



# What deters nurses from participating in web-based graduate nursing programs?☆

## A cross-sectional survey research study

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*  
Accepted 24 July 2015

*Keywords:*  
Deterrents  
Participation  
Distance learning  
Online  
Nursing faculty shortage  
Web-based graduate nursing  
Registered nurses

### SUMMARY

**Background:** A graduate degree is required of nursing faculty in America. Because of the nursing faculty shortage, web-based graduate nursing programs are being offered to encourage nurses to return to school. The identification of deterrents to participating in these programs is an important step in increasing enrollment.

**Objective:** To identify deterrents to participation in web-based graduate nursing programs.

**Design:** Descriptive survey research.

**Setting:** Louisiana

**Participants:** Two hundred and eighty-one registered nurse members of the Louisiana Nurses' Association.

**Methods:** The 54-item four-point Likert-type interval scale *Deterrents to Participation in Web-Based Graduate Nursing Programs Survey Instrument* was used. Data were collected over 8 weeks using SurveyMonkey.com to administer the web survey tool to all members of the Louisiana State Nurses' Association.

**Results:** A factor analysis revealed a three-factor solution that explained 55.436% of the total variance in deterrents to participation in web-based graduate nursing programs. The factors were labeled "concerns about quality, cost, and time," "concerns about access to resources: technological and personal," and "concerns about electronic mediated communication." Multiple regression analysis revealed an overall model of three predictors of deterrents to participation in web-based graduate nursing programs: no computer literacy, annual household income between 20,000 and 50,000 dollars, and having the current educational status of graduating from a diploma RN program. This model accounted for 21% of the variance in the deterrents to participation scores.

**Conclusions:** Since these three significant predictors of deterrents to participation in web-based graduate nursing programs were identified, web-based nursing graduate program administrators might consider an outreach to RN diploma graduates in an effort to make them aware of available technology support programs to foster participation. Scholarships for lower income nursing students are recommended, and programs to support computer literacy within the nursing community should be considered.

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### Introduction

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2014) reported that "78,089 qualified applicants were turned away from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2013 due to insufficient numbers of faculty, clinical sites, and/or clinical preceptors, lack of classroom space and budget constraints" (p. 1). "In this age of technology, the nursing profession is facing a shortage like it has never experienced in

the past" (Mancuso-Murphy, 2007, p. 252). Nursing faculty are aging and retiring which is compounding the problem (Mancuso-Murphy, 2007).

The minimal educational requirement to teach nursing is the master's degree in nursing (Louisiana State Board of Nursing, 2006). Because of the nursing faculty shortage, web-based graduate nursing programs are being offered to encourage nurses to return to school. The identification of deterrents to participating in these programs is an important step in increasing enrollment.

The purpose of this study is to describe what registered nurses in the state of Louisiana, who are members of the Louisiana State Nurses' Association, identify as deterrents to participation in web-based graduate nursing programs (Carpenter, 2010). A limitation of this study is that only Louisiana registered nurses who have membership in the Louisiana State Nurses Association were surveyed. Generalizability of the study is

☆ I wish to acknowledge Dr. Krisanna Machtmes for her supervision of the original dissertation research from which I created this journal article submission.

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limited due to the use of nonprobability census sampling of all RNs belonging to a professional nursing organization in one southern state.

## Background/Literature

This literature review has exposed a gap in the literature with regards to finding deterrents to RN participation in web-based graduate nursing programs by Louisiana RNs. No empirical studies were found that addressed deterrents to participation in web-based graduate nursing programs by Louisiana RNs. Hodson-Carlton et al. (2003) surveyed 162 National League of Nursing (NLN)-accredited nursing programs in an attempt to study online enrollment. Online RN-BSN programs account for about 90% of students enrolled in online nursing courses. There are still only 3.65% of nursing students who are participating in online master's courses, 2.29% participating in online associate degree courses, 2.14% in online basic baccalaureate courses, and 0.78% are participating in online continuing education. Participation in online LPN-RN programs are at 0.36%, whereas participation in online doctorate programs are equal to about 0.06% (Hodson-Carlton et al., 2003).

Clayton and Smith (1987) studied motives of women re-entering college and found that “for over one-fourth (28.3%) of the women *role change* was a motivating factor for return to college” (p. 102). “The only other positive motivating factor found was *social*, which represented just over one-fifth of the sample” (Clayton & Smith, p. 102). These results beg the question: is the idea of a web-based course thought of by RNs as one with a lack of social interaction? Diekelmann and Mendias (2005) identified the importance of social presence in an online course. Could this fear of isolation be a factor that is a deterrent to RN participation in web-based graduate nursing programs? The literature at this time, does not tell us.

