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Background

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that an additional 1.2 million registered nurses will be needed to fill positions in hospitals, long-term care facilities, community health centers, and other health care facilities by the year 2020 (National League for Nursing, 2016). Associate degree programs that can graduate nursing students in a reasonably short period, when compared with baccalaureate programs, play a large part in providing an educated, qualified nursing workforce (Peterson-Graziose, Bryer, & Nikolaidou, 2013). However, nursing programs continue to turn away qualified applicants for various reasons including lack of qualified faculty, classrooms, and clinical sites. The National League for Nursing Biennial Survey of Schools of Nursing found that 78% of associate degree nursing programs turned away qualified applicants in 2014 (National League for Nursing, 2016). Central Maine Community College (CMCC) receives 200–250 completed nursing applications for 40 openings each year. Admission is competitively based on points achieved from grades in heavily weighted science courses, grades in general education courses, and the scores received on the standardized entrance examination.

In addition to stringent admission requirements that limit the number of students admitted to nursing programs, a high rate of attrition only adds to the growing nursing shortage. Nursing schools have a responsibility not only to admit qualified students but also

to increase retention and to provide competent, caring professional graduates to help alleviate this nursing shortage (Shelton, 2012; Williams, 2010). Retention of nursing students remains a challenge for associate degree programs and, in fact, community colleges as a whole (Schrum, 2015; Windham, Rehffuss, Williams, Pugh, & Tincher-Ladner, 2014). It is estimated that almost half of all community college students leave without graduating (Windham et al., 2014). With increasing competition from other institutions and declining student enrollment over the past several years, CMCC has been making efforts not only to increase enrollment but also to improve retention rates of all students.

Although the CMCC Nursing Program has a rigorous admission process, student retention has been a challenge in the first semester nursing course, Foundations of Nursing. One out of four nursing students (5-year average) who are enrolled at the beginning of semester either does not finish or receives a grade less than required, at least a C (75%), to continue in nursing courses. A variety of reasons explain why students do not finish the course: personal and family issues, lack of realization of the commitment required for nursing school, work obligations, inability to successfully demonstrate competence in dosage calculations, and a challenging laboratory examination.

CMCC faculty identified several areas where students struggled during the first 15 weeks of the nursing program. Students often have difficulty answering nursing examination questions that are written at a higher level of Bloom's Taxonomy than in their general education courses. Other challenges are the medication calculation examination, which is given during week 10, and a skills laboratory examination, which students must pass prior to the acute care rotation. Many of the nursing students at CMCC are nontraditional students who have family and work obligations. CMCC faculty also noted that many of the students plan on continuing to work, some full time, while

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they are enrolled in nursing school. Most realize during the first semester that working while trying to complete the requirements of “Foundations course” is difficult, and many decrease, if not eliminate, working hours as they progress through the program.

Incoming freshman students attend a mandatory orientation program 4 months prior to beginning the nursing program. As part of this orientation, currently enrolled nursing students speak to the incoming class about their first semester experiences in Foundations of Nursing and offer suggestions for successful completion of the course including an emphasis on the time and effort needed to succeed. Although students entering this fundamentals course have seemingly been prepared for the rigors of the course, faculty wondered what else could be done. To improve retention rates and increase student performance in this course, the nursing program at CMCC (with assistance from the TRiO Student Success Center) developed, implemented, and evaluated an innovative Nursing Boot Camp in the summer prior to admission to the first nursing course.

The idea for the boot camp arose out of multiple conversations at the Nursing Advisory Committee, among nursing faculty, and between TRiO and the Nursing Department. At a regular Nursing Advisory Committee meeting in November 2014, the idea of a nursing boot camp was generated by members of the committee who were graduates of the nursing program who are now professionally licensed and employed. As the committee discussed nursing enrollment and retention, members discussed how “they wished they knew then, what they know now.” Thus, the idea of teaching students to successfully manage nursing school was born. Concurrently, nursing faculty were discussing how to improve the students' transition from college student in general education to college student in the nursing program. The Nursing Department Chair and Director of TRiO were also discussing retention strategies. TRiO's retention efforts are aimed primarily at teaching the student to be successful, and the question being asked was how could this apply to improving the success of nursing students.

