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Factors Influencing Nursing Student Success After Readmission



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ABSTRACT

This study investigated factors predicting attrition in students readmitted to an associate degree nursing program. The semester a student is initially dismissed and reason for dismissal influenced attrition. Other influences included readmission grade point average, reason for dismissal, taking coursework to raise grade point average, having a history of misconduct, having poor attendance, and failing skills evaluations. Results can be used as a guide to refine readmission criteria.

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Introduction

Students in nursing school are expected to perform at a level that meets established minimum competencies. Unfortunately, every school has students who do not meet performance expectations or find themselves unable to continue schooling for personal reasons, making them subject to readmission policies. Students enter nursing school from diverse social, economic, and education backgrounds. Many are academically unprepared, with poor test-taking skills and a lack of understanding of the rigors of nursing school, making it more difficult for them to learn what they need to know to be successful (Harding, 2012). First-year retention rates support this, with rates about 87% for bachelor of science in nursing programs and 80% for associate degree nursing (ADN) programs (National League for Nursing, 2016). Attrition within nursing programs is problematic for students and to the program for multiple reasons. In addition to contributing to the nursing shortage by reducing the number of new graduates available, it reduces tuition revenue for the program, ineffectively uses financial aid resources, and causes students and families distress and increased costs (Dante, Fabris, & Palese, 2015).

Many schools have strict readmission policies for students who have either failed or withdrawn from the program. These policies may place students on warning, probation, suspension, or dismissal from the program. The most common response is to suspend or dismiss these students. However, many of these students want to continue their education. How does one decide if a student should

have a second chance? What objective criteria can be used to determine if a student will succeed or not, or do such criteria exist?

Literature Review

There has been some exploration of factors influencing college completion for students who were dismissed for academic or personal reasons. Those who complete after readmission tend to have higher grade point averages (GPAs) and had completed more semesters and credits (Berkovitz & O'Quin, 2006). Little evidence is available that addresses the success of nursing students who have been readmitted following academic dismissal. Studies have identified reliable predictors of success for entry-level nursing students, including entry GPA, standardized entrance examination scores, and number of credits completed prior to entry (Olsen, 2017). Similar evidence exists regarding the likelihood of success after admission, including grades in key nursing courses, program GPA, performance in science courses, and clinical performance (Abele, Penprase, & Termes, 2013; Dante, Valoppi, Saiani, & Palese, 2011; Harris, Rosenberg, & Grace O'Rourke, 2014). However, it is unknown if these same criteria apply to students after readmission. It is plausible that generalizations about these predictors of success do not apply to students after dismissal for unsatisfactory academic performance or who withdraw for personal reasons.

The dismissal and readmission policies at the university studied offer the dismissed student, one who leaves the program for academic or personal reasons, the opportunity to reenter the program at any time, as long as the program is completed within 5 years. Most students reenter the program the next time the required course in the nursing sequence is offered. To meet criteria for readmission, students are required to have a 2.70 GPA on a 4-point scale and submit a readmission application, which is reviewed by a readmission committee. The committee's decision to readmit is based upon review

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of the student's entire academic record, a written application, and seat availability. The process is often cited as a source of emotional turmoil for students, parents, administrators, and nursing faculty.

The faculty perspective here was that incidentally, it appeared that several other factors were related to program completion following readmission. Faculty believed that those students who had not passed multiple skills evaluations had a history of behavior misconduct or were unsuccessful on medication math tests tended not to complete the program. While there had been a few reports of attendance being linked with poor examination grades, faculty believed that a history of multiple absences and episodes of tardiness was directly related to motivation and a student being less likely to complete (Rejnö, Nordin, Forsgren, Sundell, & Rudolfsson, 2017). Students who voluntarily left for personal reasons, although in good academic standing, appeared to be successful upon return. Research regarding personal factors affirms that academically capable students may voluntarily leave school because of family responsibilities, inability to arrange childcare, and having to work to meet financial obligations (Harris et al., 2014; Pitt, Powis, Levett-Jones, & Hunter, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors influencing program completion in nursing students readmitted to an ADN program. The results of this study will allow administrators and nursing faculty to develop evidence-based readmission policies based on clearly defined criteria that predict a student's likelihood of completing the program.

