recorded interview were reviewed and uploaded onto the electronic research log sheet. Data retrieved from the audio-recorded interviews were immediately transcribed by me. Researchers are encouraged to transcribe recorded interviews verbatim including nonverbal communication, such as pauses, laughter, coughs, or changes in tone during an interview to facilitate analysis (Lodico et

al., 2010; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Once the recordings were transcribed, I reviewed, compared, and contrasted them against the transcribed text for clarity and accuracy.

Phase 2 of thematic analysis involved the creation of codes. I coded the transcribed data to identify common categories and patterns among the responses. Coding involves categorizing data showing the connection between concepts (Braun & Clark, 2006). Colorafi and Evans (2016) described coding as assigning labels to specific topics that are then grouped together. By assigning codes, I built categories from the data based on specific concepts.

In Phase 3 of thematic analysis, I organized participants' statements and grouped them into subthemes using different highlighter pens to color the separate categories. The subthemes were then reviewed and sorted into potential themes (see Braun & Clark, 2006). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted the building of categories goes from an inductive to a deductive process as clusters of data are reviewed and analyzed. Subcategories are formed as new categories are created or eliminated.

In Phase 4 of the thematic process, I reviewed and renamed the subthemes into final themes representing overarching research data ideas. This process incorporated two levels of reviewing and refining themes. On the first level, I reviewed the collated data extracts to determine if coherent patterns had been formed (see Braun & Clark, 2006). At the second level, I evaluated the validity of themes, looked for potential new themes, and coded additional data or recoded data as needed (see Braun & Clark, 2006).

During Phase 5 of thematic analysis, I used Jeffery's (2015) nursing universal retention and success model to organize the subthemes into clearly defined and refined

final themes. Each theme was given a name, and the theme's story was identified. After all themes and subthemes were identified, I moved on to the sixth and final phase of thematic analysis by writing a final report consisting of an overview of the participants' collected perceptions and in-depth analysis (see Braun & Clark, 2006).

Evidence of Quality

Lodico et al. (2010) recommended that researchers establish credibility and accuracy as well as prevent researcher bias by using member checking. Member checking allows the participants of the study to review the researcher's analysis for accuracy in their interpretations of the information and offer suggestions on how to better portray the participant's feelings (Lodico et al., 2010). I explained member checking to the participants at the start of the interview and sent participants an email notification of the findings with instructions for review and feedback. Lodico et al. suggested using a peer debriefer to meet with the researcher on a regular basis to review notes, ask questions, and help the researcher look at alternate points of view on the subject matter. A professional colleague served as a peer debriefer for this study.

Lodico et al. (2010) noted that transferability is best established by the rich, thick details of the contexts of the data. Transferability for this study will be determined by readers who will decide if the population and setting of the study are similar or applicable to the conditions of similar studies.

Discrepant Cases

Lodico et al. (2010) noted that the researcher should examine data that conflicts or contradicts the data and provide explanations for the discrepancy. DiLoreto and Gaines

(2016) noted that discrepant results may point to the need for future research, or errors in the development of the instrument used in the study. No discrepant cases were found during the data collection or analysis of the study.

Data Analysis Results

Moser and Korstjens noted that data analysis is an interactive process in which the researcher vacillates between data collection and analysis to produce detailed findings. The data analysis process started as data were collected. Each virtual interview was audio recorded and detailed notes were taken as I listened to each participant. Lodico et al. (2010) and Moser and Korstjens recommended that researchers transcribe recorded interviews verbatim to facilitate analysis. After each interview, I immediately listened to the recording and transcribed the participant's responses verbatim to the questions. Taylor et. al. (2015) recommended reading and rereading the transcribed interviews and notes multiple times for a thorough analysis. As I transcribed the recordings, I read and reviewed my transcribed notes numerous times for continuous analysis. Using Microsoft Excel software, I created an electronic log and uploaded all the transcribed data into a spreadsheet with sections for each interview question and each participant's response to every question. Once the transcription process was completed, I had over 100 sections of data filled with rich, thick descriptions from the participants. To establish credibility and validity of the data, I utilized member checking to allow the participants an opportunity to review my findings for accuracy.

Coding Process

Coding was the next step in data analysis process. Braun and Clark (2006) defined coding as the process of categorizing the data showing the connection among concepts. Colorafi and Evans (2016) described coding as assigning labels to specific topics which are then grouped together. Creswell (2012) stated that hand analysis can be used in qualitative research when there are less than 500 pages of transcripts and when the researcher has the time to commit. Hand analysis was the coding process used for this study. The open coding method was used for this study. All coding was done manually, using color coding to separate and highlight text that was related to the research question. Belotto (2018) noted that open coding allowed researchers to apply similar texts and phrases directly from the data. Coding of transcribed data was used to identify common categories and patterns among the responses. By assigning codes to topics, I was able to build categories from the data based on specific concepts. As I reviewed the transcribed data, I organized the participants responses and grouped them into subthemes using different color highlighters to separate the categories. Braun and Clark (recommended that the categories be grouped into subthemes, reviewed, and sorted into potential themes. As I read through each transcript, I assigned codes to text and phrases that correlated with each research question. I also searched each transcript for words or phrases in the responses to the research questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that the building of categories goes from an inductive to a deductive process as clusters of data are reviewed and analyzed. Subcategories are formed as new categories are created or eliminated. After all the codes were identified they were categorized into themes and sub-themes.

Two of the themes that emerged were the challenges of family responsibilities and financial barriers that participants faced during nursing school. Subthemes that emerged from these themes included the caring for children, ill or elderly family members while trying to juggle college and coursework. The other subtheme that emerged included financial hardships related to tuition, cost of living expenses, student loan debt, rent or mortgage payments and other financial responsibilities, while being a full-time college student. The other themes that emerged were directly related to the research question and identified factors that facilitated student success, such as social support, participant's belief systems. Sub-themes that emerged from the themes included emotional and physical support from spouses, significant others, family, peers, and instructors, and the participant's belief in God, the power of prayer, and belief in oneself and self-motivation.

Research Accuracy and Credibility

Researchers must validate the accuracy and credibility of their findings (Creswell, 2012). There are several strategies that researchers use to determine the accuracy of their findings. One of those strategies is member checking. Lodico et al. (2010) noted that member checking allows the participants of the study to review the researcher's analysis for accuracy in their interpretations of the information and to offer suggestions on how to better portray the participant's feelings. The process of member checking was used to establish accuracy and credibility of the findings from this study. The study's participants were given the opportunity to review the researcher's findings and to offer feedback and comments to validate their accuracy and credibility. Polit and Beck (2017) noted that confirmability was used to ensure that the researcher's findings are derived from the

participant's views and not researcher bias. Member checking was used to determine credibility of the findings. Transferability refers to the results of the study's being applicable to similar populations, (Lodico et al., 2010). The transferability of this study was determined by the readers who decided the results were applicable in other settings.

Discrepant Cases

Lodico et al. (2010) defined discrepant cases as when the data conflicts or contradicts with the findings. As I listened to the recorded interviews and transcribed the data, I looked for discrepancies within my findings. As I coded the data into themes and subthemes, I searched for contradictions and data that did not fit in. There was not any data that was inconsistent with the themes or subthemes that emerged.

Findings

The study problem was that undergraduate nursing students leave a local Midwest community college's nursing program without completing the program or obtaining degree. An analysis of the data showed that participants experienced major challenges that caused some students to leave the nursing school without completing the program or obtaining their degree. The participants listed caring for children or an ill family member, working full or part time, financial hardships, issues with time management, not being academically prepared for school, and being a single parent as major challenges during their nursing school experience. Participants explained that they often struggled academically while trying to maintain a school, family, and work-life balance. As a result, some students were forced to drop out. In addition, participants expressed feelings of social isolation and not having a social life while in nursing school. Participants

expressed frustration about having to forgo quality time with family and friends to study which can negatively impact student retention and success. Lastly, students expressed feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration with the nursing program administration's lack of compassion, concern, and flexibility toward adult learners with families and work responsibilities.

Participants believed that the support of family, classmates, faith, and financial support were instrumental in their ability to remain in school and complete the nursing program. Participants also advised future nursing students to plan for school, develop budgets, resolve, and or stabilize finances before starting school. Participants suggested future nursing students secure family and social resources and employer/job support prior to starting school. Lastly, participants advised future students to believe in themselves, have self-determination, and visualize themselves as a nurse.

Four themes emerged that were directly related to the problem statement and research question (see Table 1). The first category of data were the challenges that nursing students face when pursuing their academic goals. The second code or category of data that emerged were the factors that help facilitate student success. The themes were derived and explained by utilizing statements from the participants and transcription data from the one-on-one recorded interviews. Participants identities were protected by assigning a letter to each participant. The problem that prompted this study was that undergraduate nursing students leave a local Midwest community college's nursing program without completing the program or obtaining a degree. The research question

guided data analysis for the study and helped to identify themes from the perspectives of recent nurse graduates who attended the local community college's nursing program.

RQ: What are recent nurse graduate perceptions on nonacademic factors that influence student retention and persistence to program completion and graduation?

The participants for the study offered rich, thick descriptions about their challenges and those factors that they believed helped facilitate their retention and program completion. The participants indicated their most significant challenges were caring for young children, ill or elderly parents, and/or other family responsibilities, and the financial challenges of paying for tuition, books, having to support themselves, their families, and meeting other financial obligations while dealing with the increased cost of living, working either full or part-time or being unemployed and attending school full time. Participants credited emotional and social support, and faith in God, prayer and self-motivation as factors that facilitated their success.

Table 1

Codes and Themes

Codes	Themes
Challenges nursing students face while going through nursing school.	1. The challenges of family responsibilities.
Factors that facilitated student retention and program completion	2. Financial challenges 3. Social support of spouse, family, peers, instructors, and community. 4. Faith in God, prayer, and self-motivation

Theme 1: Challenges of Family Responsibilities

The first theme that emerged was the challenge of maintaining family responsibilities while being a full-time nursing student. The number of students juggling multiple responsibilities while attending college is on the rise. Students must make time to attend class, complete assignments, and study in addition to allocating time for family, work, and social activities (Mills, 2020). During the one-on-one interviews for this study participants were asked to “tell me about any challenges you encountered during your nursing school experience?” Eleven of the 12 participants responded that they felt overwhelmed with trying to maintain their family responsibilities while being a fulltime nursing student. Two participants shared their experiences of caring for an ill parent while in school. Participant A explained that her “challenge was to be the primary caregiver for her ill mother, manage her family’s care and attend nursing school all at the same time.” Participant B stated, “my challenge was caring for my father who became ill while I was in the program.” Dare et al. (2022) reported that female nursing students with family responsibilities experience a higher degree of stress which can negatively affect their individual and family well-being. Recent studies examined gender role conflicts that may affect female college students. Participant C, noted that her “challenge was finding study time vs. family time.” Participant K stated,

My children would cry sometimes when I left for school. My greatest challenge was being a single mother while working full time and going to school. Because my children were so young, I had to hire babysitters for them so that I could stay late after class, go to the library, or join my study group.

