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Students' Perceptions and Strategies for Success in an Associate Degree Nursing Program

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN AN ASSOCIATE
DEGREE NURSING PROGRAM

A Dissertation in Practice
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Higher Education
The University of Mississippi

by

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ABSTRACT

The three-manuscript dissertation is based on perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students about retention interventions at Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program on the Grenada Campus. Retention and attrition of nursing students is a current area of concern at Holmes Community College in the Associate Degree Nursing Program. Understanding adaptations that led third-semester students in the ADN program to be successful in their first-year is the focus of this study. The research questions seek to answer second-year, third-semester students' perceptions of their first-year experiences of faculty interventions and personal strategies applied for success. Understanding adaptations and personal strategies utilized by first-year students could increase efforts to further improve retention of students in their first year of nursing school. Manuscript one will provide a review of what nursing school entails and the importance of the retaining nursing students to be successful in Holmes' Associate Degree Nursing Program. Manuscript two will provide an overview of the data collection and presentation of findings related to the research in answering the research questions proposed. The final manuscript will present recommendations for implementation and dissertation plans to satisfy the requirements.

Key Words: Nursing Student Perceptions, Student Success, Retention Interventions

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family who consistently supported and encouraged me to persevere throughout this doctoral journey. They have been the foundation of my objective and have shown the utmost love and motivation to drive me to pursue my dreams, and never give up. Without unwavering reinforcement from God, my family, and co-workers, achieving this monumental academic goal would not have been impossible. “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

LIST OF NURSING ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|--|
| ACEN | Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing |
| ANA | American Nurses' Association |
| CPED | Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate |
| HCCADNP | Holmes' Community College's Associate Degree Nursing Program |
| IHL | Institution of Higher Learning |
| LLS | Learning and Life Skills |
| MSBN | Mississippi Board of Nursing |
| NCLEX-RN | National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses |
| NCSBN | National Council of State Boards of Nursing |
| NURS | Jeffrey's Nursing Universal Retention and Success Model |
| PASS | Program for Accelerated Student Success |

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is undergoing a metamorphosis where the student is the product not just a learner to increase an individual's competitiveness in the global economic market and to distribute effective pedagogy in these consumer driven times (Senior, Fung, Howard, & Senior, 2018). Learning is a process that involves a change in knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and something students must do as evidenced by how they interpret and interact with their experiences (Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, & Norman, 2010). Supporting students through the learning process is imperative in higher education today. Students faced with challenges, require motivation and effort to succeed. It is not enough for students to set goals for completing college; persistence in meeting goals is a choice the student makes and can be impacted by numerous adaptations along their journey (Tinto, 2017).

The vision for America's future in higher education is to assist all students in succeeding. Colleges and universities are striving to meet students' educational needs to be employable, successful, and competitive in the global economy of America (U. S. Department of Higher Education, 2015). Higher education in America is shifting to performance-based outcomes related to students' performance of completing college (U. S. Department of Higher Education, 2015). Providing students the opportunity to complete college and compete for employment, community colleges represent over 45% of all undergraduate enrollments in the United States and students come from diverse ethnic socioeconomic backgrounds (Shellenbarger, 2016). Many postsecondary education providers, including community colleges,

are pressured to reconsider the way things have typically been done in efforts to reform and build a culture to enhance student retention and success (Maxwell & Person, 2016).

Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCADNP) is one program out of 17 ADN programs in Mississippi that are experiencing the shift to reform for students to be successful in nursing school and pass boards to become a registered nurse (MSBN, 2018). Associate degree nursing programs introduced two-year nursing degrees to fill gaps in the nursing shortage with the growth of community colleges over fifty years ago (Mahaffey, 2002). This also met the needs of the growth of the community, government, and consumer interest. Associate Degree Nursing Programs in Mississippi accounted for 54.2% of enrollments and 43.8% of graduates in all nursing programs for the 2016-2017 academic year (McCrory, 2018). According to the United States Health Workforce Chartbook, registered nurses (RNs) represent the largest occupation of health care workers in the U.S. in 2013 (NCSBN, 2018). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the 2009-2010 academic years reports registered nurses graduating equally among associate degree and bachelor's degree programs (NCSBN, 2018). Graduating nurses in two years benefits society by providing training in skills and knowledge to take care of the ill and provide education on wellness. The skill set of the program enables students to prepare to enter the workforce and adapt to society's needs. Registered nurses' employment is projected to grow 15% from 2016-2026, faster than other occupations due to the growing chronic conditions and services required to meet the health care needs from the baby boomer population (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The associate degree nurse enters the workforce meeting society's needs while having the opportunity to advance their education and enhance their competitive edge for promotion in the workplace.

Graduation rates have continued to decline in postsecondary institutions over the last decade, forcing academic leaders to examine strategies to increase enrollment, retention, and graduation rates (Talbert, 2012). Holmes Community College has been promoting retention and graduation rates since this decline and the nursing program is accountable for reporting retention, attrition, and graduation rates to the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) who accredits the program and to the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) who governs the program (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018). ACEN is the accrediting body for the Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCADNP) and states nursing graduates must graduate within 150% of the time of the indicated program length (ACEN, 2017). The standard for 150% of the time of the program means the program is structured for six semesters or two years; therefore, students must complete the program in no more than three years or six semesters to follow compliance with accreditation standards set forth by ACEN (ACEN, 2017). Yanni (2016) reports in 2013, 74% of associate degree nursing students met this criterion.

The National Council of State Board of Nursing (NCSBN) evaluates the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) exam for licensure to become a registered nurse every three years (NCSBN, 2018). NCSBN utilizes an NCLEX Examination Committee to review the NCLEX exam to promote evidence-based excellence in providing patient safety and public protection (NCSBN, 2018). Test plans are consistent with state nurse practice by utilizing a variety of resources with expert opinions of those on the Examination Committee, NCSBN staff and boards of nursing (NCSBN, 2018). In the spring of 2013, there was an increase in the difficulty of the RN licensure examination (NCSBN, 2018). As a result, the Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) program's rigor increased by restructuring the four nursing courses (NUR I, II,

III, and IV). The restructure of the content shifted some of the medical surgical content across NUR II-IV instead of all in NUR III and IV along with the integration of pharmacology throughout the four courses instead of a separate course. The restructure was designed by faculty to increase the students critical thinking in preparation for the licensure examination earlier in the program. Retention of students in the Fundamentals (NUR I) course day program suffered the most significant loss over the next three years falling as low as 40.74% (HCCADNP Self-study Report, 2018).

All students in the HCCADNP met the same requirements for entry into the program as outlined in the bulletin for the college and listed on the Holmes Website under Associate Degree Nursing. The minimal requirements for entry include: Completing and passing Anatomy and Physiology I and II, Microbiology, and Nutrition with a “C” or higher as prerequisites; a 2.0 GPA, and an ACT composite of 18 with a 17 in math and an 18 in reading (HCC Bulletin, 2018). The average age for incoming freshman into the day NUR I course from the fall of 2015-fall of 2018 revealed similar ages of 18-45 with students in their twenties accounting for the majority. The GPA’s ranged from 2.0-4.0 with the average approximately 2.5-3.4. The ACT scores ranged from 18-26 with the average approximately 18-22. The statistics for the ages, GPA and ACT scores were collected from the computer-generated spreadsheet of applicants for the HCCADNP. There were variations among the incoming freshman, although, the majority of students fell into the average age, GPA and ACT requirements.

Given the students were similar in meeting minimal requirements, this study is focused on faculty implemented interventions and strategies the students utilized to succeed in their first year of nursing school. Implementation of retention interventions in the fall of 2017 proved to increase retention from 40.74% over the past three years to 77.36%. Retention interventions

strategies that were implemented include: PASS Class, LLS Course, Boot Camp, Co-operative testing, and Connect Groups (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018). A brief description of the retention intervention strategies will be explained in further detail of each strategy clarified in the conceptual framework. The Program for Accelerated Student Success (PASS) Class was designed to teach effective test-taking strategies were incorporated into several aspects of the nursing program. PASS class promotes student success related to test taking and is implemented by the Student Navigator who is a faculty member that assists all students with difficulties throughout the length of the program. Learning and Life Skills (LLS) Course for nursing students was designed to assist the student in study skills and promote student success in other areas to increase student retention and success. Boot Camp allows a new cohort of students' time for adjusting and familiarizing with peers and faculty before plunging into the course content. Cooperative testing enhances performance by allowing students to test with peers for a better understanding of correct answers with rationales. Connect Groups break students into small groups with one instructor to prepare for upcoming tests and review what students missed on the last test. In an effort to further improve retention of students, it is essential to understand what students experienced related to retention interventions and their perceptions of what increased their success in their first year of nursing school. The purpose of this case study is to understand students' perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions utilized in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCANDP).