Over the course of the next several months, more questions were generated. What should be included in a workshop that would facilitate student success? How many hours should be allotted to the workshop? When should the workshop be offered (months or weeks before class or at the start of the first nursing class)? Is the workshop mandatory or voluntary for students? If offered for free, would students see the intrinsic value and attend? How would faculty be paid for their time? As nursing faculty and TRiO began developing answers to these questions, CMCC's first Nursing Boot Camp took shape and was scheduled for late summer 2015.

Literature Review

Early intervention strategies, especially for at-risk students, prior to entering the nursing curriculum are important for student success (Harris, Rosenberg, & O'Rourke, 2014). It is important to engage students prior to the beginning of the nursing program to address social isolation and increase the likelihood that they will complete the course. Enthusiasm and willingness of faculty to provide a sense of community at the earliest stages is a significant part of the process (Wray, Aspland, & Barrett, 2013). Although several nursing schools in the country offer a “boot camp” for incoming students, an initial review of the literature yielded few results when searching for preentrance orientation programs in schools of nursing and their effect on retention. Altman, Musselman, and Curry (2010) developed a freshman orientation course that met weekly for an hour for 4 weeks. Students who attended this course indicated that the benefit of attending was the ability to form relationships with new and upper-classmen, faculty, and practicing nurses. Gilmore and Lyons (2012) discuss a nursing orientation program designed for an on-line RN-to-BSN program using face-to-face meetings with students in eight

hour sessions. The attrition rate dropped from 20% to less than 1% during the first 6 weeks of the course. Fontaine (2014) found that an extensive retention intervention program that included a 2-day comprehensive orientation program outlining the demands of the nursing curriculum had a positive effect on student retention, although no specific intervention was identified as an effective retention strategy.

The initial discussion when faculty at CMCC began planning the boot camp centered on the skills and attitudes essential for freshman nursing students to have in order to persevere through the fundamental nursing course. Results from a qualitative study by Rogers (2010) showed several factors contributed to student success in an associate degree nursing program, which included academic abilities, test-taking and study skills, prioritization of roles and responsibilities, and active participation. Williams (2010) identified time management skills and forming connections with other students and faculty as two factors that influenced nursing students to continue in a baccalaureate nursing program. Wray et al. (2013) found that “financial issues rated high in the factors that made students consider leaving the course” (p. 1706). Another reason frequently cited by students for considering leaving a nursing program was the challenge of balancing life, work, and study (Wray et al., 2013).

Faculty also felt that some students are not prepared to take on the professional role of a student nurse because of lack of soft skills such as communication, especially on social media sites, etiquette in the laboratory, and interpersonal relationships with fellow students. Lau and Wang (2014) describe an experiential summer camp program to specifically address soft skill development for baccalaureate nursing students. This 3-day residential camp emphasized learning in a fun interactive environment using games, self-exploration, and team-building exercises. The results showed improvement of students' communication, clinical interaction, and problem-solving skills.

Description of the Program/Method

All incoming students were invited to the voluntary 1-day program, and 27 students from the class of 40 attended. The program was delivered by two full-time nursing instructors and a staff member from the CMCC's TRiO (student support services) program.

The program began with a brief welcome from the program chair, and students were given a schedule of the day's activities. Students were randomly assigned to three groups. The key topics had been divided into three modules, and each group rotated through the modules during the 8-hour day. (See Table 3.1).

Module I included study skills, time and money management, scheduling strategies, and resource availability (on campus and in students' lives). Stress management was a theme in this module. Module II reviewed math skills for nursing students and an introduction to the Dosage & Calculation course students take in the first semester. Nursing laboratory procedures and etiquette were also a part of this module, and students were provided an opportunity to practice a skill (donning sterile gloves). The instructor discussed ways that students could prepare for class

Table 3.1
Sample Schedule of Boot Camp

8:00–8:15	Welcoming remarks
8:15–10:15	Modules I,II and III (rotating)
10:15–10:30	Break
10:30–12:30	Modules I,II and III
12:30–1:45	Lunch and panel discussion
1:45–3:45	Modules I, II and III
3:45–4:15	Wrap up, evaluation

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