Participant F, a single mom shared that “nursing school took me away from spending time with my kids.” Participant D said, “My children were young and could not understand why I had to always be at work or studying.” Participant H noted, “Unfortunately, I neglected many of my responsibilities while I was in school. I was not able to do things for my family that I had always done.” Participant C stated, “School put a strain on my marriage because it took up most of my time. I spent most of my time either studying or spending time with my daughter. I eventually ended up getting a divorce.” Many college students face challenges related to pursuing their academic goals and family responsibilities. It is important that academia understand the unique challenges of these students to better support them (Mills, 2020).

Theme 2: Financial Challenges

The second theme that emerged were the financial challenges that participant faced while attending nursing school. For some student’s financial barriers prevent them from remaining in school. Several studies have reported on the effect of financial stress and student outcomes. Handwerker (2018) noted that many nursing students face financial hardships while enrolled in school. Their success or failure is sometimes directly related to those financial factors. Ma et al. (2020) reported that students facing financial hardships were less diligent in their studies than those not facing financial hardship. While Anong and Henager (2021) found that financially strained students did not function as well mentally or psychologically as those who were not financially strained. Mitchell (2020) noted increases in the cost of living and rising academic fees has added to the financial burdens of many college students. The financial stress of having to

cover the cost of tuition, rent or mortgage payments, bills, groceries, fuel, and vehicle maintenance has created barriers to college for nontraditional students (Bradley et al., 2020). Although, financial aid, government and bank loans are the major funding source for community college students, many of them must continue to work either full or parttime to meet other financial responsibilities (Beer & Bray, 2019). According to data from U.S. Department of Education 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study more than two thirds of nursing students attend community college nursing programs, are over the age of 30, have children under the age of 18 living in their household, and are married or living with a partner. In addition, Mitchell (2020) noted that most community college nursing students work at least part-time to reduce financial hardship and student loan debt. However, working more than 16 hours per week was shown to have a negative effect on the academic outcomes of those students. Ten of the 12 participants in the study experienced financial challenges while attending nursing school. The majority of participants admitted to relying on student loans, government assistance, employment income and/or spouse/family for financial support in order to remain in school and graduate. The study's participants were asked to "describe the effect that attending school had on you financially?" Three participants talked about incurring student loan debt to cover tuition costs and other financial expenses. Participant C stated, "going to school affected me financially because I had to take out student loans and incur more debt." Participant E noted, "school affected me financially because I had to cut my work hours from 40 hours to 32 hours per week. I also took out student loans." Participant F shared that "school took a toll on me financially. I took out student loans to pay for school and I

continued working full time to pay my bills. I created a strict budget and only spent money on necessities. ■ Several participants spoke about the need to decrease work hours or rely more heavily on their spouse for financial support so that they could focus on school and complete the program. Participant I stated “nursing school presented many financial challenges for me and my family. My husband worked more hours. By the end of my second year, I stopped working altogether so that I could finish school.” Participant A stated, “it was challenging at times trying to navigate and balance our finances with one income when we were used to two.” Participant C said, “I developed a budget because I had a lot of responsibilities. I was able to manage the challenges with family support.” Participant G explained, “I had to go down to part-time hours and take zero paid days at work. I depended heavily on my husband financially and we really struggled. We had to cut out things like going to dinner or the movies.” Participant D, stated “I had to work nights and pick up extra shifts on the weekends so that I could pay my bills.” Participant I said, “I worked as an OB tech in a hospital setting a minimum of 36 hours per week I balanced my family, work and school as best I could.” While Participant K, explained, “I mostly worked nights and weekends.” Participants A J and L each explained how they scaled back on recreational activities and developed budgets to live on. Participant L said, “I just had to cut back on eating out and recreational activities for a while. ” Participant J said, “I had a lot of financial challenges while attending school. I worked as much as I could, but I had to cut out a lot of things. I was able to apply for and get food stamps which really helped me.” Participant A stated, “I had to develop a budget. I looked at my life and decided what to prioritize.”

The following themes focus more specifically on the research question and emerge from data collected in the study. These themes identify factors participants believed facilitated their retention and completion of the nursing program. The themes were (a) the support of spouse/family, peers, and caring instructors, and (b) faith in God, prayer, and self-motivation.

Theme 3: Social Support of Spouse, Family, Peers, Instructors, and Community

The third theme that emerged was that social and emotional support participants received from spouses, family members, peers/classmates, and caring instructors was instrumental to their academic success. George-Levi et al. (2022) explained that social support can be either practical (material assistance) emotional (compassion from others) or informational (guidance or advice). Social support is connected to both positive physical and mental outcomes. Social support of college students from family members plays a significant role in their experiences. Family can provide the verbal and emotional support, and constant encouragement that many college students need (Mishra, 2020). Kensinger and Minnic (2018) studied mothers enrolled in college and found that social and emotional support was most beneficial for them.

Participants in this study were asked to describe the support systems that were instrumental in helping them overcome the challenges they faced and successfully complete the program. All participants credited either family, classmates, or instructors as essential supports systems and critical to their success in nursing school. Participant B stated, “My family was very supportive, I have an aunt and a neighbor who are nurses and were very supportive. My boyfriend, coworkers and classmates were also

instrumental in my success as well.” Participants F, I, J, and K also talked about the support that they received from parents and spouses. Participant F said that “her mother was supportive and spent time with her children when she had to work or study.”

Participant I explained that “her husband and older sons supported her and helped care for her younger daughters so that she could study.” Mishra (2020) concluded family support continues to be a significant source of strength for college students.

The study participants also talked about the important role that their peers played in their success. George-Levi (2022) explained that peer support is critical to the emotional needs and academic demands of college students. In this study participants B, C, D, E, F, H, J, K, and L all described their classmates and peers as very important support systems during nursing school and contributed to their academic success. These participants shared stories about forming strong relationship bonds and developing close knit groups with their classmates, and how they gathered weekly at each other’s homes to study and eat meals together. These peer groups provided social, emotional, and physical support for one another. Participant E explained, “We formed a study group of six classmates. We studied and ate together three times a week.” Participant G stated that “her husband and church family were her support systems and lifeline. They provided moral and spiritual support for me. Without them I would not have made it through.” Participant H credited her success to her nursing classmates, “my nursing classmates were my support system. We had a very close-knit group of about 10 people, and we checked in with each other regularly.” Keogh et al. (2020) noted that peer support is

linked to decreased mortality and better health among college students. Social support from peers is essential for the mental health and wellbeing among college students.

Eight of the 12 participants cited instructor support as a factor that facilitated their success. Utvaer, et. al. (2022) reported that while peer support had a direct effect on a student's emotional status teacher support had a significant effect on a student's competence. Over the past 10 years researchers have examined the positive effects of the instructor-student relationship on student success. Building meaningful instructor-student relationships leads to active student engagement and decreased student anxiety (Tatu, 2020). Flaherty (2021) found that an increasing number of students rely on their relationships with instructors for mental support and assistance. According to Twidwell, et al. (2022), faculty support of nursing students is necessary to achieve equitable healthcare and diversity within the nursing profession. Everett (2022) reported that faculty support plays an essential role in the success of nursing students. Smith-Wacholz et al. (2019) studied nursing student retention and discovered that faculty serving as role models and providing student support from the beginning to the end of the program were imperative to retention and program completion.

Participants A, B, C, D, F, I, K, and L stated that instructor emotional and social support played a significant role in being able to complete the program. Participant A stated, "We had very good instructors and teaching assistants. They provided many resources for us." Participant C said, "The instructors were supportive, they gave me encouragement and support and taught me how to learn." Participant D added, "Our nursing instructors were very understanding and compassionate towards myself and other

students. They offered encouragement, support, and other resources.” Participants F, I, K, and L talked about the emotional and academic support they received from instructors who supported them throughout the program. Positive instructor-student relationships will promote positive student outcomes (Tatum, 2021).

Theme 4: Faith in God, Prayer, and Self-Motivation

Participants identified belief in faith in God, prayer, and self-motivation as factors that allowed them to balance school, work, and home life so that they could complete their program of study. According to data from the Pew Research Center (2018) most Americans (90%) believe in God or a higher power. Studies show that there is a correlation between religious beliefs and academic success. Brooks and Allen (2016) reported that students often turn to their faith and religious beliefs to sustain them when faced with academic or personal challenges. The participants were asked to “explain what helped you to be able to successfully complete and graduate from the nursing program.” Participants F, G, and C used prayer, and their faith in God to cope with the challenges of nursing school. Participant F said, “Through prayer, family, instructor, and classmate support, I believe that I made it through this program by the grace of God.” Participant G agreed, “Three factors contributed to my success, my faith, prayer, and meditation. The support of my immediate family and church members also contributed to my success.” Participant C stated, “I prayed a lot and read my bible. I stayed focused on my schoolwork. In addition to prayer, the instructors were supportive.” Participant H noted,

My church and my family were my support systems. Our church was more like my family, they provided moral and spiritual support for me. My church, my

husband and my family were my lifeline, they provided moral and spiritual support for me. Without them I would not have made it through.

Participant A stated, “There were days when I felt so overwhelmed that I would just sit in the school parking lot and pray.” Participant E noted, “We formed a study group of six people; we studied and prayed together three times per week.” Horwitz (2021) studied the impact of religion on academic outcomes. Horwitz discovered that students with strong religious beliefs earned better grades and completed more of their education than those who with less religious beliefs. She argued that students who prayed at least once a week, had a strong belief in God and were part of a religious community believed that God was always evaluating them. Because of their desire to please God, they tended to be self-disciplined, more cooperative, more diligent, have higher GPAs and complete more years of schooling.

Six of the 12 participants also talked about belief in self and self-motivation as factors that facilitated their success. Everett (2022) reported that when students feel empowered, they can overcome challenges and remain in school. The participants were asked, “Now that you have graduated from the program, what advice would you give to current students regarding persistence and program completion?” Participants A, B, C, D, E, and L advised students to believe in themselves and know that they can do this.

Participant A said, “This has been done before by others so you can do it too. Just be determined to see it through.” Participant B agreed, “I would advise students to believe that you can do this and to persevere no matter what someone else tells you!” Student D added, “I would tell students to believe in yourself even when no one else does. And no

matter what, don't give up regardless of how things may look or be going at that moment." And Participant E stated, "I would advise students to be persistent no matter what."