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Healthcare is ever-changing, so being a nursing educator is a profession that will require life-long learning. Nursing is highly revered as a trusted and caring profession with a

commitment to helping others (Odishoo & Vezina, 2014). Professionalism is a concept that is introduced on the first day of class and stressed throughout the HCCADNP. Preparing students to become nurses utilizing critical thinking and clinical reasoning is vital to passing the program and the national examination for becoming a registered nurse. Fundamental concepts are a large part of the nursing examination for licensure and the basis for nursing as they relate to fundamental principles and safety related to patient care. These concepts are taught along with most of the skills to be a nurse in the first-semester course. Students need a strong understanding of these basic concepts in this first-semester fundamental course. Nursing draws explicitly on students' past and present experiences. These experiences shape their way of thinking to make critical decisions required to be successful in nursing school and as a novice nurse.

Retention and attrition of nursing students is a current area of concern at Holmes Community College in the Associate Degree Nursing Program. Understanding adaptations that led third-semester students in the ADN program to be successful in their first-year is the focus of this study. The inability to pass nursing school is vital as it is costly and poses a threat to the future of the nursing workforce for the students and the program. Increases in the rigor of the HCCADNP, resulted in updating the curriculum to coincide with the NCLEX test blueprint as recommended by ACEN (ACEN, 2017). The restructuring of the curriculum to integrate pharmacology and divide medical surgical content throughout NUR II-IV by the faculty was implemented to increase critical thinking early on in preparation for the licensure examination. The NUR I Fundamentals Course lays the foundation for the program and incorporates most of the necessary skills required to become a nurse.

“The NCSBN Board of Directors voted in December 2012 to raise the passing standard for the NCLEX-RN. The passing standard was revised from -0.16 logits to 0.00 logits. This

passing standard was implemented April 1, 2013, in conjunction with the 2013 NCLEX-RN Test Plan. NCSBN voted on December 9, 2015 to uphold the current passing standard for the NCLEX-RN. The passing standard will remain at the current level of 0.00 logits that was instituted April 1, 2013. This passing standard will remain in effect through March 31, 2019. The test plan cycle which is reviewed to reflect the amount of nursing ability currently required to practice competently at the entry level takes three years to review, be accepted, and published for changes (NCSBN, 2018)". The NCLEX test plan terms include:

- "Candidate Ability - The level of entry-level nursing knowledge, skills and abilities that the candidate has.
- Ability Estimate - The level of entry-level nursing knowledge, skills and abilities that the computer has determined that the candidate has.
- Passing Standard - A cut point along an ability range that marks the minimum ability level requirement. For the NCLEX, it is the minimum ability required to safely and effectively practice nursing at the entry-level.
- Logit - A unit of measurement to report relative differences between candidate ability estimates and item difficulties (NCSBN, 2018)".

The increase in the difficulty of the NCLEX examination and the increased rigor in our nursing program caused retention rates in the first-semester students to drop less than 80%. The program's standard of 80% has not been met as part of our outcomes for the past few years when end of semester summary reports were turned in and analyzed (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018). The program is accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) who also approves the program based on many factors including NLCEX board scores for students who pass the NCLEX the first time, retention, and attrition rates of students (ACEN,

2017). The changes in the ADN program produced an increase in rigor for the program overall and within each of the five nursing courses. There are four nursing courses (NUR I-NURIV) and one management course, along with prerequisite and corequisite courses. The prerequisite science courses must be passed with a “C” or higher and all NUR courses with a “B” or higher to be successful in the HCCADNP (HCC Bulletin, 2018). The increased rigor caused a drop in the four main nursing courses with Nursing I Fundamentals (NUR I) course retention being the area of greatest concern. End of Semester Summary Reports created by the course coordinator in each course per semester shows NUR I retention rates dropping after 2013 and increasing after the implementation of retention interventions to improve student success (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018).

Table 1

HCCADNP NUR I Retention Rates 2013-2017

| <u>HCCADNP NUR I</u> | <u>Retention Rates</u> |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| Fall 2013 | 77.78% |
| Fall 2014 | 56.36% |
| Fall 2015 | 40.74% |
| Fall 2016 | 45.83% |
| Fall 2017 | 77.36% |

Retention rates affect attrition rates if the students do not immediately return the following semester to allow them time to complete the 150% rate set by ACEN. The retention rate of successful students increased slowly after the rise in testing and rigor of the first-semester for the fall of 2017 but remained below the HCCADNP goal of 80% for each course as set forth by the

faculty to meet standards for accreditation (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018). Retention interventions were implemented in the fall of 2017 to increase student retention and success. Retention interventions strategies that were implemented include: PASS Class, LLS Course, Boot Camp, Co-operative testing, and Connect Groups. The purpose of this study is to understand perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions utilized at Holmes Community College ADN Program. Understanding students' perceptions that contribute to their success and retention interventions used in the first-year of nursing school could benefit the students who are unsuccessful and assist faculty in gaining an insight into factors increasing success and retention in the nursing program, not only at Holmes Community College, but at other institutions, state and nationwide.

CHAPTER MAP

The study in this manuscript will serve as Manuscript One of three manuscripts to complete my doctoral dissertation for the EdD with an emphasis in Higher Education. The introduction and problem in practice have been identified to explain why exploring perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions utilized at Holmes Community College ADN Program is important. The next section regarding professional positionality and assumptions explain my background and why this topic is of importance to me for my research study. The conceptual framework being used is Jeffreys' Nursing Universal Retention and Success (NURS) model as it most closely relates to this study on student success. The Jeffreys' model was adapted reflecting a model created to explain and understand students' perceptions of interventions in the research study. The conceptual framework defines intervention strategies that were implemented: Cooperative testing, Connect Groups, Boot Camp, PASS Class, and an LLS Course. Labaree's Political

Goals of Education related to the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate Initiatives and the review of literature contain the foundation and research for this case study subject of retention and student success. The research questions seek to answer second-year, third-semester students' perceptions of their first-year experiences of faculty interventions and personal strategies applied for success. The methodology section explains the setting and sample size of the study and how the data will be collected. The permission section explains permission obtained from the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB), Holmes Community College Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, and Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL). The interviewer has also completed CITI training in Human Research for research to be conducted.

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONALITY AND ASSUMPTIONS

The topic of student retention in first year nursing students is of extreme concern to me as faculty at Holmes Community College (HCC) in the Associate Degree Nursing Program. My subjectivity related to my study comes from personal struggles I have had on my journey through life and nursing school. The many struggles and successes in my life have shaped who I have become as a person, a nurse, and as a researcher. My journey in nursing began as I graduated from high school and attended college not knowing what I wanted to do with my life. I interviewed family members who influenced me to help determine my path. I have always loved school and teaching but have a very caring heart and love helping people. There are many nurses and teachers in my family, both my sister and aunt are teachers and I have other relatives who are nurses. I was taking general courses in college, so I decided to apply to nursing school and was accepted. This journey changed my life.

I was accepted into a BSN program and embarked on the journey for four very challenging years. As a nursing student, I had no prior experiences in a hospital or dealing with sick people other than family. I studied hard as the program was all-consuming. I noticed I had a more difficult time with test taking and applying knowledge than many of the other students in my class. I graduated high school with honors and had never taken tests like these before. There were always at least two correct answers, if not all four. Testing and clinical courses required critical thinking and a high level of application that I had not previously been exposed to in college. The same rules applied when it was time to take the licensure examination upon graduation from nursing school to begin practicing as a nurse. Upon obtaining licensure, the rewarding career of being a nurse ensued. I have been in nursing over twenty-three years and have witnessed so many astonishing and troubling things that have changed my views on life, nursing, and the world. I have practiced in various settings including hospitals, schools, dialysis centers, and home health. I spent the majority of my career in home health where I could treat the patient holistically and teach them and their families to take better care of themselves for a higher quality of life.

Even though nursing was a passionate and rewarding life, I still had a tug to teach nursing and give back some of the knowledge and experiences I had learned. Deciding to attend school again to obtain a master's degree in nursing education was another cumbersome yet rewarding experience. I have been a nurse educator at Holmes Community College for nine years now. Being a new instructor was exciting, challenging, and rewarding all at once. I quickly began noticing students who seemed to struggle, just as I had, with test taking. If students could shape their way of thinking to understand how to take the tests, it usually became a little easier even though the content and tests gradually became more difficult as they

progressed. As an instructor in the ADN program, I have observed and tried many different teaching styles to aid students in improving test-taking skills, specifically for nursing school. The nursing program has also implemented numerous new strategies to assist students with test-taking skills. I have been faculty in the HCCADNP for nine years and received a promotion at the start of my tenth year as Assistant Program Director for the Grenada ADN program. As the Assistant Director, my interest in this case study intensifies for student success, as we are in the accreditation process for the 2018-2019 academic school year with our accrediting body, ACEN and governing body, Institution of Higher Learning (IHL). I will still be an instructor in our day and night program where I am needed each semester, as well as oversee reports and day-to-day operations of students and faculty in our nursing program.

