

# The use of gaming as a peer mentoring tool for student success strategies<sup>1</sup>



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## KEYWORDS:

Peer mentoring;  
Gaming;  
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**Abstract** The use of a novel board game, called “Steps of Success,” is discussed as a peer mentoring tool. Students progress through the game by answering questions about strategies that promote a nursing student’s ability to achieve academic success. Freshman and senior nursing students in an associate degree nursing program played the game together during peer mentoring labs. A questionnaire used to assess student feedback suggests that playing the game benefits both groups.

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## 1. Introduction

Nursing student success, which is measured by program completion and passing the NCLEX-RN, is essential to meet the increasing need for registered nurses (Joint Statement from the [Tri-Council for Nursing, 2010](#)). Innovative active learning strategies, such as gaming, can be used in a peer mentoring format to help students prepare for issues that impact their academic success. Variables such as testing skills, organizational skills, study habits, rest and nutrition, and the ability to manage life events have been identified by students as important to their success ([Griffiths, Papastrat, Czekanski, & Hagan, 2004](#); [Rogers, 2010](#)). Although faculty mentoring can be useful in addressing these issues ([McGann & Thompson, 2008](#)), [Latino and Unite \(2012\)](#) found that

peer mentoring was less intimidating, and “messages of transition and responsible behaviors can be better received from someone who has recently had the experience or is facing similar challenges” (p. 33). Peer mentoring has also been recognized as having benefits for both the mentor and mentee ([Robinson & Niemer, 2010](#)). [Broscious and Saunders \(2001\)](#) found that the mentees had lessened feelings of anxiety and increased sense of well-being or confidence, and the mentors reported enhanced leadership and confidence. Gaming is a nontraditional tool that can be used to provide information to students in a manner that is enjoyable and addresses different student learning styles. Unfortunately, research regarding the use of gaming over traditional teaching methods has been inadequate to make judgments about the effectiveness of each strategy ([Blakely, Skirton, Cooper, Allum & Nelmes, 2009](#)). Although gaming does have identified advantages, such as reducing stress and anxiety, enhancing motivation, and promoting team work, it also has the possible disadvantages of creating stress and embarrassment when the wrong answer is given, and competition can be seen as threatening ([Blakely et al., 2009](#), p. 261). [Graham and Richardson \(2008\)](#) suggest that when “participants become aware of their own values, the

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atmosphere is one of self-discovery and continuous revelation and the experience is fun” (p. 41). Peer mentoring between senior- and freshman-level nursing students allows for the exchange of real, first-hand advice. A student success game was developed and implemented in an associate degree nursing program (ADNP) to provide some structure and guidance to a peer mentoring experience.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. The program

Current enrollment in the clinical portion of the ADNP in a Mid-Atlantic state is 241 students with an age range of 17–57 years. The population is predominantly female (80%) and Caucasian (68%). Other ethnicities, as reported by the students, included Black (17%), Hispanic (8%), Asian/Pacific Islanders (6%), and American Natives (0.4%). After completion of prerequisite courses, full-time students progress through eight clinical nursing courses in four semesters.

Student success and retention are significant priorities for both the College and the ADNP. Because the college’s mission is to provide successful employment upon completion and/or transfer to a senior institution, the ADNP strives to meet this mission by creating and implementing retention and success strategies for the nursing students.

### 2.2. The game

It was determined that a “gaming” strategy could be used to help students in the ADNP more clearly understand possible obstacles to their success and maximize strategies that would support their success and retention through increased knowledge and awareness of study habits, available support systems, common pitfalls, and other varied success strategies. The interactive board game was developed with the support of a College funded Student Success Grant designed to fund innovative projects that promote student success and progression towards graduation.

The game, called Steps of Success (S.O.S.), was patterned after the Hasbro children’s game “Chutes & Ladders.” The game boards were designed with the College insignia in the center surrounded by medical clipart. Game spaces 1 through 50 progress from the bottom to the top of the board with stairs and slides interspersed, and the final “winning” space contains clipart of graduation. Clipart of multiracial/gender nurses was used to design the game pieces. The game accommodates four to six players at each board. The game starts with a student choosing a question card, which is read aloud to the other students and then answered. If the student answers the question correctly, the game piece is moved the designated number of spaces; if not, the next student then draws a question card and repeats the process. When

a student lands on a square that is at the bottom of a set of stairs, a “stairs” card is drawn and the game piece is moved up to the square at the top of the stairs. The stairs cards reflect positive student success strategies; for example, “I turned down my friend’s request to be part of her study group because I know that is not how I learn best.” Conversely, if a student lands on a square at the top of a slide, a “slides” card is drawn, and the game piece is moved down to the square at the bottom of the slide. The slides cards reflect actions or perceptions that impede student success; for example, “I was texting during class..I missed important information.” The students are encouraged to read the cards that they draw and then share and discuss the information with one another. The student who reaches the “Graduation!” square would be the winner of the game.

### 2.3. Peer mentoring lab

In the ADNP, there is a peer mentoring lab in place for freshman and senior nursing students. Initially, this lab focused only on physical skills, and senior students mentored the freshmen at each of four stations. The senior students typically reported how confident they had felt in the role of mentor, whereas the freshman students would voice how comfortable they were with learning from another student instead of an instructor “watching over them.” With this feedback in mind, and knowing the game was geared towards student success, the game was set up as a fifth station in the peer mentoring lab. Who better to play the game with new nursing students than senior nursing students, whose success strategies had enabled them to get through to the final semester?

During these gaming sessions, the positive interactions between the two levels of students were informally observed. Conversation stimulated by the game questions provided the opportunity for senior students to offer their own tips and suggestions for success in the nursing program to the freshmen. After playing the game in this format for two semesters, a question became evident about the benefits of the game. Did the students at both levels walk away with something from having played the game together?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Design

Information was gathered regarding what both groups of students thought about the game and the perceived benefits of playing it. Two paper-and-pencil questionnaires were developed, one for the freshmen and the other for the seniors. Questions were framed using a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (*don't agree at all*) to 5 (*agree completely*). First, feedback was solicited about the game itself in order to make improvements. Both questionnaires asked the same

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