Discussion of the Findings

The following themes emerged and are discussed in this section as related to the data in the study and a review of the literature: (1) the challenge of caring for children and family responsibilities, (2) financial challenges and hardships, (3) the support of family, peers, and nursing instructors. (4) faith in God, prayer, and self-motivation.

Theme 1 Participants discussed the challenges of caring for young children, an ill or elderly parent and other responsibilities while enrolled in school as a full-time nursing student. Some of these students do not have the support of their spouse or family members. Spousal, domestic partner, or family conflicts can arise related to time spent away from home due to class or clinical requirements, (Drew et al. 2022).

Theme 2. The financial challenges of being a full-time college student resonated with all the participants. College students must secure funds to pay for their education. In addition to finding ways to pay their tuition some students must also provide for their families and have other financial responsibilities while attending school. Many studies have reported on the effect of financial stress and student outcomes. Handwerker (2018) noted that many nursing students face financial hardships while enrolled in school. Their success or failure is sometimes directly related to those financial factors. Ma et al., (2020) reported that students facing financial hardships were less diligent in their studies than those not facing financial hardship. While Anong and Henager (2021) found that financially

strained students did not function as well mentally or psychologically as those who were not financially strained. McCulloh (2022) concluded that financial support for college students was crucial continued enrollment.

Theme 3. The third theme that emerged was that participants believed the support of and resources provided by family, peers/classmates, and nursing instructors were instrumental in their being able to complete the program and graduate. The result of this study aligns with prior studies which showed that parents provided verbal and emotional support, constant encouragement, and other necessities, (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Sax & Weintraub, 2014; Strom & Savage, 2014). McCulloh (2022) reported that the rigors of nursing school and the challenges of adjusting to a new academic environment requires the support of a strong social network composed of parents, extended family, and community. A strong social network contributes to student retention. Researchers also noted the importance of instructor support in student retention and program completion. Twidwell et al. (2022), concluded that faculty support of nursing students is necessary to achieve equitable healthcare and diversity within the nursing profession. Utvaer et al., (2022) reported that teacher support had a significant effect on student competence while peer support had a direct effect on a student's emotional status. Everett (2022) noted that faculty and peer support play an essential role in nursing student success. Smith-Wacholz et al. (2019) studied nursing student retention and discovered that faculty serving as role models and providing student support from the beginning to the end of the program was imperative to retention and program completion.

Theme 4. The fourth theme focused on participants belief and faith in God, prayer, and self-motivation. Students explained that their faith and beliefs made them feel empowered to balance school, work, and home life and complete their program of study. According to data from the Pew Research Center (2018) most Americans (90%) believe in God or a higher power. Studies show that there is a correlation between religious beliefs and academic success. Horwitz (2021) studied the impact of religion on academic outcomes. She discovered that students with strong religious beliefs earned better grades and completed more of their education than those who with less religious beliefs. Horwitz argued that students who prayed at least once a week, had a strong belief in God and were part of a religious community believed that God was always evaluating them. Because of their desire to please God, they tended to be self-disciplined, more cooperative, more diligent, have higher GPAs and complete more years of schooling. Everett (2022) reported that when students feel empowered, they can overcome challenges and remain in school.

The conceptual framework used for this study was based on Jeffrey's nursing universal retention and success model. This model focuses on the multidimensional factors that impact the retention and success of undergraduate nursing students. It emphasizes early identification and resolution of student problems to increase student retention and success rates. The framework provided by Jeffrey's nursing universal retention and success model substantiated the fact that external environmental or non-academic factors (i.e., family support and responsibilities, financial and employment status, encouragement from family and friends, and living arrangement and transportation

status) influence student persistence, retention, and success (Jeffreys, 2014). The model which is focused on retention and not attrition acknowledges eight factors connected to student retention and success; (a) interaction of student profile characteristics; (b) student affective factors; (c) academic factors; (d) environmental factors; (5) academic outcomes; (6) psychological outcomes; (7) outside surrounding factors; and (8) professional integration, (Jeffreys, 2014). The Jeffrey's model can be used to identify at risk students, and offer effective interventions that promote successful student outcomes, (Williams & Thomas, 2020). This conceptual framework provided background information about the challenges that nursing students face and the support that they need to successfully complete their program of study. Furthermore, this conceptual framework supported the need for a student retention and success program at the local community college to ensure the retention and success of its nursing students.

The four themes showed what nursing students believed about nonacademic challenges and supportive factors that either impeded or facilitated their success. The participants shared their perceptions and experiences about the challenges of dealing with family responsibilities and financial obligations while being a full-time nursing student. The participants also discussed factors that helped to facilitate their success, i.e., family and instructor support, belief/faith in God, power of prayer and being self-motivated.

Conclusion

In obtaining the various perspectives of the study's participants on nonacademic challenges and supportive factors that they experienced during their nursing program, I addressed the research question for this study. The research question addressed

nonacademic factors that facilitated their retention and persistence to program completion and graduation. I studied the themes, reviewed, and examined the research question to address the themes that emerged.

RQ 1: What are recent nurse graduate perspectives on nonacademic factors that facilitated their retention and persistence to program completion and graduation?

Theme 1 indicated that participants believed that caring for young children, an ill or elderly parent and/or having other family responsibilities while enrolled in nursing school was challenging and a potential barrier to retention and program completion.

Theme 2 indicated that participants believed that the cost of tuition and books, living expenses, supporting themselves and/or families and other financial responsibilities while being a full-time college student was challenging and a potential barrier to retention and program completion.

Theme 3 indicated that the participants believed that the support of their spouses/significant other, family members, peers/classmates, and nursing instructors and the various resources that they provided were instrumental their retention and completion of the program.

Theme 4 indicated that the participants believed that their belief and faith in God, the power of prayer, and being self-motivated empowered them to be able to balance school, work, home, remain in and complete the program.

Based on my findings, nursing students need support, encouragement, and various resources to be successful in nursing education programs. I propose that a professional development workshop may provide nursing faculty and administrators with useful

strategies that they can implement to facilitate the retention, and program completion of nursing students. In Section 3, I will use the research findings to create a project to provide the local nursing school with strategies that may be helpful for nursing students to implement that will facilitate retention and persistence to program completion.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of the project site community college nursing program's recent graduates regarding nonacademic factors that they believed helped to facilitate their retention and successful completion of the program. Through semi structured interviews, I was able to capture their perceptions about their experiences in the nursing education program. The themes revealed the participants' perspectives regarding the challenges and supportive factors that they encountered. In this section, I discuss the professional development project created based on the findings. The goal of this project was to provide the local nursing program with strategies that can be implemented to improve nursing student retention and persistence to graduation. In this section, I also provide a description of the project, the project goals and rationale, project implementation, potential barriers, and resources and supports to aide faculty and administration to foster social change at their college. To gain a better understanding of the themes in the study, I conducted a literature review to determine how the theory and research support the project and themes from the study. At the conclusion of this section, an evaluation of the project and a summary with implications for potential social change are also provided.

Rationale

The problem that prompted this study was that undergraduate nursing students leave a local Midwest community college's nursing program without completing the program or obtaining a degree. According to data from the AACN (2019), retaining and

graduating student nurses is problematic across the country. The average nursing school dropout rate was 20%, and some undergraduate nursing programs have reported dropout rates as high as 50%. Retaining and graduating nursing students is critical to supplying the nursing workforce and maintaining the future of the health care system (Rosa et al., 2020). The goal of the professional development project was to provide nursing faculty with an understanding of nonacademic challenges that students face and offer recommendations for nonacademic support and strategies that facilitate successful student outcomes. Martin et al (2019) noted that teachers realize that professional development activities can transform their beliefs and lead to student achievement and success.

I selected the genre of professional development based on the themes found in the study. Professional development is a lifelong process that helps nurses maintain skills and enhances professional practice. Continuing professional development is necessary for the promotion of a sustainable nursing workforce (Yu et al., 2022). Walter and Terry (2021) noted that professional development affects professional standards and competence. Engagement in professional development activities by nursing staff showed improved patient safety, increased staff retention, and ensured the continuous development of highly skilled practitioners. Nursing faculty at the local community college desired strategies to increase student retention and program completion rates. I created the professional development for this course using the constructs of leader self-efficacy of academic nursing professionals. Moran et al. (2021) reported that the development of leadership skills is embedded throughout nursing education. Leader self-efficacy impacts

beliefs, motivation, challenges, and persistence, and high levels of leader self-efficacy can lead an individual to believe that they can successfully perform required behaviors and have successful outcomes. My intention with the creation of this 3-day professional development program was to enhance faculty leaders' self-efficacy to improve student outcomes. I designed this professional development program to promote the collaboration efforts of faculty and students to identify and address the challenges that students face and explore strategies and resources that provide support and facilitate student success.

I designed the professional development program based on the data that emerged from the participant interviews. From analysis of the resulting data, themes and subthemes emerged related to challenges that can interfere with a student's ability to stay in and/or complete the nursing program. Data analysis also resulted in themes that supported and facilitated nursing student success. The professional development program addresses the problem under study by assessing the faculty's understanding of the challenges and obstacles that adult learners face and the supporting factors that help facilitate student success as well as engaging the faculty in interactive group activities, discussions, and reflections.

I created a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation for the professional development that will be used to outline the learning objectives, set goals, and provide information to the participants. Each participant will receive a hard copy of the PowerPoint presentation with a section for notetaking. On the first day of the professional development program, the participants will engage in a short discussion and a role play activity about nonacademic challenges that students face. This activity will provide me with a better

understanding of the participants' knowledge and comprehension of some of the challenges that their students face. On Day 2 of the professional development, the participants will be divided into groups with a timed activity comprising case study scenarios about student challenges and supportive factors to discuss and problem solve. On Day 3, the participants will be asked to participate in an interactive game using their cell phones, which will allow me to evaluate what the participants have learned over the past 3 days. At the end of Day 3, which is the final session, I will ask the participants to complete a course evaluation form and give them a handout on challenges and support factors for nursing students that can be used for future reference.