The HCCADNP recently increased rigor in the program to enhance success with board scores as a result of the licensure exam increasing in difficulty. Keeping retention rates and board scores up has been one of the sizable obstacles for our program and many other nursing schools surrounding us. We were very successful in our program in increasing our board scores with the licensure increasing in difficulty. The shift is now on retention. I have observed and feel from my own experiences in nursing school, if we could find strategies to increase success with test taking and factors that affect retention in the first-semester, it would strengthen the students' success in the program as they progress. The first-semester of nursing school is where we have had the largest retention problem in the past few years and sets the foundation for the other semesters. I want to see each student reach their potential and be successful. Being part of the first-year faculty in the two-year nursing program makes me very invested in my research interests in improving retention and student success in first year nursing students by studying third-semester nursing students who have been successful.

Nursing is a profession of devotion to the welfare of others. I believe my devotion and enthusiasm for student success as a nursing instructor led me to my problem of practice. I have received positive evaluations from students and peers in my nine years as an instructor. This has pushed me, even more, to be vested in the program and the students. I love helping others and being a nursing instructor. Being faculty in the nursing program allows me to teach students and take care of patients while still practicing as a nurse in clinical courses. In seeking stability and consistency, I feel my problem of practice could benefit the students and increase our retention rates.

The assumptions I hold related to my problem of practice and participants are derived from what I have observed over the past nine years as a nursing instructor and from my struggles in nursing school. One assumption I hold is the students are not reading and studying in preparation for class. They seem to rely on wanting the instructor to tell them what they need to know and post the power point, so they can study instead of using it as a guide or take notes and read the chapter to study. I know students have different learning styles and there is not one way to study that would encompass all students. I also presume most of the students who are being successful are putting enough time into reading, studying, taking test questions, and coming to class prepared. Another assumption I hold is that students should review concepts being presented in class each day to interact in class and participate. When they come to class unprepared, the material sounds foreign to them causing miscommunication and lack of engagement with their peers. If they are unable to interact, they get confused once they are home and studying.

My biases and assumptions are of interest to me and related to my problem of practice to see if any of the strategies implemented facilitated the students in the first-semester and

throughout the program to be successful. Exploring student success through retention interventions and personal strategies students use in HCCADNP will assist in gaining insight to implement practical changes to reflect better outcomes for the students and program. Integrity and honesty are professional qualities I expect from students as they begin and progress through the program to become a professional registered nurse.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework surrounds a model most relevant to the Problem of Practice. Jeffreys' Nursing Universal Retention and Success (NURS) model most closely relates to this study on student success. "Nurse educators are in a key position to influence retention positively" (Jeffreys, 2012, pg. 4). Nurse educators can design evidence-based retention strategies that positively target student retention and success. Understanding the student's perspective of factors that positively influence success can increase retention efforts (Jeffreys, 2012). The use of the NURS model as a framework for this study will be implemented for optimizing student success outcomes. Secondly, the retention interventions utilized in the ADN Fundamentals Course to enhance student success are defined. Finally, David Labaree's political beliefs of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility related to the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate Initiatives of equity, ethics, and social justice and how they compare to nursing student success will be explored because Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program prepares students for university transfer, productive employment, and lifelong learning that is committed to providing affordable and equal access to higher education (HCC, 2018).

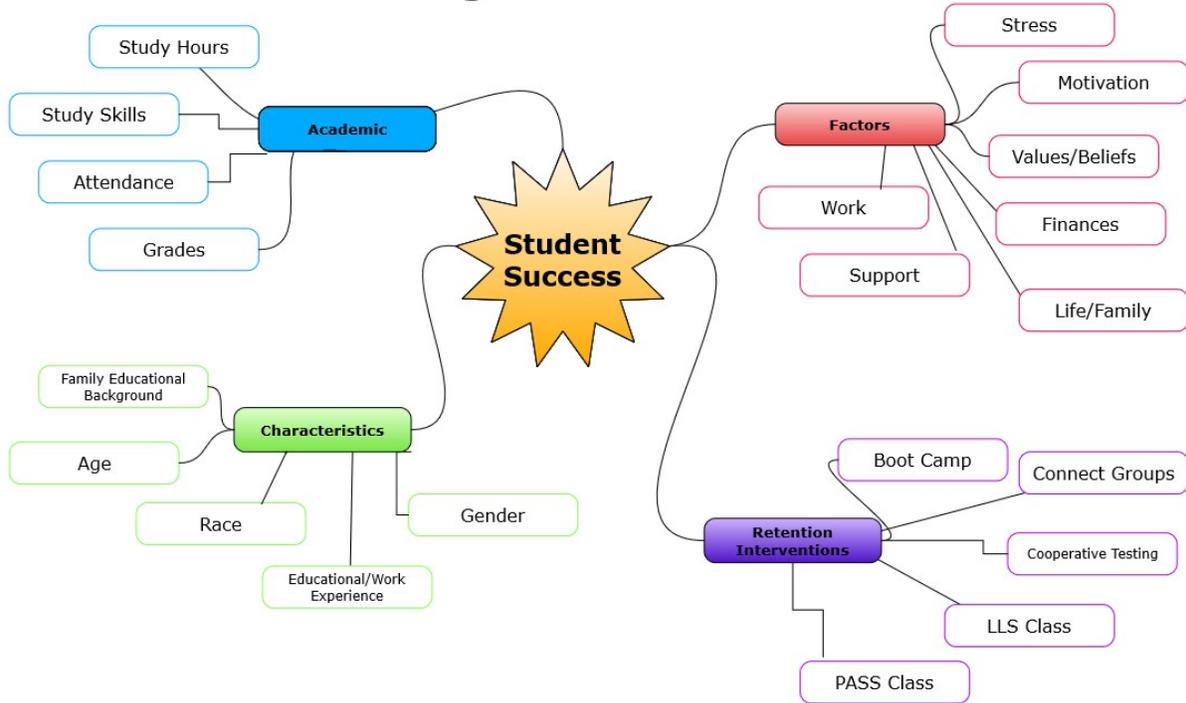
Jeffreys Nursing Universal Retention and Success (NURS) model

Jeffreys (2014) defines success as having various meanings for students such as passing nursing school, passing the licensure examination, and post-graduation employment. Success to some students means more than just achieving specific benchmarks. The Nursing Universal Retention and Success (NURS) model provides a framework for looking at factors that affect nursing student's retention and success. The model encompasses numerous factors affecting student retention and success to evaluate effective strategies such as the retention interventions implemented in the ADN program at Holmes in the fall of 2017. "Several assumptions underlie the NURS (2013) model (Jeffreys 2013):

- 1) Nursing student retention is a priority concern of nurse educators worldwide;
- 2) Student retention is a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon that is influenced by the interaction of multiple adaptations (factors);
- 3) Environmental factors and professional integration factors greatly influence nursing student retention;
- 4) Psychological outcomes and academic outcomes interact and influence persistence;
- 5) All students, regardless of prior academic performance and work experience can benefit from professional socialization and enrichment throughout pre-professional and professional education;
- 6) Nursing student retention is best achieved by focusing more comprehensively on success as going beyond minimal standards towards optimizing outcomes aimed at achieving peak performance
- 7) Optimizing outcomes necessitates a holistic approach that focuses on proactive inclusive enrichment (PIE) and avoids exclusive remediation (ER)" (Jeffreys, 2015).

The model basis outcomes of retention and success on interaction of adaptations. The model designed for this study was developed adapting Jeffreys 2012 NURS Model. The adapted Nursing Model used in this study explains adaptations in the HCCADNP that may affect student's success in the diagram below:

Nursing Model for Success



(Student Success Model is adapted from Jeffreys 2013 NURS Model)

The adaptations in the diagram above depict various elements of HCCADNP students that may hinder or support students with retention or success in the program. Jeffreys NURS model explains internal and external factors that affect retention and how faculty can impact and support to improve student success in nursing school (Mooring, 2016). Understanding the student’s perceptions of their success strategies and those used in the retention interventions could shed insight into assisting future students to succeed. Personal interviews that will be conducted for this study will contribute to understanding some of the retention interventions and personal strategies utilized that supported students to succeed in the program.

Understanding the factors, academics, and characteristics of nursing students may also play a significant role in student success. Factors that can enhance or inhibit student success

include stress, motivation, values/beliefs, finances, life/family, work, and support. Academic adaptations such as study hours, study skills, attendance, and grades can be positive or negative influences on the students' success. Characteristics such as family educational background, age, race, gender, and educational/work experience can positively or negatively affect students' perceptions in the program. The purpose of this study is understanding student's perceptions of the retention interventions and personal strategies utilized during their first year in the HCCADNP. Nurse educators can create innovative strategies to make a positive difference that aide nursing student retention and success in optimizing outcomes (Jeffreys, 2014).

Defining Retention Interventions

Students and how they learn are changing with advances in technology affecting them. Doing what has always been done does not seem to impact this generation of students. They are learning and perceiving things differently and the use of traditional lecture in nursing school where students are isolated and rely solely upon their interpretation of the concepts presented is not working. In understanding what motivates them and how they learn, factors that influence or inhibit their learning, and interpreting new knowledge would be highly beneficial. Duckworth (2016) states perseverance and hard work are necessary traits in nursing school that will shine quickly as opposed to natural talent in theory and clinical. Students must be motivated and have a purpose to succeed. Constant optimism and perseverance using a growth mindset applies to the students and teacher. Students who have the grit to complete must use effort and talent enhancing their skills to become more productive (Duckworth, 2016).