Method

Design

Data were collected using an archival design from the records of all students readmitted after dismissal between fall 2009 and spring 2015 to an ADN program on a regional campus in northeast Ohio. *Dismissal* was defined as leaving the nursing program at any time before completion. Students readmitted were tracked from the reentry point until either dismissed a second time or successful, which was defined as program completion. No currently enrolled students were included in the sample.

Measures

Demographic data obtained included each student's gender and whether the student was a traditional student, licensed practical nurse, or paramedic. Study variables included each student's GPA when initially dismissed and GPA upon readmission to the program; reason for the dismissal—personal or academic, course(s) associated with dismissal, number of semesters completed before the first dismissal, number of semesters out of the program before readmission; midcurricular HESI (MC-HESI) scores; and National Council Licensure Examination-Registered Nurse (NCLEX-RN®) scores for those who completed. Other variables of interest included the number of clinical failures, medication math test failures, skills test failures, attendance, and conduct reports before either dismissal or program completion.

Data Collection and Analysis

After obtaining institutional review board permission, a coding sheet for retrieving the archival data was developed. To protect anonymity of archival data, all existing data were assigned an identification number for data collection and evaluation purposes. The master list of students and identification numbers was kept locked in a filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office.

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 software. Frequencies were used to describe sample characteristics. Correlation coefficients and *t* tests were used to determine whether statistically significant relationships existed between likelihood of program completion and study variables. Binary logistic regression was conducted to determine which factors most influenced the dependent variable, academic status, which was either program completion or second dismissal. The chosen level of significance (alpha level) for rejection was 0.05.

Findings

Of the 107 students for whom complete records were available, 46 (43%) were dismissed a second time, and 61 (57%) completed the program. The gender ratio mirrored practicing nurses, with 95 (88.8%) female and 12 (11.2%) male students. The sample included 98 (91.6%) traditional and 9 (8.4%) advanced standing students who were either paramedics or licensed practical nurses. There was a significant difference between the type of student and program completion (Table 1), with advanced standing students being more likely to complete ($\chi^2 = 4.075, p = .044$). There were no differences in program completion rates by gender.

The reason for dismissal and the semester a student was initially dismissed significantly influenced attrition upon readmission. Here, all students readmitted after withdrawing for personal reasons completed the program ($\chi^2 = 5.648, p = .019$). Of those students, 6 were females, 3 of whom withdrew because of pregnancy. The remaining 4 students, 3 females and 1 male, withdrew because of family responsibilities. No student readmitted after being dismissed the first semester for academic reasons in either the fundamentals nursing course or chemistry completed the program ($\chi^2 = 37.492 [7], p < .001$). Every student readmitted the final semester to repeat the final medical–surgical nursing course completed the program (Table 2). As students progressed through the second and third semesters, the percentage of students completing the program also increased, although the percentage completing after return in the third semester was just over 50% (53.2%). There was no significant difference in program completion rates for those students ($n = 21$) who failed multiple courses in any one semester ($\chi^2 [Andrew et al., 2008] .228, p = .63$).

While there was a difference, although not significant, in entry GPA and MC-HESI scores between those students who completed the program and those who did not, students who completed the program had significantly higher GPAs on readmission ($t = 2.023, p = .046$) (Table 3). The cohort of students who had to take coursework for three or more semesters to raise their GPA to meet readmission criteria had only a 10% chance of completing the program ($\chi^2 = 20.741 (4), p < .001$). A simple two-factor logistic regression model consisting of GPA on readmission and the semester a student was initially dismissed was statistically significant ($\chi^2 =$

Table 1
Demographic and program completion

Factor		Program completion		χ^2 (Andrew et al., 2008)	p		
		Yes	No				
		n	%	n	%		
Gender	Female	57	60	38	40	3.091	.079
	Male	4	33.3	8	66		
Student type	Traditional	53	54.1	45	45.9	4.075	.044
	Advanced standing	8	88.9	1	11.1		
Dismissal reason	Academic	54	54	46	46	5.648	.019
	Personal	7	100	0	0		

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