Review of the Literature

In the review of the literature for this section, I searched and reviewed peer-reviewed literature related to the topics of college student challenges and supportive measures for college students, nursing student retention, nursing student persistence, andragogy, adult learning theories, professional development, nursing best practices, and nurse faculty challenges. I obtained the literature reviewed through the following databases accessible through the Walden University Library: CINAHL PLUS, EBSCO, ProQuest Nursing, Sage, Medline, Allied Health, and Ovid Nursing Journals. The online search engine, Google Scholar, was also used to locate relevant extant literature. The following keyword terms were used in my search: *nursing student nonacademic barriers and challenges, nursing student support and resources, adult learning theories, andragogy, professional development, nursing professional development, teaching nursing students, nursing best practices, nurse faculty professional development, and*

challenges. The literature review provided me the opportunity to examine the study findings and connect the themes with my research question: What nonacademic factors influence nursing student retention and persistence to graduation? In this literature review, I present scholarly research that is connected to the study's themes and that supported the professional development project.

Challenges to Retention

The AACN noted that increased health care needs, a growing elderly population, a nursing shortage, and most recently, a global pandemic, has necessitated the need for more nursing students to graduate and join the workforce. Unfortunately, many nursing students leave their programs before completion or degree obtainment. Poor student retention and lack of persistence are worldwide problem in nursing education programs (Jeffreys, 2015). Students often face nonacademic challenges, such as family responsibilities, financial status and work obligations, that affect their decision-making when it comes to remaining in school (Priode et al., 2020). Richburg (2022) found that inadequate academic preparation, poor study skills, lack of family support, insufficient financial resources, and low self-esteem often resulted in student attrition. Smith et al. (2021) noted that high levels of stress for nursing students has generally been accepted as part of the academic process; however, high levels of stress related to financial status, self-efficacy, and life obligations can negatively influence a student's ability to stay in school. Identifying factors and implementing strategies that can positively influence nursing students to persist to graduation is essential to the integrity of the nursing workforce.

Community colleges serve as the entryway to higher education for many college students. They offer a way to gain access to skills, workforce training, and basic education in a shorter amount of time than universities (Huerta et al., 2022). According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2015), 45% of registered nurses graduated from community college associate degree nursing programs. Hart and Park (2021) noted that a great percentage of the community college student population is composed of nontraditional students; nontraditional community college students are over 24 years old, parents with at least one dependent child, and/or employed either part or full time. Nontraditional students also include students of color, students with disabilities, and students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Sinclair, 2021).

Many nontraditional students enroll in community college nursing programs because of the cost, location, and shorter program completion time (Sabio, 2019). Roy et al. (2022) noted that 1 out of 5 community college nursing students were parents with dependent children. Huerta et al. (2022) stated that because nursing students with dependent children serve multiple roles and responsibilities and face daily challenges related to childcare issues, family obligations, and financial pressures, they are at higher risks for failure. Attempting to balance family, school, and work is stressful and often leads to dropped classes, the decision to take a break from their studies, and/or to leave school without obtaining a degree. Nontraditional nursing students must also struggle with learning vast amounts of information and completing campus and clinical assignments while juggling family responsibilities and financial obligations. Cruse et al. (2019) reported that only 37% of community college students with dependent children

complete their degree compared to 59% of community college students without children. Colleges and universities have an obligation to not just educate students but to provide the support and resources that they need to be successful. Institutional processes and practices must be implemented that will facilitate positive student outcomes (Huerta et al., 2022).

Strategies to Facilitate Retention

In a recent study about community college retention strategies Monaghan and Sommers (2021) noted that emotional support from family and friends, faculty advisement, adequate transportation, and financial aid/scholarships were very significant to retention. In a study of nontraditional nursing student retention, Priode (2019) reported three emergent themes (i.e., enhancing personal capacity, learning to balance, and maintaining support) that allowed the students to remain in school and complete their program. Enhancing personal capacity involved students rearranging their personal lives and restructuring their families, social schedules, financial responsibilities, and personal commitments to determine what worked for them. Learning to balance included redefining priorities in their lives and making school commitments a priority over life commitments, which helped them develop a balance between life, school, and work. The students noted that maintaining support from family, friends, spiritual sources, and employers was critical to their success. Nikolaidou et al. (2019) identified family emotional support, increased socialization through membership in nursing clubs and organizations, online library services, registration, and advising as vital to nursing student academic success.

Jenkins et al. (2017) advocated for the use of the guided pathways model to increase community college student retention. The model provides new students with information about career paths, assists with scheduling of classes, offers ongoing support and feedback, and closely monitors students throughout their program of study by campus faculty or academic advisors. Guided pathways offered students assistance with job searches and mock interviews after graduation. In a recent study, Espinoza and Geena (2021) pointed out that early identification of poor performance in at-risk students and providing them with early, consistent, and individualized feedback improves student retention and outcomes. Their data showed that students who received these types of interventions earned passing or higher grades and were less likely to withdraw from the course. Their findings also suggested that early identification of at-risk students and consistent formative feedback can positively impact students' GPAs and improve retention rates.

Fong et al. (2018) discovered that high levels of mastery approach and moderate levels of performance approach goal orientation were the best combination to motivate and foster student retention and success in community college student persistence. Their findings indicated that these students were intrinsically motivated, which fostered their level of achievement and persistence. These results may offer instructors ways to target specific students with interventions tailored to improved persistence. In a similar study, Rothes et al. (2022) determined a positive relationship between student goals and the motivation to mastery of goals. Student motivation plays a significant in student learning outcomes, retention, and success.

Hart and Park (2021) suggested blended learning modes as an effective learning and retention strategy for nontraditional community college students. Online hybrid and blended instructor-led courses combined with student-facilitated learning offered students more flexibility, improved student interactions and access to faculty, presented fewer learning barriers, and increased student's satisfaction.

Mulrenan et al. (2021) studied retention strategies for homeless college students and noted that although this group of students faced additional challenges, personal resilience, a sense of purpose, family relationships, and friendship groups were key factors in the retention of this student population. They noted that the homeless students persisted because they were determined to obtain their degree that they believed would lead to a better life; had clear and measurable goals; had strong family relationships, which were generally with their children; and felt a sense of belonging or connectedness to the university.

Jeffries (2004) acknowledged that nursing instructors influence student retention and persistence through culturally congruent advisement, helpfulness, enhancing student participation in professional events and memberships, the promotion of peer partnerships, enrichment programs, and nursing student resource centers. Jeffries emphasized that faculty cultural congruence and attitudes and behaviors have a significant effect on student satisfaction, retention, and persistence.

Martin and Davies (2022) studied retention and persistence in nontraditional students enrolled in a college program that offered a professional certificate and credentials that could later be applied towards earning a degree. The professional

certificate provided students with employment opportunities, a sense of accomplishment, increased self-confidence, and motivation to persist to obtain a degree. By providing students an opportunity to have a short-term goal and earn a professional certificate, students felt a sense of achievement, were motivated, and felt more confident in being able to achieve the long-term goal of obtaining a degree. As a result, the college saw an increase in student retention and matriculation rates.

Pedagogical Learning

Knowles et al. (2011) explained that the pedagogical model of teaching was an ideology that dates to the 12th century in the cathedral schools of Europe. This model was used in the U.S public school system for many years because it was the only model that existed for many years. The model is based on six concepts (a) learners must learn that to pass the class, they must learn what the teacher is teaching; (b) the learner is dependent on the teacher; (c) the teacher's experience and the textbooks are what is important, and the learner's experience has little or no value; (d) the learner's readiness to learn is determined by the teacher; (e) the learner gaining information about a subject-matter; and (f) learners are motivated to learn for grades and the teacher's approval.

Andragogical Learning

Knowles (1973) andragogical model offers six concepts about adult learners. The first concept is that adults need to know why they are learning something. This concept maintains that instructors or facilitators should help increase students' awareness of the benefits of learning this topic. The second concept is that adults believe that they are responsible for their own decisions and lives. They resent others trying to impose on their

lives. Adult educators must create learning environments in which adult learners can be self-directed. The third concept is related to the learners' experiences. Adult learners come with varied life experiences. It is important that adult educators emphasize that experience and engage them in peer activities, group discussions and simulations. Their experiences should be valued and acknowledged. The fourth concept is readiness to learn. Learning activities must coincide with the adult's developmental stage and readiness to learn the new information. Readiness to learn can be introduced through simulation activities, career advising and other methods. The fifth concept is orientation to learning. Adult learners are focused learning how to perform tasks or solve problems. Presenting information that is applicable to real-life situations is an effective teaching method for adult learners. The sixth and last concept is motivation. Adult learners are internally and externally motivated to learn. Adults are motivated to keep learning and growing for a better job, a work promotion, improved quality of life (Knowles et al., 2011). The andragogical learning theory will be utilized for this professional development project.

Professional Development

Effective professional development leads to changes in instructor practices and improved student outcomes. Effective professional development includes focused content, active learning, collaboration, provides coaching, offers feedback and reflection, (Wakefield, 2022). Instructors benefit from professional development when it provides them with the opportunity to enhance knowledge and skills, sustain competency and optimize learning opportunities. Holland et al. (2022) noted that instructors look for ways to improve student outcomes and professional development provides them with tools and

information to prepare their students to be successful. Yang (2020) found that teacher self-efficacy is enhanced through professional development, which leads to improvements in teacher quality and student outcomes. Hughes et al. (2022) reported effective professional development offers active participant engagement, collective learning, and informative feedback. It should emphasize active learning, relevance, and the opportunity to apply what is learned. Effective professional development motivates and energizes faculty development through the promotion of trust, mutual buy-in, assessment and continuous improvement.

Nursing Professional Development

Dagg et al. (2022) noted the goal of nursing professional development is to provide educational opportunities for nurses to improve and expand on their knowledge, skills, and behaviors through additional training and learning activities. Nursing professional development is generally clinically based education that helps health care organizations achieve their goals through the education, onboarding, orientation, competency-based management, quality improvement and evidence-based practices of its nurses.

Nursing professional development includes specialty certifications and continuing education. Nursing professionals can choose to demonstrate their level of expertise by obtaining specialty certifications through professional development organizations. Nurses with specialty certifications benefit healthcare organizations, providers, and patients, (Shinners & Graebe, 2020). Nursing specialty certification is one of the components of nursing professional development in which a nurse's knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience are evaluated and validated by a specialty board or certifying agency.

Fitzpatrick (2017) studied the relationship between nurse certification and vascular patient outcomes and discovered a correlation between nursing certification and workplace empowerment. Continuing education (CE) is another component of professional nursing development. According to the American Nurses Credentialing Center (2015) continuing education CE can be used for personal or professional growth as there are many kinds of programs, activities, and technologies offered. Nurses engage in CE activities for certification or licensure requirements, to build on prior knowledge, or to enhance education and improve practice. CEs can be offered via conferences, internet, classroom, simulation, self-study, seminars, or a combination of various methods (Shinners & Graebe, 2020).