Instructors and students should be accountable for interactive learning by coming to class well prepared, motivated, and dedicated. In nursing school, learning the material is only a small portion of the process. The student must take the learned concepts and apply them, using critical

thinking to take a test and utilize skills in their lab and clinical courses. It is imperative to stay current on nursing practices and facilitate the process of learning and application of critical thinking. Learning new strategies to improve teaching in theory and clinical courses is crucial in meeting the needs of the diverse learning styles of students to enhance retention and student success.

The ratio of students to instructors of 15:1 according to standards set forth by ACEN meets standards but does not allow sufficient time for one-on-one with students. Changes in the NCLEX and increased rigor in the program, shifted the program's focus on retention and success of students in the HCCADNP. In the fall of 2017, strategies were implemented to enhance student success. Changes in curriculum and testing resulted in an increase in rigor in the nursing program. Faculty restructured the curriculum to implement medical surgical nursing and pharmacology in NUR II-IV. The complexity of questioning amplified on tests rather than waiting until NUR III & IV in an effort to increase critical thinking earlier in the program. End of semester reports for each course revealed the first semester nursing course retention fell as low as 40.74% in the fall of 2015 (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018). Retention strategies were implemented to increase student success in the fall of 2017 with retention rising to 77.36%. Retention interventions strategies that were implemented include: Cooperative testing, Connect Groups, Boot Camp, PASS Class, and an LLS Course.

Cooperative testing. Cooperative or collaborative testing learning strategy provides students with an opportunity to learn by testing with other peers to enhance learning and increase test performance. Rivaz, Momennasab, and Shokrollahi (2015) found an increase in test performance and enhancement of learning by collaborating with others compared to the traditional independent test-taking method. They found collaborative testing to be a valuable

assessment method related to strong statistically significant differences in the student's problem solving and critical thinking abilities. Collaborative testing in HCCADNP is termed cooperative testing and has been used in past years before re-use in the fall of 2017. Collaborative testing was not used for a few years prior to re-implementing in the fall of 2017 as points were added to the students' individual test grade after turning it in and taking the same test as a team to receive points. It was used as a form of test review for peer mentoring and test taking strategies for students. Faculty voted to avoid adding any points to test as it could inflate grades and increase the student's possibility to pass each course with a passing grade not reflecting what they had truly understood and learned. The administrator at the time decided to remove it from all courses when some faculty voted to keep cooperative testing as a test taking strategy and others did not. Cooperative testing allows students to work in teams towards a common goal to foster learning and initiates group discussion regarding test questions to understand correct answers and critical concepts (Martin, Friesen, & DePau, 2014).

Allowing students to take tests as a team after being placed into small groups is time-consuming but will enable students to understand peer's rationale for answering test questions. The students in the nursing program are allowed 30 minutes to re-take the unit test in a small group for increasing critical thinking and enhancing learning after taking the unit test individually for a grade first. Re-taking small group unit tests allows the students to review concepts that were missed. Students studying in small groups for test review enhances students' understanding of the content and how to choose the best answer before taking a comprehensive final exam and for retention of material before moving forward to the next semester nursing course. First-year nursing students verbalized cooperative testing in past years as being helpful with understanding concepts and how to take nursing exams from students who were successful.

Cooperative testing is optional and at the instructor's discretion to be utilized in the course.

Martin, Friesen, and DePau (2014) found cooperative testing increased student's motivation to learn, enhanced critical thinking, and promoted communication and social skills through teamwork.

Connect groups. The concept of connect groups was implemented in the fall of 2017 for all courses of the nursing program to break students into small groups with one instructor to prepare for upcoming tests and review what students missed on the last test. Connect groups will continue for NUR I-IV for all students and lasts for thirty minutes to an hour for review after each test. Individual meetings with an instructor can be requested if needed. Some connect group leaders choose to do a review of practice questions prior to the upcoming test to stimulate critical thinking and examine student preparedness. The connect groups in the fall of 2017 in NUR I met before and after each test to promote student success. Tinnon (2018) cited testing for students is difficult as they move from knowledge and comprehension test questions to more complex questions requiring a higher level of thinking. She found allowing students a reflective test review to see their mistakes gave them insight into their way of rationalizing answers with testing to change their approach for upcoming tests. The purpose of the connect groups was to divide students equally among the course instructors into smaller groups and assign a faculty member or connect group leader in the course to serve as a mentor for the group of students. Connect groups allow faculty the opportunity to interact with smaller groups and one-to-one, if needed, to assist the student with learning needs. How the connect group interacts and meets is autonomous to each instructor.

Talbert (2012) found student-mentoring from faculty assists struggling students in a new environment the opportunity to receive first-hand knowledge and experience. The connect group

leader would meet with students in a group and individually if requested after unit test and cooperative testing to facilitate mastering the concepts on the test before moving on to new content. The connect group leader also met with their connect group and administered a trial test before the next unit test once the students had time to study to prepare them for the concepts on the upcoming unit test. Different faculty made the trial test on the level of the content for the next test and all connect groups administered the same test. The students were given thirty minutes to independently take the trial test with a number of questions at the discretion of the faculty writing it. Upon completing the trial test, the faculty leader then reviewed the trial test with rationales for each answer. The review was a group discussion that allowed students to learn in a student-mentoring approach. The connect group leader also tracked their student groups' grades throughout the semester and was available to the students to assist in any way to promote success in the course. Mooring (2016) found students are eager to feel understood and appreciated, and see faculty as knowledgeable, approachable, and as a resource to guide their learning to be successful.

Boot camp. The freshman faculty in the first-semester foundation course created and implemented a one-week boot camp in the first-semester fundamentals course to allow a new cohort of students' time for adjusting and familiarizing with peers and faculty before diving into lecture and skills for the course (Appendix F). The course requires a lot of group activities and group learning activities. "New student orientation programs that promote diversity are the gateway to student inclusiveness in academia" (Talbert, 2012, pg. 24). Incorporating boot camp allows the students who are all of diverse backgrounds, to meet one another and form friendships. This will help them feel a sense of belonging and be part of the team to help each other through the program. The week incorporated standard orientation to the course and

paperwork, along with activities and quizzes that were fun and interactive. This allowed students time to adjust and moving test one to week three in the course instead of week two.

The boot camp introduced the other retention interventions for the semester and covered test taking and study habit strategies, stress reduction, medical terminology, introduction of drug calculation, use of online resources, required immunizations, testing, and certifications for nursing. The introduction of faculty and resources available for them were a few of the concepts introduced during the week. Kinney, Montegut, Charlton, and McManus (2017) reported a 92% success rate with students in a study with a similar nursing boot camp. They found slowly introducing students to the time required, study skills, commitment, and importance of communication were significant benefits in students learning and decreasing anxiety related to course expectations. HCCADNP retention rates were listed in a table earlier and this study will provide data for this cohort regarding success with implementation of boot camp with the fall 2017 class.

PASS class. “The Program for Accelerated Student Success (PASS) is designed to provide a proactive means to increase the success of nursing students. PASS is designed to retain nursing students who will graduate and complete the licensure exam” (HCCADNP PASS Contract, Appendix G). The PASS program is coordinated and implemented by the Lab Coordinator/Student Navigator and was implemented in the fall of 2017. The Lab Coordinator/Student Navigator position was appointed by the director upon introduction of the position. PASS is scheduled and put on course calendars and lasts for one hour for all semesters in preparation for the upcoming unit test. The first PASS for every semester is mandatory for all students and then highly recommended each semester for those students who make an 82 or below on each unit test (Appendix H). Any student who would like to attend

PASS for a review, regardless of their grade, may do so. PASS was implemented to help retain students in the HCCADNP by enhancing test-taking skills. Each student at the beginning of each semester must also sign a PASS contract stating their role and commitment to the program for their success. Several documents are given to each student to assist their study habits, but the primary goal is the test-taking strategies using PICK (problem, identifiers, choices, keep). PICK is an acronym used for students to choose the best answer, which aligns with the test blueprint on the National Council of State Board of Nursing Website (Appendix I). PICK is a test taking strategy developed to guide students through strategies to correctly answer test questions. Teaching effective test-taking strategies were incorporated into several aspects of the nursing program to promote student success related to test taking.

Learning and Life Skills (LLS) course. LLS 1413, Improvement of Study, course “is designed to aid the student in study skills, promote student success in basic reading and note-taking techniques, critical thinking, time management, test-taking strategies, and listening and memory enhancement” (HCCADNP LLS 1413 Syllabus, 2017). The course was implemented in the fall of 2017 and consists of fifteen weeks of lecture once a week for three hours (Appendix J). The course was designed after an LLS Orientation Course offered by the college and adjusted to meet the needs of nursing students by the faculty. All faculty taught at least one lecture and wrote test questions for the course to enhance student success. Some of the topics taught in the course included orientation, empowerment, preparing study skills, strategies for test success, NCLEX preparation, critical thinking, prioritization, and communication. Implementation of the retention interventions was implemented to have a second review of content for students in all semesters prior to each unit test to strengthen test taking skills. Understanding students’

perceptions of the retention interventions and personal success strategies would benefit the nursing program with higher retention rates and student success for their financial investment and educational futures. The foundation of nursing is arranged in the first-semester course. Ensuring the students receive a firm foundation gives rise for success in the remaining nursing courses.