Atack and Rankin (2002) did a descriptive study of registered nurses who participated in a web-based continuing education course and found that insufficient time and access to computers were deterrents. “Many nurses reported wanting more feedback from the teacher; they missed talking to the teacher and their peers” (p. 462). This supports the findings of Clayton and Smith (1987) with regards to reasons for participation in adult education programs, in that a “positive motivating factor found was *social*” (p. 102).

One theme that has emerged in the literature on deterrents to participation in adult education is that researchers have not identified any one comprehensive theory of deterrents to participation, nor have they identified a consistent finding of deterrents that might predict participation levels in adult education activities, and be generalized to a wider population (Cookson, 1986; Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982; Darkenwald and Valentine, 1985; Johnstone and Rivera, 1965; Scanlan and Darkenwald, 1984; Thompson, 1992).

I hope that this study of deterrents to participation in web-based graduate nursing programs by Louisiana RNs will contribute to the body of knowledge on deterrents to participation in web-based distance learning in an effort to do just what Valentine and Darkenwald (1990) suggested “to make education more accessible to adult learners” (p. 40).

It is important to understand that there are several different paths that a student can take to earn the opportunity to take the National Council Licensing Examination to become a registered nurse. The traditional ways to become a registered nurse include graduating from a diploma program, an associate degree program, or a baccalaureate degree program in nursing. In response to the nursing shortage, a number of accelerated programs of nursing have been created in an effort to streamline the path that a student can take to become a registered nurse (Speziale, 2002). These registered nurse programs include degree programs that can be completed in 18 months if the student already has a bachelor's degree in another discipline (Wink, 2005). There are also licensed practical nurse to registered nurse programs that shorten the length of time that it takes for a licensed practical nurse to earn the registered nurse credential (Louisiana State Board of

Nursing, 2006). There are also programs to encourage associate degree students to continue lifelong learning toward earning the baccalaureate credential by participating in registered nurse to baccalaureate nurse programs, many of which are offered online (Louisiana State Board of Nursing, 2006). In graduate nursing education, there are also registered nurse to master's prepared nurse programs, which allow nurses who have an associate degree or a diploma to earn both a bachelors and masters degree in the same program graduating in less time (Zemaitis and Kosmach, 1991).

These are all creative educational initiatives that have a common goal, that of reducing obstacles or deterrents to students who wish to become registered nurses or who wish to advance their education to obtain a higher degree in nursing.

In order to work as a faculty member in a nursing curriculum, a master's degree is required (National League for Nursing, 2005a, May 9; National League for Nursing, 2002, May 18; Louisiana State Board of Nursing, 2006; Louisiana State Nurses Association, 2001). It is well documented that there is a shortage of nursing faculty nationally (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2014; National League for Nursing, 2005b, Dec 9; National League for Nursing, 2002, May 18). This is also the case in the state of Louisiana (Louisiana State Board of Nursing, 2006; Louisiana State Nurses' Association, 2001; Louisiana Workforce Commission, 2008).

Themes that emerged from the research (Lupien and Rosenkoetter, 2006; and Louisiana State Nurses Association, 2001) and from the articles that addressed the national nursing shortage and the tremendous need for MSN and PhD prepared faculty (Allan and McClellan, 2007; Berlin, and Sechrist, 2002; Curl et al., 2007; Fontaine and Dracup, 2007; National League for Nursing, 2005b, December 9) included that there is a graying of nurse faculty who have graduate degrees of either the master's or the doctorate. “The average age for graduates of nursing doctoral programs is 46 years with fewer than 7% of graduates younger than 35 years” (Lupien and Rosenkoetter, 2006, p. 371).

The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. to describe selected demographic information of the study sample,
2. to describe deterrents to participation in web-based graduate nursing programs,
3. to describe a factor analysis of the data set,
4. to determine if differences in perceived deterrents exist among the selected demographics, and
5. to determine if a model exists which explains a significant portion of the variance of deterrents and specific demographic characteristics.

## Methods

The target population included registered nurses in the state of Louisiana who were members of the Louisiana State Nurses' Association ( $n = 1100$ ). The sample consisted of the RNs who responded to the survey ( $n = 281$ ).

The instrument used in this study is the *Deterrents to Participation in Web-based Graduate Nursing Programs Survey Tool*. This tool was adapted from a survey tool created by Perdue and Valentine (2000). Permission to use and to adapt the original Survey tool to the population of nursing was obtained by Perdue and Valentine. A panel of experts reviewed the instrument and it was pilot tested (Perdue and Valentine, 2000). Data collection for this nursing study took place over a period of 8 weeks. The web survey tool, Deterrents to Participation in Web-based Graduate Nursing Programs, was sent to participants using SurveyMonkey.com, an Internet survey company. A total of four subsequent follow-up invitation reminders were sent via e-mail. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). E4598 is the IRB approval number for the study (Carpenter, 2010).

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