Professional development is an important strategy that can be used to prepare nurses transitioning from the clinical setting to the role of academic nursing instructor. Properly preparing novice instructors for this new role is essential to job satisfaction and retention of new faculty (Kinneary & Sutton, 2021). Due to nursing faculty shortages, registered nurses working in clinical settings are often recruited and designated as clinical facilitators to supervise, assess, and support nursing students during clinical rotations, (Ryan & McAllister, 2020). Oprescu et al. (2017) noted that nursing program clinical facilitators are often assigned these roles without adequate preparation, training, or professional development. A lack of leadership skills, unfamiliarity with adult learning theories or inadequate teaching strategies can negatively impact students' clinical learning experiences. Professional development is needed to enhance their understanding

of student populations, develop effective teaching skills, and to support their success in the role.

Nursing Best Practices

A review of best practices in nursing education revealed that mentorship is a useful strategy to increase retention and persistence in nursing students. Burry (2019) described mentorship as a relationship between a knowledgeable and skilled professional and a novice. The professional guides and nurtures the development and career of the novice and provides emotional support, role modeling and socialization into the profession. There are several different kinds of mentorship formats used in the academic environment; faculty- student, student/peer, group, virtual and remote. Traditionally faculty-student and student-peer mentorships are used in nursing programs. In the faculty mentor mentorship, the faculty member serves as a role model, teacher, sponsor, advisor, coach, and confidante to the student. Student-peer mentorships support faculty student mentorship relationships, which promote academic, emotional, and social support which can impact student resiliency and retention (Dahlerbruch et al., 2021). Baxter and McGowan (2022) found that students benefitted from the personal and interpersonal relationships gained through mentorship. Positive mentoring relationships have been linked to student career development and mentorship. Effective mentorship programs and professional development can lead to increased retention. persistence and successful nursing student outcomes.

Project Description

The project is a three-day professional development program for nursing faculty that can be implemented to improve the retention and program completion rates of nursing students enrolled in their program. The project was created from the themes that emerged from the study which revealed that nursing faculty understand the importance of addressing the problems related to poor student retention and low program completion rates and want to learn effective interventions and strategies to help their students be successful.

The goal of the professional development program was to provide nursing faculty with (a) an understanding of the nonacademic challenges that students face which may impede their ability to remain in the program, and (b) offer recommendations for nonacademic strategies that can support and facilitate student success.

On the first day of the professional development program, I will give an overview of the program and provide a schedule. The first activity will be to engage the faculty in a short discussion about nonacademic challenges that students face to assess their understanding of the subject. After the discussion, I will present a research-based power point presentation about the nonacademic challenges faced by nontraditional nursing students who are parents, who work full or parttime, and who have other responsibilities. After the power point presentation, the faculty will be divided into two groups and given two nursing student challenge scenarios and asked to role play. After the role play activity faculty will engage in a group discussion to critique the scenarios. At the end of the first day, I will provide a summary and allow a question-and-answer period. Each

faculty member will be asked to write a short reflection regarding what they learned from the day's session.

On the second day of the professional development program, I will begin the session with a review of the reflection statements from the previous day. I will present a research-based power point presentation on nonacademic support sources and resources for (nontraditional) nursing students who are parents, work full or parttime and/or have other responsibilities. After the power point presentation, the faculty will be divided into groups with a timed activity of case study scenarios based on student challenges and supportive factors to discuss and problem solve. After the allotted time is up each group will present their case study scenario and offer solutions/recommendations. At the end of the second day, I will provide a summary and engage the faculty in a discussion with a question-and-answer period. Each faculty member will be asked to write a reflection statement about one thing that they learned from the day's session.

On the third and final day of the professional development program, we will begin with a review of the reflection statements from the previous day. I will present a research-based power point presentation on strategies that can be implemented by faculty to help improve student retention and program completion rates. The strategies will also include suggestions from the activities and reflections of faculty members. The faculty members will be asked to download the Kahoot Game app on their cell phones and participate in an interactive game that I created about the information that they have learned over the past 2 days. The Kahoot game is used to assess and evaluate the learner's knowledge about the subject matter. At the end of the third day, I will provide a

summary and engage the faculty in a discussion with a question-and-answer period. The faculty will be asked to complete 10 question true false quiz to assess their comprehension of the content and strategies that can be implemented to facilitate student retention. Faculty learners will also be asked to complete a course evaluation which will offer me feedback and recommendations on how to improve the professional development course in the future.

Project Evaluation Plan

Both summative and formative assessments will be used for the professional development project. Summative assessments are used to measure learning while formative assessment provide an evaluation of the student's learning with feedback (Ismail et al., 2022). Formative assessments act as a self-assessment tool which allows students to self-evaluate and reflect on their learning (Nieminen & Tuohilampi, 2020). There will be a summative assessment at the end of each day of this professional development project. The faculty/learners will be asked to write a short reflection at the end of each day describing what they learned from the day's session. The reflections will offer insight about the information that was presented, and how well it was understood by the learners. Niemen and Tuohilampi (2020) noted that summative assessments give learners the opportunity to practice self-assessment with feedback on their performance and receive a grade. On the last day of the professional development the faculty/learners will be given a summative assessment. The summative assessment will be a 10-question true false quiz. This quiz will be used to evaluate learners' comprehension of the content. In addition, the learners will be asked to complete a course evaluation. The course

evaluation will provide me with information about the professional development course's presentation, comprehension, and likes and dislikes from the learners' perspectives.

Overall Evaluation Goals

Because both the formative and summative assessments are aligned to with the goal of the professional development project to identify nonacademic facilitators to nursing student retention and persistence, faculty learners that participated will be able to enhance their knowledge and understanding of nonacademic challenges and facilitators to retention that nursing students face. Formative assessments will be used during the first and second day to allow participants to actively engage and reflect on what was learned. On the last day a summative assessment will be used to allow students to self-evaluate and receive immediate feedback through a 10-question true/false quiz. Evaluation of the professional development is important because it provides information about nonacademic strategies to promote student retention and persistence. The overall evaluation goal will help determine the effectiveness of the professional development and whether it can be influential in successful student outcomes.

Key Stakeholders

This professional development project is consistent with the themes identified in my study. Nursing students are our future nurses who will work in health care organizations and provide care; therefore, it is important that all stakeholders are included in the development and organization of this project. The participants for this three-day professional development project include, nursing faculty, school administrators and health care administrators.

The Nursing Faculty The main participants for this project are nursing instructors/faculty. The primary goal of the professional development project is to provide nursing instructors/faculty insight into the daily challenges to retention and persistence that nursing students face and to offer strategies that can be implemented that will help facilitate student success.

Nursing Program Administrators. The dean, assistant dean, and department chairperson are essential to the projects' success. I will invite them to collaborate and participate in the three-day professional development sessions. Including the nursing program's administrators will afford them an opportunity to see and hear first-hand about the challenges the often lead to dropout or stop out for their students. Administrator support will also encourage faculty to implement the new strategies that they have learned.

Health Care Organization Administrators. Health care administrators are instrumental in establishing clinical partnerships and clinical rotations for nursing students. They are the ones who make decisions regarding the days, times, and locations for clinical rotation sites. Including health care administrators in the professional development project will give them insight about the challenges that students who are parents face related to issues with childcare and ease of access with clinical rotations times and locations. Support from these administrators can help facilitate student success.

Project Implications

Social Change Implications

Once nursing instructors and faculty members understand that they can impact student retention and persistence by incorporating effective strategies that help facilitate

student success they will become agents for social change. Data analysis for this study revealed key findings that can positively effect student retention and persistence. Nursing instructors and faculty use instructional tools and techniques to help students prepare for academic success. They also want to understand and learn how they can better assist students nonacademically. Through this professional development project, I will be able to offer nursing instructors and faculty members additional strategies to use with their students. Offering strategies to nursing instructors and faculty on how to effectively facilitate student retention and persistence can lead to improved student success.

Importance of the Project to Stakeholders

The professional development project is important to health care organization/ administrators because nursing schools are the pipeline to the nursing workforce. Health care organizations struggle with retention of new graduate nurses and can possibly benefit from utilizing some of the strategies presented to nursing instructors and faculty members in the professional development project. I will reach out to the health care administrator at the local hospital to encourage their participation and support in the professional development project.

Importance of the Project to the Larger Context

Regarding the larger context, this project can potentially assist nursing instructor/faculty, nursing programs and healthcare organizations in the retention and persistence of nursing students and new graduate nurses. Nursing programs must focus more on strategies to reduce or remove those nonacademic challenges to student success. Consequently, they must develop and implement nonacademic strategies that facilitate student retention and

persistence. This professional development project was created to enhance the knowledge and skills of nursing instructors/faculty that can be implemented to improve student retention, persistence to program completion and graduation.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Faculty at the local community college nursing program reported that nursing students were dropping out and/or leaving program before completion or obtaining their degree. The findings from this study revealed that nursing faculty needed to engage in professional development activities to find ways to better assist students with retention and persistence to program completion. In this section, I provide my reflections and conclusions about the project.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Project Strengths

The strengths of this project are based on the research and data analysis of the findings. The nursing universal retention and success model (Jeffreys, 2012) provided the conceptual framework for this study. This conceptual framework guided the creation and development of a professional development project to provide nursing faculty with strategies that they can implement to improve student retention and persistence to program completion and graduation. Sato et. al. (2021) noted the importance of teacher engagement in continuous professional development for additional training, teaching skills enhancement, and professional growth. I designed this professional development project to engage participants in active learning through collaborative activities, group discussions, and shared reflections. The participants had 3 days to participate in active and collaborative learning activities and practice strategies that they can use to offer support to their students. The aim of this professional development project was to

enhance participants' knowledge and understanding and recommend strategies that can be used to improve student outcomes.

The project's greatest strength is providing participants with an opportunity to enhance their knowledge base, improve their instructional practices and behaviors, and promote collaborative relationships between faculty that will have a positive effect on their students. Pantic (2021) emphasized that many factors affect student success; however, teachers can be agents of change that positively impact student outcomes.

Project Limitations

A limitation of the project is the study size. The study site emailed flyers about the study to nearly 200 of the nursing program's recent graduates; however, only 12 recent graduates responded and participated in the study. Therefore, the generalizability of the study's results is limited, and conducting a larger and broader study is recommended. Another limitation of the study is that once the professional development project has ended and participants return to their regular teaching schedules and routines, they may find it difficult to maintain the same level of consistency and collaboration among the group's participants as experienced during the 3-day professional development project. To address this limitation, I recommend that the community college offer nursing faculty continuous professional development activities throughout the school year. These activities will provide nursing faculty with opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and feedback regarding the application of strategies implemented to improve student outcomes.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Alternative Definition of the Problem

The problem was that nursing students at the local community college leave the nursing program before completing the program or obtaining their degree. An alternative definition of the problem is that nursing students face nonacademic challenges to retention and persistence that negatively affect their ability to remain in the program and persist to completion or graduation. Although some students drop out of the program due to academic reasons, many students are unable to complete the program due to nonacademic challenges, such as childcare issues, family responsibilities, work obligations, and financial hardships. Another alternative definition of the problem is that nursing faculty did not know or have effective strategies to decrease nursing student retention rate and increase program completion rates.