LABAREE'S POLITICAL GOALS OF EDUCATION

Labaree (1997, p. 40) writes regarding the three approaches from a political perspective stating, “the problem is not that we do not know how to make schools better, but that we are fighting among ourselves regarding what goals schools should pursue”. Labaree (1997) suggests democratic equality as a public good related to citizenship, social efficiency as a public good in preparing workers to enhance the economy, and social mobility as a private good in preparing students to be competent and competitive in the market. An approach incorporating all three aspects of a political perspective would enhance the way in which students view society and inspire to improve themselves. Using Labaree in this study supports Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program which prepares students for university transfer, productive employment, and lifelong learning that is committed to providing affordable and equal access to higher education (HCC, 2018).

Democratic equality

Democratic equality prepares students to be responsible, competent citizens (Labaree, 1997). Students are striving for equal treatment and access for all. Nursing teaches students that as a profession, one is responsible to society and takes an oath for beneficence and non-maleficence to all people. Every person is treated equal with no regard to social standing, race, gender, etc. Nurses require a license to practice which is issued and makes the nurse accountable

to the Mississippi State Board of Nursing (MSBN). The MSBN issues nursing standards of practice requires nurses to be dedicated and assume responsibility for all actions, regardless of consequences. Holmes nursing program ranks students for enrollment eligibility and creates the list of applicants from a computer program without any bias regardless of age, race, gender, etc. The system allows equal opportunity to all students. Many topics such as culture, sexuality, spirituality, and communication are discussed with importance placed throughout the program on these issues for students to understand equality in practice for all patients and their families. The standards prepare the students to be responsible ensuring equal treatment.

Membership in nursing professional organizations is encouraged to place strong emphasis on politics. The Mississippi Nurses' Association (MNA) promotes registered nursing practice through advocacy and education (NCSBN, 2018). Membership in professional organizations guides students in the pursuit of citizenship training. MNA is just one of the professional organizations for nurses and nursing students to participate in the political process to assist in shaping society. The Mississippi Board of Nursing (MBON) ensures practicing nurses are ethically and morally following standards of practice for accountability to society (ncsbn.org, 2018).

Social efficiency

Social efficiency is for the public good and society depends on nursing programs to prepare nurses that will be competent and useful in the community related to the economy. In retaining more students, while maintaining high standards, parents and students will see the benefit in applying to the program. Social efficiency states the purpose of the institution is to educate productive workers (Saichaie & Morpew, 2014). The program will benefit society in preparing a greater number of quality students to enter the workforce if they complete the

program in two years and pass the NCLEX on the first write. The competent nurse safely practices under the MBON with licensure after training and passing the NLCEX exam. The assurance of safe practicing nurses is a vital benefit to society.

Associate degree nursing programs with the growth of community colleges over fifty years ago, introduced two-year nursing degrees to fill gaps in the nursing shortage to meet the growth of the community, government, and consumer interest (Mahaffey, 2002). Holmes nursing program is working to attract more males and minority students, but still has over 61% white female ratio of students for the past three years from 2015-2018 (HCCADNP, 2018). Retention of the minority and male students is also a great area of concern for research and a priority for the program. Graduating nurses in two years' benefits society by providing training in skills and knowledge to take care of the ill and provide education on wellness. The skillset of the program enables students to prepare to enter the workforce and adapt to society's needs. The associate degree nurse enters the workforce and has the ability to further their education and enhance their competitive edge for promotion in the workplace. They can make this move in a shorter period of time then proceed to move vertically with more education and more skillful and productive employees if they choose (Labaree, 1997).

Social mobility

Social mobility benefits the student as an individual and prepares them to be competitive in the job market. Students will be active in the competitive medical field upon completion of the program and pass boards as a registered nurse. The desire to continue their education and pursue a higher degree at a university is highly encouraged in the program. Continuing education and advances in the field benefits the individual and society. Preparing students to be

competitive in society and for schools to adapt themselves to meet societal demands is imperative in education (Labaree, 1997).

Saichaie and Morpew (2014) state academic needs of students need personal attention from faculty to increase the likelihood of success. One-on-one interaction from faculty and peers is important for social mobility to encourage students to do their best and seek resources to expand their knowledge and preparation. Nursing uses technology, group work, individual assignments, and a vast array of learning techniques to encourage the student's individuality to improve learning. Each student has to find what learning style works best for them and elevate their critical thinking skills to apply them in nursing for skills and test taking. Interacting with other students and getting involved in the community is one way for students to find social contacts to benefit themselves in the program and for future resources as a nurse. Investing in contacts and resources can provide endless opportunities for their future career in nursing. Nursing provides the student with skills and credentials to advance their career.

In preparing students to be accountable to society (democratic equality), a skillset to enter the workforce quickly (social efficiency), and increasing personal competitive qualities utilizing critical thinking (social mobility), would increase the competitive success of the student as an individual who can in return, benefit society. These three approaches apply to nursing as students take an oath to benefit society and have many alternatives to further their education in the wide field of nursing after completing their two-year RN degree. The two-year RN degree prepares the students with the required skills and knowledge. The Associate Degree Nursing Program takes two years allowing the student early entry into the workforce to support themselves and their families opposed to a four-year baccalaureate program.

CARNEGIE PROJECT ON THE EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE INITIATIVES

The research project in this study will fulfill the requirements of the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED) associated Doctor of Education program in Higher Education at the University of Mississippi. The CPED webpage (2018) states, “The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession.” The CPED initiative engages teaching to require ongoing assessment and accountability, be grounded in theory, research, and problems of practice, and teach students to develop a moral and ethical attitude for equity and social justice (CPED, 2018). The CPED initiatives are relevant to this study as it focuses on students’ perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions. The CPED initiatives incorporate ethics, social justice, and equity. According to Reynolds and Halx (2018) student affairs have a clearly defined national code of ethics that focuses more on integrity than wrongdoing. The code of ethics offers a set of terms to include autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity, and veracity (Reynolds & Halx, 2018). These terms of ethics are defined and synonymous with nursing terminology throughout the nursing program and introduced in the first semester related to an oath for public safety and nursing practice (HCCADNP NUR I Syllabus, 2018). Students who are successful in the nursing program are educated on the Code of Ethics as outlined by the professional organization, the American Nurses’ Association (ANA). ANA guides nursing professionalism with ethical values, obligations, and duties of nurses to society who enter the profession (Cipriano, 2016).

The CPED initiative of equity and social justice relates to this study as nurses have an ethical obligation to social justice according to the ANA’s Code of Ethics (Rushton, 2017). The

ANA Code of Ethics includes all of the CPED initiatives of equity, ethics, and social justice as it relates to nursing. The issue of equity and social justice is necessitated for faculty and students in the nursing program and instilled in the students as part of their professional responsibility as a registered nurse. Rushton (2017) emphasizes the responsibility the nursing profession's voice can contribute to issues in the healthcare field related to equity and social justice. She states it is the nursing professions responsibility to incorporate principles of justice in nursing and health care to be accountable to society. Ethics, equity, and social justice are integrated into nursing as nurses take an oath to practice and uphold these principles as part of nursing practice. Integrating these principles and understanding student's stance on these issues can impact their success in the program and as a future practitioner of nursing.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“How we teach has changed and developing into what emerges from the learner's experiences and the learner has more control on how, when, and where they learn” (Selingo, 2018, p. 4). More non-traditional students are returning to college to be successful in their jobs and traditional students are working while attending college, which increases the demand for virtual and innovative ways to learn (Selingo, 2018). Students are juggling work and family responsibilities and with the rising cost of education and pressure of expectations, higher education must place an increased focus on student success and ways to enhance student completion and success (U. S. Department of Higher Education, 2015).

Approximately one fifth to one quarter of college students drop out at the end of their freshman year” and “more colleges need to create conditions that foster student persistence and promote policy changes that address the high dropout rates in higher education” (Chen, 2012).

There are many studies that assess what risk factors lead to dropout rates within the first year or result in no degree. There is a need for further studies on retention rates to decide what is being done and what works. Tinto (2012) explains through extensive research, that college students are more likely to remain committed and reduce dropout rates through social and intellectual integration into the college community. Many colleges are making orientation for new students and advising each semester mandatory to assure guidance from instructors. A study by Maher and Macallister (2013) states attributes prior to college and student's own aspirations could be used as predictors of success and retention. Students need to feel like they have value and be a part of a supportive learning environment. Shaw and Mattern (2013) note in a study that there are negative consequences for the student and the institution when students drop out prior to degree completion. Cost is always involved in providing excellent student support and instruction and money is lost when students do not finish. The end result not only affects the students and the college, but society as a whole.

