

Predictors of Retention of Students in an Online Nurse Practitioner Program

Joyce M. Knestrick, PhD, FAANP, Melody R. Wilkinson, DNP, FNP, Tiffany P. Pellathy, MSN, ACNP, Julia Lange-Kessler, DNP, FACNM, Ross Katz, MIDS, and Peggy Compton, PhD, FAAN

ABSTRACT

Online advanced practice nursing programs face multifaceted issues related to retention. A study was conducted to identify predictors of attrition in 847 students admitted to an online family nurse practitioner, adult gerontology—acute care nurse practitioner, or a certified nurse midwifery/woman's health nurse practitioner program. Attrition can be predicted with good accuracy on the basis of relatively few predictor variables. The identification of students at risk for attrition provides opportunity for early faculty support and intervention.

Keywords: attrition, graduate nursing programs, nursing education, online distance education, nurse practitioner programs, retention

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The retention of students in advanced practice registered nursing (APRN) programs is challenging, particularly in distance online programs. The number of online programs in higher education has almost doubled between 2002 and 2012, with an estimated 20 million students reporting taking an online course in 2011.¹ Graduate nursing programs shadow this trend. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing² reported in 2013 that 85.5% of masters of science in nursing degrees were offered using some type of online format. Overall, outcomes such as graduation rates and certification examination results have been positive. In 2010, a meta-analysis conducted by the United States Department of Education concluded that online student learning outcomes were at least as effective as face-to-face instruction, if not modestly better.³ Another large meta-analysis of online health professional education suggests that online programs that integrate interactivity, practice exercises, repetition, and feedback into course work have the best outcomes.⁴ In light of the expansion in online programs, additional information on retention/attrition is needed to ensure the success of distance online APRN students. In this article, withdrawal (W) and leave of absence (LOA) as indicators of

attrition are examined. Attrition is a multifaceted issue. Early identification of students at high risk of attrition provides opportunities for faculty intervention related to academic advising and structured retention initiatives throughout the curriculum.⁵

BACKGROUND

The study setting is a large advanced practice nursing program delivered by an online-hybrid model platform that includes on-campus simulation intensives, community-based clinical experiences, weekly online synchronous sessions with a 12:1 student/teacher ratio, and asynchronous learning materials the students are required to complete before the synchronous sessions. Students complete precepted specialty clinical rotations in their communities (600–1,000 hours). Community integration and connection are encouraged by student community projects, assignments, and professional activities. Because of the distance delivery model, ensuring student success and reducing factors that lead to attrition are of utmost importance.

The literature suggests that the online teaching modality is particularly well suited to adult nurse learners, who are often employed and/or may

practice in underserved or rural communities.^{3,6} However, because of diverse and often nontraditional educational backgrounds, not all students admitted to advanced practice nursing programs ultimately succeed in online study. In a recent review of the literature on improving student retention in online graduate programs, Gazza and Hunker⁷ reported that online learning opportunities, while meeting the needs of many nursing professionals, also bring challenges. Student retention, or continued enrollment in an online program from admission through program completion, is one such challenge. Retention rates for nursing programs delivered via distance education are not available in the published literature, making it difficult to compare rates in graduate nursing programs with those of higher education overall. Graduation rates, an indirect measure of retention, are key indicators for program accreditation for all levels of nursing education in the US.

Little is known about the predictors of attrition in online nursing programs. In a descriptive study of archival data, the characteristics of face-to-face and online masters of science in nursing participants, both admitted students and graduates, were described and compared with one another with respect to family nurse practitioner (FNP) certification examination pass rates.⁸ The admission and graduation grade point averages (GPAs) in the 2 groups were not statistically different, and first-time pass/fail rates on the certification examinations revealed no differences. Although the online students had more experience as registered nurses, both the face-to-face and online students were well prepared to pass the certification examination.⁸

A study of nurse anesthesia students indicated that students who successfully completed the online program were younger, had a higher GPA in their undergraduate program, and achieved a higher analytic total Graduate Record Examination score than students who withdrew or were dismissed. Challenges such as personal, family, and other socioeconomic issues often overlapped with academic performance problems, leading to attrition.⁹

Gibson¹⁰ has identified many reasons why some students remain and others drop a class. These include factors such as student characteristics, the quality of the class or its instruction, the course's discipline,

socioeconomic factors, disabilities, and even apathy. Three categories of factors affecting retention in distance courses derived from Gibson's work were used to provide the conceptual framework for this study: student factors including educational preparation, motivational and persistence attributes, and student academic self-concept; situational factors including family and employer support and changes in life circumstances; and educational system factors such as quality and difficulty of instructional materials and provision of tutorial support. The identification of predictors of student success or failure early in the program affords the opportunity to provide timely and effective remediation; it can be critical to student and program success. Students are often advised to withdraw or take an LOA in order to avoid course failure and to allow for an opportunity to retake the course.

The purpose of this study was to examine the student factors (undergraduate GPA, science GPA, number of science credits, and statistics credits), situational factors (age), and educational system (full-time vs part-time status) as predictors of attrition based on W (which might be voluntary or involuntary) and LOA rates within the first 2 terms of program entry in the university's online graduate advanced practice nursing programs. Being a retrospective study, other situational predictors such as personal and family issues, employment responsibilities, and educational system factors such as advising were not considered in this analysis.

METHODS

A descriptive, retrospective study design was used to develop a statistical predictor model for student attrition. The model was developed from deidentified student data collected upon admission. Theorized student, situational, and educational system factor variables both before and after admission were extracted from student files to determine the degree to which each contributed to student attrition because of W and LOA within the first 2 terms of program entry.

The sample on which the predictor model was built consisted of 847 students entering a large, private, accredited, mid-Atlantic university's online APRN program between January 2013 and January

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5569831>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5569831>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)