Alternative Solutions to the Local Problem

Administrators and nursing faculty at the local community college struggled with poor retention and low completion rates for its nursing students. An alternate approach to the local problem that the college administrators and nursing faculty can use to improve retention and program completion rates is to create a resource packet for new nursing students. The resource packet can be explained and given to students when they first enter the nursing program or during the orientation process. The resource packet would provide students with contact information for faculty advisors and counselors, financial aid information and services, childcare providers near the college campus, faculty and/or peer mentors, tutoring services, student organizations, and other resources and/or services

that students would be able to access when needed. The college could also offer the resources packet online and create a system that would allow them to collect data about which services were used, frequency of usage, and satisfaction with the resources/information. Data collected about the usage of the resources could provide the college with input and feedback for revisions or improvements.

Another alternative solution would be to assign faculty mentors or advisors to check in with students on a regular basis throughout the nursing program. Checking in on students regularly could afford advisors an opportunity for early identification and recognition of nonacademic challenges that students face that may put them at risk for dropping out. When nonacademic challenges are identified early, advisors may be able to offer students resources and/or recommendations that will help them to remain in school and complete their program of study.

Scholarship, Project Development, Leadership and Change

Reflective Analysis of Personal Learning

As I interviewed participants for this study, my confidence as a researcher and interviewer began to grow. When I listened to the recordings and transcribed the data, I gained a better understanding of the qualitative research process and how it affords the researcher an opportunity to explore the perspectives of the participants. As I analyzed the data and themes emerged, I gained a greater understanding of the challenges that many nursing students face while trying to obtain their degree. Through the research, creation, and development of this professional development project, I have learned that

nursing faculty and administrators need and want to learn strategies that will be effective in increasing nursing student retention and persistence to program completion.

Growth as a Scholar

The research study process has taught me what it means to be scholarly. By investigating the perceptions of recent nurse graduates about nonacademic factors that influence student retention and persistence to graduation, I was able to gather data and develop findings to present to the nursing program's faculty at the local community college. The college's nursing program struggled with poor retention and graduation rates among its nursing students. As a former nursing program director, I understood the significance of the problem and the need to find a solution. My goal was to gain a better understanding of the local community college's knowledge and understanding of the challenges that nursing students face that often interfere with their success and learn more about interventions, if any, they were currently using and their effectiveness. As I interviewed the participants for this study and learned about their personal experiences, I gained a better understanding of the challenges that many nursing students face while going to school.

When conducting this study, I cleared my mind of all thoughts about my prior role as a nursing program director and stepped into the roles of scholar and researcher. Although it was a little challenging at times because of my prior role, I withheld my biases and opinions throughout the research process because I knew that nursing student retention and program completion were problematic and that the local community college needed effective strategies to mitigate the situation. The findings from the research study

confirmed this as well. Priode et. al. (2020), Sabio (2019), and Banks and Dohy (2019) showed that nursing students experience barriers and challenges to persistence, retention, and graduation. Effective strategies and interventions must be developed and implemented that will improve student retention and persistence and lead to successful student outcomes. These previous studies offered me guidance and information that influenced the direction of the current study. As I interviewed the participants for the current study and began to review, analyze, and transcribe the data, I gained confidence in conducting research. After the data analysis was complete, I compiled the results and wrote about my findings. As I continued the scholarly review of the literature, my knowledge base expanded and I gained a greater understanding and appreciation for peer-reviewed publications, journal articles, and scholarly research.

Growth as a Practitioner

The research study process has provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my professional practices as an academic practitioner. Reading hundreds of journals articles; collecting, analyzing, and transcribing data; reviewing enormous amounts of research data; and looking at numerous conceptual frameworks and theories has given me a deeper understanding and insight into the challenges that students face and nursing faculty and administrators struggle with. Reviewing the literature and listening to the experiences of the study participants have helped me to better align my teaching strategies and interactions with students. As an educational practitioner, I know that following evidence-based practices in academia and nursing, staying abreast of new and current

literature, and being committed to lifelong learning are essential to effectively to being a teacher of adult learners.

Growth as a Project Developer

As the project developer, I was able to take the findings from this study and create a professional development program. Creating the professional development project gave me the opportunity to develop a program that could be shared with nursing faculty and administrators at the local community college that could offer strategies to help improve the retention and persistence rates of their nursing students. From the participant interviews and a review of the literature, I learned that poor student retention is often due to nonacademic challenges that students face and that effective strategies are needed to mitigate the problem. As a result, I created a 3-day professional development program for nursing faculty to share research-driven and evidence-based strategies that can be implemented in the nursing program to help improve student outcomes. Through the research process, I learned that adult learners/nursing faculty need to be engaged and understand why they needed to learn the information being imparted in professional development. As a result, the professional development program included interactive activities, collaborative teamwork, group sessions, and discussions. As the project developer, I was able to tailor the program to meet the needs of the participants. As I near the end of my doctoral education process, I feel comfortable and confident referring to myself as a doctoral researcher and scholar.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

This research study is significant because I was able to gain the perceptions of nurse graduates about nonacademic challenges to retention and persistence and nonacademic factors that facilitated their success in the nursing program. The participants in the study were recent graduates of the local community college nursing program. Collecting the experiences and perceptions of these new graduates was instrumental in identifying challenges that nursing students face and offering recommendations that can help facilitate student success. This study can be useful by offering nursing faculty and administrators strategies that may be effective in improving student retention rates and outcomes.

As I created and prepared this professional development program, I reflected on the importance of this work because it has helped me to understand the significance of student experiences and the nonacademic challenges that many adult learners face daily. Conducting this study has also shown me that students need the support of administrators and faculty members to achieve their academic goals. By providing nursing faculty and administrators with opportunities for discussion, engagement, and collaboration, I am encouraging the continuation of lifelong learning. My hope is that the professional development program will help nursing faculty and administrators increase their knowledge and understanding of nonacademic student challenges and implement nonacademic strategies that will be effective at improving student success.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This research study contributes to the literature about nonacademic challenges that impact retention and program completion for community college nursing students and offers recommendations for effective strategies that support and facilitate student success (see Banks & Dohy, 2019; Priode et. al., 2020; Sabio, 2019). Through interviewing 12 recent nurse graduates, I was able to capture their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences about the nonacademic challenges that they experienced during their nursing program. After analyzing the data and revealing the findings, I created a professional development project that nursing faculty and administrators can implement to facilitate student retention and program completion.

Potential Impact for Positive Social Change

Poor retention and low completion rates for nursing students has a negative impact on the nursing workforce. An aging nursing workforce and the growing health care needs of the U.S. population have created the need for an additional 1 million nurses to address the current nursing shortage (AACN, 2019). Nurse graduates are the pipeline to the nursing workforce. The findings of the current study have the potential for positive social change on the individual, new graduate nurse level through helping them obtain new knowledge, skills, and readiness for employment in the nursing workforce. The study also has the potential to positively impact social change by assisting health care organizations be staffed by knowledgeable, well-trained nurses who can provide safe and competent patient care. The study's potential impact for positive social change on society is ensuring a sufficient nursing workforce supply that can provide high-quality, skilled

health care delivery services to a diverse patient population (see Owens et al., 2021). The professional project developed from this study has the potential for positive social change by increasing the knowledge and understanding of nursing faculty and administrators about nonacademic challenges to nursing student retention and persistence as well as providing them with information and recommendations for strategies that can lead to successful student outcomes.

Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Implications

This study has important methodological, theoretical, and empirical implications. The problem that prompted the study was that nursing students were not graduating from the local community college's nursing program because of nonacademic challenges that impacted their retention and persistence. Solutions to this problem were proposed by the study participants who shared their perceptions and experiences in extensive detail in one-on-one interviews. I used a basic qualitative design for this study. This design was the most appropriate because it allowed the study participants to provide rich, thick descriptions of their experiences. Jeffreys's (2015) nursing universal retention success model, which emphasized how a student's personal, academic, and environmental factors can impact their success or failure, was used as the conceptual framework for this study. In the model, Jeffreys focused on the identification of at-risk students and implementation of strategies to mitigate and promote student retention and success. As I reviewed and analyzed the data, I looked for strategies that could be implemented by nursing faculty and administrators to better assist students faced with nonacademic challenges. The theoretical implications of this study suggested that providing nursing

faculty and administrators with effective strategies to help nursing students remain in the program can be instrumental in improving student retention, persistence, and outcomes.

An empirical implication of this study is that nursing faculty and administrators are knowledgeable about the academic problems that affect nursing student retention and persistence. The data from the study confirmed that nursing faculty and administrators have information on ways to address the academic challenges that affect their students. However, they were receptive to learning more about strategies that can be implemented to help mitigate the nonacademic challenges that nursing students face. Another empirical implication for this study is that additional studies that focus on nursing faculty perceptions and understanding of nonacademic facilitators of student retention and success may be helpful and inform nursing programs with regards to increasing flexibility with scheduling student clinical and course meeting dates and times. These kinds of studies might provide additional strategies that could be effective at increasing student retention and persistence.

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

There are many opportunities for future research and practice in nursing education that focus on the practices, experiences and expertise of nurses which includes students through nurse experts in the profession. The findings from this study have shown that nursing faculty and administrators want effective interventions that can be implemented to mitigate those nonacademic factors that negatively impact student retention and persistence. The research findings were aimed at developing effective strategies that can be implemented that would lead to successful student outcomes.

Additional research that examines the effectiveness of strategies aimed at mitigating nonacademic challenges and facilitating student success would be beneficial because it could offer additional strategies that might be used to improve student retention. Finally, research about how to implement nonacademic interventions that promote student success may help nursing programs better align their course offerings and schedules to better meet and support the needs of their students.