Talbert (2012) found that graduation rates have continued to decline over the last decade due to retention decreasing among college students. The research in this study used a conceptual data model displaying academic leaders' perspectives to increase enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. The purpose of this study used two viewpoints. First, a review in thirty-two of Minnesota's higher education institutions was performed regarding student enrollment and performance. Second, 104 diverse academic leaders were involved using strategic methods to increase enrollment, retention, and graduation rates for first generation and first year students. The results yielded a significant part of the research to be the results of the leader's perspectives of how to increase enrollment, retention, and graduation rates to promote student success. Numerous findings were identified such as tracking systems for failures, achievements, and

success, and to expand advertising, just to name a few. It was decided with both phases that utilizing leaders and developing a plan, increasing community partnerships, and enhancing advisement and mentorship programs was key to increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates.

A retention study by Wray, Aspland, and Barrett (2014) shows evidence why nursing students leave within the first semester of the program such as generally being unprepared, developing a dislike for the profession, or not coping with the demands of the program. Other studies focused in their study yielded consistent reasons for attrition such as financial issues, family issues, and lack of support. The results provided factors such as good support by peers, faculty, and family; along with the desire to become nurses, were positive factors in overcoming financial issues, family pressures, work-life balance, and unpleasant experiences (Wray, Aspland, & Barrett, 2014).

Shaw and Mattern (2013) in a study examining under and over performance in college within the first year found adaptations such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, academic preparation, motivation, peer and faculty interactions, sense of belonging, campus life, finances and difficulty of the program to be factors affecting success or drop out. Holmes' nursing program includes a variety of younger and older students, first generation students, minority students, and various factors related to family and work issues, and life circumstances in balance with the demands and rigor of the program. Factors affecting student success and retention add to diversity and challenges for faculty and students.

Mansfield, O'Leary, and Webb (2011) researched to determine if prevention programs for drop-out in a Northern Indiana community college was effective related to retention. The mixed methods study examined faculty and student perceptions of the factors attributing to drop-

out rates. The results yielded that a computer literacy course should accompany the orientation course and should be mandatory the first year. Educators also voiced a review of academic advisory plans within the first year to be made mandatory and recommended an environment conducive to increasing retention rates by promoting student persistence. Nursing boot camp in an ADN program for the first year can aid in boosting nursing students' confidence and increase retention due to the first semester of nursing school being very challenging (Kinney, Montegut, Charlton, & McManus, 2017). The study found boot camp boosted confidence when introduced to expectations of the program, faculty, peers, and college.

Faculty development for diverse teaching methods and ways to enhance student learning, along with curriculum changes to remain within current standards is an ongoing investment from the administrators and faculty. Implementing new innovative learning and teaching strategies to meet the demands of multigenerational students is imperative for retention and success of the students (Talbert, 2012). Nursing programs must create conducive learning environments that foster student persistence and the drive to succeed. One way is to facilitate learning in a way that translates knowledge into practice to enhance student success (Chen, 2012). The strategies to improve retention through persistence is vital as nearly 50% of students in the United States leave nursing programs prior to graduation (Mooring, 2016). Learning why students are not successful and more importantly how to create a change environment to enhance learning and reduce drop out is imperative to the future of nursing programs. Faculty will have to invest time and effort into the retention strategies and success of the students in order to initiate change in the program outcomes. The dedication will need to start with administration and faculty in order to instill the willingness to learn and change into the students. Shaping change into transformation for the better good of the program, students, and society (Chen, 2012).

Mckendry, Wright, and Stevenson (2014) explored the efficacy of retention strategies related to student motivations, experiences, and support requirements during their first year. The qualitative study through the use of focus groups revealed students' voices to understand the most effective means of supporting students in their first year. The conclusions of the study found student expectations for satisfaction of a clear and realistic understanding of the program and career with a nurturing sense of belonging was beneficial in promoting retention and student success. Fontaine (2014) evaluated the effects of a retention intervention program for an associate degree nursing program. The study utilized seven retention interventions and found a statistically significant improvement in retention overall. The conclusion revealed the retention program must be comprehensive with integrated resources to enhance student success. Some of the retention interventions aligned with interventions in the HCCADNP. Learning communities were similar to the LLS course for this study as students were exposed to structured activities to help develop collaborative methods to learn from each other. The peer tutoring in Fontaine's study involved mentoring from peers individually and in groups which aligns with the PASS class, connect groups, and cooperative testing in the HCCADNP retention strategies. The orientation in the study by Fontaine (2014) was a welcome ceremony to familiarize students with the program and college resources. HCCADNP boot camp for incoming freshman introduces students to the program, faculty, students, and college resources available for the program.

A study on the effect of collaborative testing on learning and retention of nursing students by Rivaz, Momennasab, and Skokrollahi (2015) generated results that showed an increase in test performance and long-term learning. The increased performance enhanced students' problem solving and critical thinking abilities. Martin, Friesen, and De Pau (2014) found collaborative testing to engage students in ongoing assessment that will foster a deeper learning and enhance

teamwork skills as they worked towards a common goal in understanding test taking strategies. Tinnon (2018) proposed in a study the first step in student retention was a reflective test review method for student retention and success. She found testing was difficult for most nursing students as they progress from knowledge and comprehension testing to a higher-level application style of testing. Her findings yielded students who had adequate test reviews were able to reflect on their thought processes to improve their critical thinking for future testing. The method of cooperative testing, connect groups, and PASS class in the HCCADNP aims to enhance student critical thinking for testing and clinical application to succeed in the program.

Talbert (2012) in a study on strategies to increase enrollment, retention, and graduation rates found peer interactions promote self-confidence in motivation. She states student orientation programs and mentoring helped struggling students find their way to succeed in a new environment. Creating policies and procedures to promote student success was the most important aspect of Talbert's research. She found the role of technology to be an important factor to stimulate students to learn collaborative and understand to enhance critical thinking. Understanding students' perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions utilized in the Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program, will be vital to the success of the progression in the program and students for their future as a successfully, well-prepared nurse. Wray, Aspland, and Barrett (2014) found students leaving in their first semester of the nursing school program were unlikely to return. The study examined various pull factors that led them to stay and want to become a nurse despite the many push factors that led students to leave. Understanding students' perceptions of the adaptations and personal strategies utilized in their first year is the focus of this study. Understanding adaptations affecting success of students in the first year will aid

student's progress in the program and assist faculty in finding methods to enhance learning and retention for future first semester students.

NEXT STEPS

The purpose of this research study is to understand perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions utilized in Holmes Community College ADN Program. Retention interventions that were implemented in the fall of 2017: Cooperative testing, Connect Groups, Boot Camp, PASS Class, and an LLS Course were designed to improve retention and student success in the first-semester and throughout the program. Understanding student perceptions of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions and personal strategies applied in the program may expose possible insights for the success of future students and ways to improve their first year. The following research questions explore the student's perceptions of retention interventions and personal strategies to attain success in their first year of the ADN program at Holmes Community College.

Research Questions

1. How do students in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program perceive the effectiveness of retention interventions in their first year?
2. What personal strategies can be observed to enhance student success in their first year at Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program?

METHODOLOGY

Students encounter many factors that can influence success in their first year of transitioning into higher education. A qualitative study will be utilized to measure factors that influence student success in their first year. A qualitative study by Crombie, Brindley, Harris,

Marks-Maran, and Thompson (2013) examined factors contributing to students' success in completing their nursing programs by reviewing what students' perceptions were related to the factors enhancing their completion. Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) defined qualitative research as a social aspect using open-ended questions with semi-structured interviews to assess an interviewee's perspective and attempt to answer the research questions. The use of qualitative analysis in this research study will focus on students' perceptions of their success from individual interviews. A phenomenological research design will be utilized as it investigates the student's lived experiences and meanings to understand why students succeed (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2016) define phenomenological theoretical perspective as part of the qualitative methodology that understands an actor's own perspective on how the world is experienced. In this study, understanding how the students have achieved success is the purpose of the research. "Phenomenologist seeks to understand through qualitative methods, such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and others, that yield descriptive data" (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016, p. 4). The data collection will involve personal interviews and descriptive data that will be the student's spoken word of third-semester nursing students in the HCCADNP regarding their personal strategies and the effectiveness of intervention strategies for success during their first-year. The student's participation will be voluntary, and all participants will be required to have utilized all five of the retention interventions implemented during the fall of 2017. Using interviews and a focus group will allow for triangulation to gain an understanding of why some students are successful. Using qualitative data will enable the researcher to answer research questions related to student's perceptions of their success. Qualitative research uses open ended questions in the interviews within a quiet environment to

elicit the participant views on subjects that are not well understood in an attempt to answer research questions (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Qualitative data will allow the researcher to understand how the students felt and their experiences in their first year to be successful. The data will allow the researcher to recognize if the interventions were successful for students and assist in retention and success for future students. Description of the setting and participants, data collection, data analysis, and implications will be presented in Manuscript Two.