Conclusion

Research has shown that low retention and persistence rates among nursing student populations is often related to the nonacademic challenges that they face, (Banks et al, 2019; Priode et al; 2020;Priode, 2019). This qualitative study invited 12 recent nurse graduates to share their experiences and perceptions about nonacademic challenges and factors that facilitated their success in a local community college's nursing program. As I reviewed and transcribed the data from their stories, I sought to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. Priode et al. (2020) noted that there are a many nonacademic factors that can cause a nursing student to leave their program of study before completion. Poor retention, persistence and graduation rates continues to be problematic in nursing education. However, the focus of study was on the nurse perceptions of nonacademic factors that influence nursing student retention and persistence to graduation. The problem that prompted this study was students in a local community college nursing program were not staying in the program, not completing the program and/or were not graduating from the program. Although nursing faculty and administrators were aware of the problems related to student retention, they did not have

a thorough understanding of the nonacademic challenges that often lead to student attrition nor did they have any effective strategies to assist their students. As I listened to the participants during the interview process and collected the data for the study, I gained a better understanding of their perspectives. The data analysis which was driven by the research question revealed that students faced daily nonacademic challenges related to family responsibilities, work obligations and financial issues that impacted their ability to persist in school. The data analysis also revealed that family, spousal, peer and nurse instructor support, as well as emotional, physical, financial support and spiritual/religious beliefs facilitated their persistence to graduation and success. Lastly, the data supported professional development for faculty and nursing program administrators to learn about effective strategies that can be implemented that facilitate and support student success. This study is relevant and important because it highlights nursing student perceptions and experiences about nonacademic challenges that affect retention and persistence in addition to recommending effective strategies that can be implemented to improve student outcomes.

To date nursing student retention and persistence is problematic in nursing education programs. When students fail to complete their program and/or graduate the nursing workforce and the health care needs of the U.S. population are negatively impacted. Therefore, nursing faculty and administrators must find effective strategies that decrease nursing student attrition and increase nursing student retention. Nursing faculty and administrators must be committed to developing and learning new strategies and resources that will be effective in facilitating successful student outcomes.

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Appendix A: The Project

Goals: During this 3-day professional development nursing faculty and administrators/participants will be given information about nonacademic challenges that negatively impact student outcomes and how to implement effective strategies that facilitate student success. The goal of this professional development is to enhance the participants knowledge and understanding about strategies that can be implemented to reduce student retention and increase student persistence to program completion and graduation.

Learning Outcomes:

Nursing faculty and administrators will learn how to identify students at risk for attrition due to nonacademic related factors such as family responsibilities, work obligations and/or financial hardship. They will also learn how to implement effective strategies that offer support and promote successful student outcomes. Participants will engage in collaborative group activities to assess their current knowledge base about nonacademic challenges that students face and to determine their current needs about effective nonacademic strategies that promote student success. Upon completion of the professional development nursing faculty and administrators will be provided with a resource handout containing effective strategies that support student and facilitate retention and persistence.

Target Audience: The target audience for this project will be the nursing faculty and administrators at the local community college. Local health care organizations and clinical partners with the nursing school will also be invited to attend and participate in

the professional development to provide support, guidance and feedback as participants learn about effective strategies that facilitate nursing student retention.

Components: The professional development will be divided into sessions based on topics which will assist participants meet their goal of learning effective strategies that facilitate student success.

Day 1: Nonacademic challenges that students face

Day 2: Different kinds of nonacademic support for students

Day 3: Effective strategies that can be implemented to improve student outcomes

To plan this project findings from the study were incorporated to be used as guidelines to present effective nonacademic interventions to facilitate student success.

The professional development project was created to assist nursing faculty and administrators with strategies that can be implemented in the nursing program that can improve student retention. On the 1st and 2nd day of the professional development nursing faculty and administrators engage in collaborative group discussions and activities to determine the most effective nonacademic strategies to facilitate student success. On the 3rd and final day, the participants engage in collaborative activities, provide feedback and make recommendations for additional strategies that can be implemented to improve student retention and persistence.

The professional development sessions were presented using Power Point presentation and presenter/facilitator notes. The Power Point slide presentation provided an outline of the information presented during each session. Both formative and

summative assessments were used in the 3-day Professional development program. The following chart provides an overview and schedule for each day's session.

Professional Development Schedule – Day 1

Time	Activity	Method
8:00am – 8:30am	Sign-in, pick up PD materials, receive group number assignment	Sign-in table at entrance of conference room, participants pick up PD materials, table number & group assignments
8:30am-9:00am	Participant Meet and Greet, Refreshments tea, coffee & doughnuts served	Lobby area right outside of conference room
9:00am – 9:30am	Welcome, Introductions, Ice-breaker activity: What is a skill or fact that most people don't know about you? PD overview, Goals and Learning Outcomes	PD facilitator led utilizing PowerPoint slide presentation
9:30am – 10:30am	Presentation: Nonacademic challenges that nursing students face	Power Point presentation presented by PD facilitator- handout of slides given to participants
10:30am – 10:45am	Break	

10:45am – 12:00pm	Collaborative Group Activity-Role Play Teacher and Student – Scenario nonacademic student challenge Part 1 Student contemplating dropping out of school due to family responsibilities. Participants divided into groups of 4 with each person assigned a role.	Facilitator led- Collaborative group activity
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch	On your own
1:00pm – 2:00pm	Collaborative Group Activity-Role Play Teacher and Student – Scenario nonacademic student challenge Part 2 Student contemplating dropping out of school due to work obligations and financial hardships Participants divided into groups of 4 with each person assigned a role	Facilitator led- Collaborative group activity
2:00pm – 2:30pm	Closing session. Summary, question, and answers. Reflection statements- Exit Ticket	Exit ticket

Day 1- PD Facilitator Notes

- Participants sign in, pick up name tag and packet that contains PowerPoint slides handout, group number/seating assignment and reflection exit ticket
- PowerPoint slides handouts have lines for note taking
- Collection box for reflection/exit tickets placed on sign in table near exit door.
- Dry erase board with markers noted in front of room

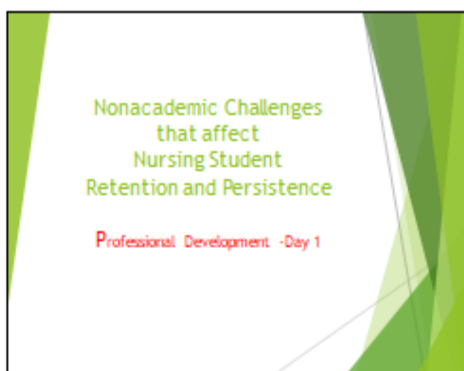
- Welcome participants to PD program, introduce facilitator, go around room allow each participant to introduce themselves
- Play ice breaker game
- Explain the goals and learning outcomes of the PD are to assist nursing faculty and administrators with learning effective nonacademic strategies that can be implemented with nursing students to help facilitate student success
- Confirm participants are in correct group assignments/tables
- Review scheduled time for breaks and lunch- Set timer on smartwatch
- Review rules for PD sessions, group discussion and participation.
 - Be respectful when others are speaking
 - Listen attentively, do not interrupt others
 - Be receptive to other viewpoints
 - Do not be judgmental or critical of others

Lead with the ice breaker activity- Each person will share a skill or fact that most people don't know about them.

- Give an overview of PD program, rationale for program, goals and learning outcomes.
- Ask the participants to explain what is meant by “nonacademic challenges”
- Ask the participants to tell the group about nonacademic challenges that nursing students face based on their experiences working with students
- Start PowerPoint presentation
- Stop periodically to emphasize important points, ask/answer questions, engage learners
- Divide participants into groups for interactive role play activity- part 1

- Describe activities that will occur after lunch
- Take lunch break
- Have participants return to their assigned groups for interactive role play activity part 2
- Collaborative discussion about role play activity
- Summary of day 1
- Have participants drop Reflection -Exit Ticket in drop box

PowerPoint Presentation Day 1



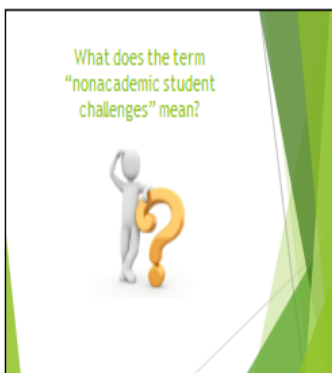
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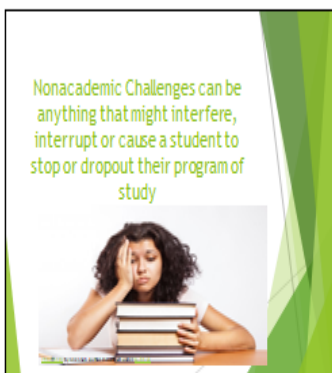
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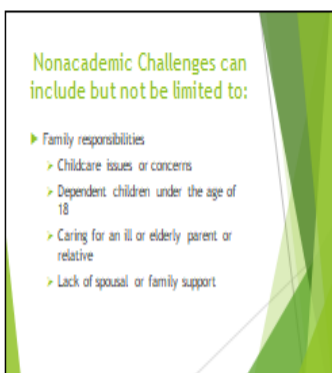
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5



6

2

Nonacademic Challenges

- ▶ Work Obligations
 - Work and school schedule conflict
 - Working part time >20 hours/wk
 - Working full time> 30-40 hours/wk
 - No flexibility with signing up for class schedule (must take course when it is offered, or you lose out)

7

Nonacademic Challenges

- ▶ Financial Barriers
 - Rising cost of tuition and books
 - Inadequate financial literacy
 - Unable to pay out of pocket
 - Lack of financial aid
 - Lack of scholarships
 - High cost of student loans/debt

8

Professional Development Day 1- Conclusion

- ◆ Summary
- ◆ Group Discussion
- ◆ Question and Answers
- ◆ Reflection -Exit Ticket

9

Professional Development -Day 2

Time	Activity	Method
8:00am – 8:30am	Sign-in, Pick up PD materials, group assignment	Sign-in table at entrance of conference room, participants pick up PD materials, table number & group assignments
8:30am - 9:00am	Continental breakfast served	Lobby area outside of conference room
9:00am – 9:30am	PD overview for day 2 overview. Review reflection statements from day 1.	Led by PD facilitator
9:30am – 10:30am	Presentation: Nonacademic support sources/resources for nursing students	Power Point presentation by PD facilitator- handout of slides given to participants
10:30am – 10:45am	Break	
10:45am – 12:00pm	Collaborative Group Activity-Case Study Scenarios -Part 1 Problem solving nonacademic student challenges and nonacademic supportive measures Each group designates a reporter, recorder, and timekeeper	Facilitator led- Collaborative group activity
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch	On your own
1:00pm – 2:00pm	Collaborative Group Activity-Case Scenarios – Part 2 Each group reports on their case study findings/results.	Facilitator led- Collaborative group activity

2:00pm – 2:30pm	Closing session. Question and Answers. Reflection statements	Exit ticket

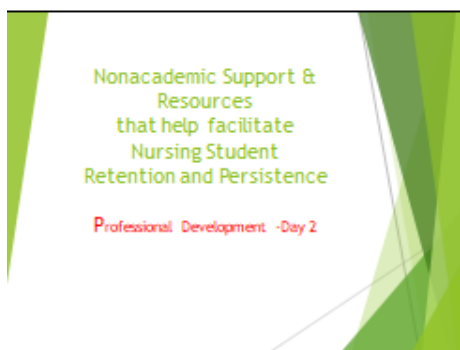
Day 2 – PD Facilitator Notes

- Participants sign in, pick up name tag and packet that contains PowerPoint slides handout, group number/seating assignment and reflection exit ticket
- PowerPoint slides handouts have lines for note taking
- Collection box for reflection/exit tickets placed on sign in table near exit door.
- Dry erase board with markers noted in front of room
- Explain the goals and learning outcomes of the PD are to assist nursing faculty and administrators with learning effective nonacademic strategies that can be implemented with nursing students to help facilitate student success
- Confirm participants are in correct group assignments/tables
- Review scheduled time for breaks and lunch- Set timer on smartwatch
- Remind participants of rules for PD sessions, group discussion and participation.
 - Be respectful when others are speaking
 - Listen attentively, do not interrupt others
 - Be receptive to other viewpoints
 - Do not be judgmental or critical of others

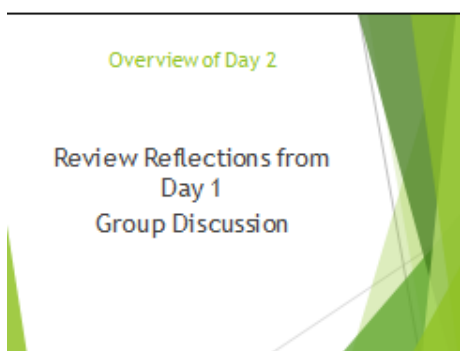
- Ask the participants to describe nonacademic measures that can be used to support nursing students
- Ask the participants to tell experiences of how they were able to offer nonacademic support nursing students
- Start PowerPoint presentation
- Stop periodically to emphasize important points, ask/answer questions, engage learners
- Divide participants into groups for interactive case study scenario activity- part 1
- Describe activities that will occur after lunch
- Take lunch break
- Have participants return to their assigned groups for interactive case study activity part 2
- Collaborative discussion about case study activity finding/results
- Summary of day 2

Have participants drop Reflection -Exit Ticket in drop box

PowerPoint Presentation Day 2



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Case Study Scenarios Part 1

Collaborative Group Activity
Divide into groups 3-5.
Each group will be assigned a Case Study scenario related to nonacademic student challenges and nonacademic support/ resources that help facilitate student success. Each group must select a Reporter, Recorder and Time-Keeper

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Case Study Scenario- Part 2

Each group will report on their case study and findings/results

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Professional Development Day 2- Conclusion

- ◆ Summary
- ◆ Group Discussion
- ◆ Question and Answers
- ◆ Reflection -Exit Ticket

12

Professional Development – Day 3

Time	Activity	Method
8:00am – 8:30am	Sign-in, pick up PD materials/instructions to download Kahoot game	Sign-in table at entrance of conference room
8:30am - 9:00am	Continental Breakfast	Lobby area outside of conference room
9:00am – 9:30am	PD overview- day 3 - Review reflection statements from day 2.	PD facilitator led
9:30am – 10:00am	Brainstorming Session – Facilitator and Participants together will compile list of effective strategies based on information learned and group collaborations and discussions during PD sessions	Brainstorming Session -Led by Facilitator
10:00am- 11:00am	Power Point presentation – Effective Nonacademic Strategies to facilitate nursing student success	Power Point presentation presented by PD facilitator- handout of slides given to participants
11:00am – 11:15am	Break	
11:15am – 12:00pm	Kahoot game -played using participants cell phones via downloaded app. Game is used to assess participants knowledge and understanding about topics covered during PD.	Facilitator led- interactive activity
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch	On your own

1:00pm – 2:00pm	Summative Assessment- Participants will take a 10-question true/false quiz to evaluate knowledge of content. Review quiz answers	Facilitator led- Collaborative group activity
2:00pm – 2:30pm	Closing session. Participants will be asked to complete a course evaluation survey.	End of PD

Day 3– PD Facilitator Notes

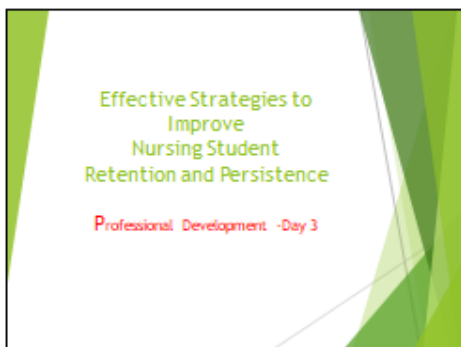
- Participants sign in, pick up name tag and packet that contains PowerPoint slides handout
- PowerPoint slides handouts have lines for note taking
- Collection box for course evaluation surveys placed on sign in table near exit door.
- Dry erase board with markers noted in front of room
- No assigned seating noted for today
- Review scheduled time for breaks and lunch- Set timer on smartwatch
- Brainstorming session
- Participants will use dry erase boards for brainstorming activities
- Remind participants of rules for PD sessions, group discussion and participation.
 - Be respectful when others are speaking
 - Listen attentively, do not interrupt others
 - Be receptive to other viewpoints

- Do not be judgmental or critical of others

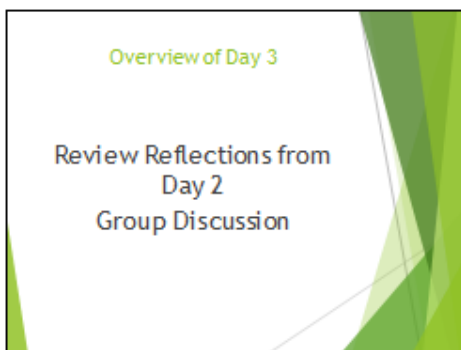
Ask the participants to download the Kahoot.it app to their smartphone

- Review instructions for interactive Kahoot game using participants smartphones
- Play Kahoot Game
- Review
- Stop periodically to emphasize important points, ask/answer questions, engage learners
- Describe activities that will occur after lunch
- Take lunch break
- Participants will take 10-question True/False quiz -summative assessment
- Review quiz answers
- Summarize goals and learning outcomes of the PD
- Closing remarks
- Participants will complete course evaluation survey, place in drop box near entrance

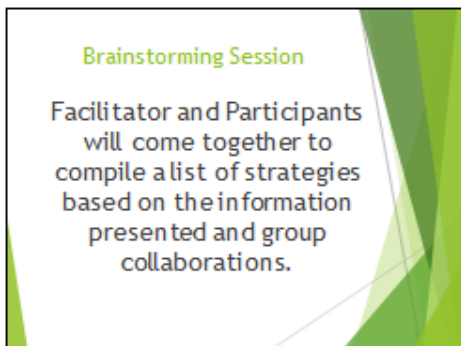
PowerPoint Presentation Day 3



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Effective Strategies to Facilitate Nursing Student Retention

- ▶ Guided Pathways
- ▶ Early Identification of students at risk for failure
- ▶ Teaching students' strategies that help them learn how to balance their lives with school and work
- ▶ Teaching students how to prioritize and set goals
- ▶ Encouragement for students to join student organization and clubs

4

Effective Strategies to Facilitate Nursing Student Retention

- ▶ Peer partnerships and support groups
- ▶ Faculty Mentorship
- ▶ College Advisors
- ▶ Professional Certificates
- ▶ Professional Development
- ▶

5

Effective Strategies to Facilitate Nursing Student Retention

- ▶ Emotional, physical and mental support from;
 - ✓ Family/spouse
 - ✓ Peers/classmates
 - ✓ Employers
 - ✓ College/Universities
 - ✓ Community

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Professional Development Quiz

Directions: Please circle True or False for the following questions

1. Low nursing student retention and persistence rates are problematic in nursing education? True or False
2. Nursing students face nonacademic challenges that often affect their ability to remain in the nursing program? True or False
3. Nursing students need various kinds of nonacademic support to help them succeed in school? True or False
4. There is a nursing shortage and nurse graduates are needed to sustain the nursing workforce. True or False
5. Nursing faculty and administrators can provide nonacademic support to nursing students. True or False
6. Nonacademic strategies that facilitate student retention and persistence include early identification of students at risk. True or False
7. Peer support has been shown to increase student retention rates. True or False
8. Lack of family support is a nonacademic challenge that many nursing students face. True or False
9. Childcare issues or family responsibilities can cause a student to drop out of school. True or False
10. Faculty-student mentorship can be a supportive relationship to nursing students. True or False

Professional Development Evaluation Form

Directions: Please circle one response

How would you rate the overall quality of the PD presentation? Excellent Good Fair

How well did the presenter state the objectives? Excellent Good Fair

Were the sessions informative and interesting? Excellent Good Fair

What is your overall rating of the facilitator? Excellent Good Fair

How effective were the handouts? Excellent Good Fair

What was the most useful part of this professional development? Why?

What was the least useful part of this professional development? Why?

What additional professional development would you like to see?

Appendix B: Semistructured Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Interviewee Pseudonym Code: _____

Zoom Audio- Conference Interview:

Hello:

Thank you for taking time to meet with me and participate in this interview for my doctoral study project.

Purpose:

The purpose of my doctoral project is to explore the perceptions of nurse graduates regarding nonacademic factors that they believe helped to facilitate their success. I remind you that all your identity and responses will remain confidential and that you have the right to withdraw your consent at any time. This interview will be audio recorded for the purpose of ensuring accuracy in reviewing and analyzing your responses.

Interview Questions:

- Tell me about any challenges you encountered during your nursing school experience.
 - a. For example, if you worked full or part time while attending school, how did you balance your workload between work and school?
- Describe the effect that attending school had on you financially.

- a. If you experienced financial challenges, how were you able to manage or overcome them?
- Describe how attending school affected your personal life, such as family responsibilities or health issues.
 - a. Explain how you were you able to overcome or manage any challenges.
 - Describe the support systems or resources that were instrumental in helping you overcome any of the challenge that you faced while attending school.
 - Please describe a time or situation where you felt like giving up or quitting the program.
 - Explain what helped you to be able to successfully complete and graduate from the nursing program.
 - a. Identify specific factors that contributed to your success.
 - Now that you have graduated from the program, what advice would you give to current students regarding persistence and program completion?
 - What recommendations would you give to the nursing program regarding improving student retention and completion rates?