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MANUSCRIPT II: DATA INTERPRETATION

SUMMARY OF PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Nursing programs prepare students to graduate, pass the licensure examination, and enter into the professional world of nursing. A decrease in student retention inhibits their dreams of becoming a nurse and can be detrimental to the nursing program. Manuscript one provided a review of what nursing school entails and the importance of retaining nursing students to be successful in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCADNP). Preparing students to become nurses utilizing critical thinking and clinical reasoning is imperative to their ability in passing the program and the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) for becoming a registered nurse. Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program showed a decline in retention of first-semester nursing students since the fall of 2013 until implementation of retention interventions in the fall of 2017. Understanding the success of intervention strategies for students to be successful in their first year was the focus of this study because of the decline in student success. The HCCADNP defines student success as the ability to progress in the program, graduate, pass the licensure examination, and begin working as a registered nurse (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018). The program tracks student success from when they begin the program until six months after they graduate and pass the licensure examination for job placement rates. This study focused on understanding perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions utilized while in their first year. The lowest retention rate was in the first-semester of nursing school. Understanding personal strategies and

outcomes of retention interventions could improve student success in future students and for program outcomes.

My dedication and passion for nursing and education through my years of nursing experience, personal experiences, and teaching experience is what led me to my problem of practice. Nursing is a profession that is dedicated and empathetic to the needs of others in providing care. Empathy is a vital component of quality nursing care and leads to better patient outcomes (Heidke, Howie, & Ferdous, 2018). Understanding students' perceptions that contribute to their success and retention interventions used in the first-year of nursing school could benefit the students who are unsuccessful and assist faculty in gaining an insight into factors increasing success and retention in the nursing program.

Retention interventions implemented in the fall of 2017 at Holmes Community College to increase nursing students' success in their first year consisted of five strategies. The first strategy implemented was cooperative testing which allows students to retake the test in small groups to provide a clearer understanding of the correct answers with rationales. Peer learning allows students the ability to collaborate and problem solve in pairs to support and learn from one another (Palsson, Martensson, Swenne, Adel, & Engstrom, 2017). The second retention intervention was connect groups that divides students into smaller groups with instructors in the course to prepare for upcoming tests and review what students missed on the last test. Connect groups fosters faculty-student interaction. "The relationship between educators and students is considered to be one of the most important factors in the learning outcomes of students" (Chan, Tong, & Henderson, 2017, pg. 110). The third strategy was Boot Camp which permits a new cohort of students' time for adjusting and familiarizing with peers and faculty before delving into the course content. The Program for Accelerated Student Success (PASS) class led by the

Student Navigator was the fourth intervention implemented to teach effective test-taking strategies. Learning and Life Skills (LLS) Course was the fifth intervention planned for nursing students to support the student in study skills and enhance student success. In an effort to further improve retention of students, it is essential to understand what students experienced related to retention interventions in their first-semester and their perceptions of what increased their success in their first year of nursing school.

CPED: EQUITY, ETHICS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The principles of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), Labaree's (1997) framework, and Jeffrey's Nursing Universal Retention and Success (NURS) model was used to strengthen and better understand the Problem of Practice (POP) for this Dissertation in Practice (DIP). The CPED initiatives of ethics, equity, and social justice can be found in parts of the American Nurses' Association (ANA) Code of Ethics. Nurses have an obligation as outlined in the ANA Code of Ethics that guides nursing professionalism with ethical values, obligations, and duties of nurses to society as part of the profession (Cipriano, 2016). The responsibility of equity and social justice is a primary role in the responsibility of the nursing profession to the healthcare community (Rushton, 2017, May23). Students are provided equal access to advance in the Associate Degree Nursing Program at Holmes Community College. Intervention strategies implemented by faculty in the fall of 2017 provide students equal access to faculty and resources available to be successful. The program distributes social justice by the availability of resources and intervention strategies offered to every student. The findings in the study support the success of the interventions related to students' success. How students embrace the interventions to help them succeed depends on students' ethical values to adhere to the policies and assume accountability for their education. The intervention strategies encourage student-

faculty interaction, cooperation and active learning from peers, and strategies to increase critical thinking to progress and be successful. Personal strategies applied by the students' expression of applying the interventions to reach their goal of completing the program.

Labaree's democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility supports the HCCADNP by preparing students for university transfer, productive employment, and lifelong learning while providing affordable and equal access to higher education (HCC, 2018). Nursing protects public good in providing care and prepares students to work and be competent and competitive in the market and professional field of nursing. Intervention strategies that were implemented encourage students to take responsibility for what they learn and how they progress through the program. Learning critical thinking strategies and communication among peers and faculty promotes social mobility and social efficiency as they enter the workforce and further their education for reaching their career goals.

Jeffrey's (2013) NURS model provides a framework for understanding the factors that affect retention and success in nursing students. Using this model allows numerous factors to be analyzed in evaluating the effective strategies such as personal and intervention strategies on student success. The Nursing Model for Success was adapted from Jeffrey's (2013) NURS model to depict the various elements of nursing students in the HCCADNP that may hinder or support their success. Understanding the issues students encounter and how they apply the intervention strategies in conjunction with their own personal strategies could expand ideas to aide in the success of future nursing students.

The Nursing Model for Success depicted four elements related to student success: academic, factors, characteristics, and retention interventions. The elements were applicable to this study as the interview data was extracted and categorized. Academic elements were evident

as students voiced the amount of reading, studying, and commitment required to progress. Factors of balancing life, work, family, and finances to help decrease the stress and stay motivated was evident in the interviews. Staying motivated, dedicated, and having a good support system was a factor repeated during the interviews. Characteristics were diverse and adequate for the sample size in presenting education and work experience, age, race, and gender of the participants for the variation and similarities of responses. Retention interventions revealed a significant factor in improving student success in the program. Students responses uncovered the interventions a success with boot camp as the greatest contributor. The intervention strategies, along with student's personal test-taking and study strategies, facilitated students in overcoming obstacles to progress. Students recommendations on revisions for improving interventions for future students and personal strategies employed in the first year answered the research questions and proved the success of the framework adapted for this study.

My problem of practice focuses on the success of third-semester nursing students regarding the personal strategies and intervention strategies that were implemented in their first-semester of nursing school in the fall of 2017. Individual student interviews and a focus group interview were used with field notes to obtain qualitative data pertinent to answering the research questions for this study.

1. How do students in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program perceive the effectiveness of retention interventions in their first year?
2. What personal strategies can be observed, if any, for different student groups in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program in their first year?

The individual student interviews and group interview attempted to extract personal strategies employed by the students and examined the success of the five intervention strategies

implemented in the first-semester of nursing school. Awareness of the personal strategies and success of the five intervention strategies that were beneficial to students will expand my understanding and assist the program in making recommendations for enhancing student success in the Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program.

DATA OVERVIEW

Research Setting and Sample

This study took place at Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program in Grenada, Mississippi. The sample of students were third-semester students in the fall of 2018 who were successful in completing their first year of nursing school beginning in the fall of 2017. The selected sample was 15 students who participated in all five retention interventions initiated in the fall of 2017. The retention strategies included Cooperative Testing, Connect Groups, Boot Camp, PASS Class, and an LLS Course. There were 53 students who began in the fall of 2017 program and 36 students who progressed to third semester. The purpose of the study is to understand perceptions of third-semester nursing students who were successful regarding retention interventions and personal strategies utilized in their first year at Holmes Community College ADN Program; therefore, only the students who were successful that were part of all five retention strategies were studied. The use of individual interviews with field notes and a focus group for data collection allowed triangulation of the study to understand all perspectives and their contexts in answering the research questions (Glesne, 2016). The focus group allows participants to expand further or express missing themes from the interviews. Participants reviewed their individual transcripts from the interviews for accuracy. They were allowed to add or delete any data collected for trustworthiness.

Data Collection

The 15 individual interviews were held in a private location of the HCCADNP during the participants third-semester in the program. The participants were given the option to select the time, date and location on campus where their individual interview would take place for confidentiality and allowing them to feel comfortable to express their actual experiences. The focus group was held in a classroom at the participants' request during their fourth-semester. There were 11 participants present for the focus group who advanced to fourth-semester. The individual interviews and focus group interview were audio-recorded with permission from participants and field notes taken by the interviewer. Open-ended questions guided the interviews allowing participants to be truthful with no bias from the interviewer. Confidentiality was assured without repercussion to elicit students' true perceptions of interventions in their first year. The interviews were transcribed to ensure accuracy for data analysis and reviewed by participants during the focus group interview to edit, clarify, or withdraw any data to be shared from the interviews. A number was assigned to each participant prior to the interview to provide anonymity and confidentiality. All data and documents obtained for this study are kept and stored on my personal computer with a password and hard copy documents locked in a file cabinet in my office which are only accessible by me. The transcribed data from the interviews were read while listening to audio-recordings and organized into nodes using NVivo, a qualitative software to organize and identify themes and patterns. The findings of the study will be presented to the faculty of the program for discussion on possible future studies and changes in curriculum to increase success in first-year students in the HCCADNP.

Trustworthiness

To guarantee trustworthiness, this study followed criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as presented by (Glesne, 2016). Interviews were conducted with participants in their third-semester of nursing school regarding success through their first year to establish data credibility. Dependability was confirmed with saturation of results in the interviews that were described in detail using participants exact responses. The data was coded using nodes and NVivo software per interview question and each participant. Emerging codes and themes were discussed, and participants reviewed the transcripts from individual interviews to certify conformability. The emerging themes were reviewed for a consensus throughout the coding process. Transferability of the findings is evident in the descriptions, optional participation, data collection and analysis which will be provided in the last manuscript.

Permissions and Ethics

Participants were recruited with a letter outlining the study via email. Participants returned interest in the study and set up interviews via email. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, participants read and signed a consent letter that explained the scope of their participation, confidentiality, risks and benefits, right to withdraw any time during the study and the right to refuse any questions during the audio recorded interviews and focus group session for the study (Appendix D). There were no ethical concerns for participants in this study surrounding the use of the data as outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research involving human subjects.

Limitations

A limitation of this study would be participant's willingness to openly discuss how they felt concerning each of the retention interventions or the strategies they utilized during their first-

year. Participants were interviewed in their third-semester and some were struggling to adapt to the level of difficulty and testing as they progress. During the interviews, participants were in their third-semester and relied on recall about their first-year strategies and successes. The goal of this study was to measure interventions and strategies that were used for success in their first year, rather than how they are currently adapting. It is important to mention the interviewer was an instructor in the participants first-year and now the Assistant Program Director for the HCCADNP before interviews began in their second year. Guaranteeing all data would be confidential for each participant with only an assigned number used to present findings and assuring no repercussion of their true perceptions was ensured to eliminate any biases. All students were allowed to choose a quiet location on the campus to voice their experiences in their first year of nursing school.

Another limitation was a small sample size of the students who participated in all five retention interventions; yet the data collected emerged into similar themes that are relevant. A delimitation to the study which could have increased the sample size was choosing participants who only participated in the five intervention strategies during their first year. One focus of this study is to examine which intervention strategies assisted students succeed that will also examine which ones and why some were not successful; therefore, only students who utilized all strategies were approached for the study. There were a few other students who chose not to participate that would have increased the sample size. Some verbalized and other emailed me that they are currently struggling in their second year and did not feel they had the time to participate. The participants were open to share personal factors they had to overcome such age, gender, and other information that will be presented in the findings. Another limitation for the study was the personal interviews and focus group interview varied between 7 minutes 4 seconds

to 25 minutes 51 seconds. The students were asked the open-ended interview questions with no probing to avoid interviewer bias. There are limitations in this study, and it would be beneficial to study a broader range of students by changing the research questions to allow all students to participate and express successful interventions utilized during their first year. Researching more than one program or more than one year of data would lend to a larger study to reflect strategies for student success that could improve the study and affect outcomes for future students.

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The goal of this study is to determine effectiveness of intervention strategies and personal strategies to improve retention and success of students in their first-semester and year of nursing school. Data was obtained utilizing individual interviews and a focus group interview to answer research questions developed to guide the study. Data and findings were gained from 15 participants in their third semester and 11 participants in their fourth semester of nursing school concerning their perceptions of intervention strategies and personal strategies employed to enhance success in the first year the Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program.

Participant Profiles

The participants chosen for this study were selected from a class of first-semester students in the HCCADNP who utilized all of the intervention strategies that were explained earlier offered in the fall of 2017. Participation in the study was voluntary for any student who participated in all five intervention strategies during their first year of nursing school. The participants were in their third-semester during the individual interviews and in their fourth-

semester when the focus group interview took place. Data revealed a diversity in participants and background experiences for the study. The chart displays profiles of the participants.

Table 2

Participant Profile Table

| Number of Participants | Ages | Race | Gender | Prior Medical Experience |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------|---------------|---|
| 15 | Range: 21-52 9-20's 3-30's 2-40's 1-50's | 9-W 6-B | 12- F 3-M | LPN-4 EMT-1 CNA-3 Respiratory Therapist-1 PT Technician-1 Phlebotomist-1 No Experience-6 |

Abbreviations Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA), and Physical Therapy (PT).

The participant profile table presents the participant's ages, race, gender and prior medical experience to understand some of their demographics and experiences. Prior medical experiences suggest the number of participants who have had some or no medical experience, while one of the participants has prior experience in three areas. Other areas of personal data mentioned having children, families, working part-time, recently married or divorced, and financial stressors. Having a family, working, and going through life stressors increases the anxiety in nursing school. Betts, Shirley, and Kennedy (2017) found students are affected by many factors besides academic that contribute to attrition such as financial constraints and lack of family support.

The first interview question asked the participants to reveal some information about themselves to include demographics and past experiences. The question also asked the

participants how they felt when they first started the program. Most of the participants stated they were nervous, scared, or out of place when they first started. A few participants were excited and ready for the challenge.

Looking at demographics, stressors, and backgrounds shows diversity among participants who elected to participate in the study. The participants self-identified with their learning style in the interviews. Four stated they were kinesthetic learners and required hands-on learning. Five were visual learners needing graphs, pictures, and examples. Six were mixed learners where learning is best using all three styles of visual, hearing, and kinesthetic. As an educator, understanding the learning style of students allows various approaches in theory and clinical for effective learning to reach all students.

Results

The data from the interviews were transcribed and uploaded using NVivo qualitative software to assist with organizing the data to categorize themes. The nodes created in NVivo were divided into three categories to capture the focus from the interview questions in answering the research questions for this study. The three categories were then divided into subcategories developed from the main points of the interview questions. The emerging themes that resulted from the interviews are explained within each of the subcategories. The emerging themes will be discussed in the findings under each subcategory to explain the results and answer the research questions proposed in this study. The participant's responses presented within each subcategory were selected as they summarized the majority reply to the interview questions. Table 3 explains the categories and subcategories created from the main points of the interview questions. There were five subcategories related to intervention strategies, three subcategories related to students' personal strategies utilized, and three subcategories related to future recommendations. The

emerging themes related to each subcategory will be discussed and presented in subsequent tables.

Table 3

Categories and Subcategories from Individual Interviews

| 5 Intervention Strategies | 3 Personal Strategies | 3 Future Recommendations |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Cooperative Testing | Personal Motivation Strategies | Obstacles |
| Connect Groups | Student’s Test Taking and Study Strategies | What would have helped the Most/Earlier |
| Boot Camp | Changes as Progressed | Overall Perceptions/Recommendations |
| PASS | | |
| LLS | | |

Research Questions:

1. How do students in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program perceive the effectiveness of retention interventions in their first year? *The questions in the individual interviews related to the five intervention strategies were used to answer this research question.*
2. What personal strategies can be observed to enhance student success in their first year at Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program? *The questions in the individual interviews related to personal strategies and future recommendations were used to answer this research question.*

Intervention Strategies

Retention intervention strategies were developed from faculty as a result of continuing education, research and conferences attended in 2017 in an effort to make evidence-based decisions for improving student success. Changes in the nursing program are consistent with professional nursing standards, guidelines, and competencies (HCC Faculty Handbook, 2018).

The interventions were presented and voted upon by faculty to be implemented in the fall of 2017 in efforts for improving student success and retention. The five intervention strategies include: Cooperative Testing, Connect Groups, Boot Camp, PASS, and LLS and were described in detail in manuscript one. The presentation of data that follows explains each intervention and the results of the data based on the interviews. The emerging themes that answer the first research question are presented under each subcategory.

Cooperative Testing. Learning from small groups of peers can ease the stress as students transition from knowledge and comprehension level testing to higher level application testing in nursing school (Tinnon, 2018). Cooperative testing allows students to group test once individual testing is complete. Peer interaction to recognize why other students succeed on tests and to learn test-taking skills is a goal of cooperative testing. Participants viewed cooperative testing as a good concept with much room for improvement. Success is based on who was in the group and group dynamics such as test taking skills, knowledge of the content and different personalities. It is important for students to work as a team because nursing requires collaborating with other disciplines to provide quality patient care. The overall concept of cooperative testing per participants was it increased anxiety and suggestions for improvement were made such as allowing students to choose their group.

Participant 10

Cooperative testing, I think overall, was a good idea. It had a good beginning to have the students discuss the answer choices amongst each other and overall, it was a good theory. I believe sometimes you get different personalities and things of that nature and depending on which group you got put in, as to how well that went. Overall, I think it is a

good theory to help students to talk it out and why this answer was right and why that one was not.

Participant 14

Cooperative testing, it was a good concept. It was really good, if you got a good group. Depending on who you ended up with. Some of the other students, they took it a little too serious and didn't get the concept of it where you were supposed to be getting someone else's perspective instead of saying, this is what it is. I did like it, especially when I got a good group.

Participant 4

I personally like cooperative testing because it gives you a chance to collaborate with your fellow peers and if you had a question on the test that you weren't sure about, then this gives you the opportunity to see what your peers think about it and kind of work through a process together. I think most importantly, it builds better communication, as well as effective therapeutic communication and teamwork and collaboration. I think that's the most important thing that you can get out of collaborative testing. Some may not like it because they think I missed this, I might not get a good grade, but I think ultimately, it's a good idea.

Participant 5

I really liked it. Corporate testing really helps because they give you a view of what your classmates think about a question. Why did they pick that question? I really like that, it really helps.

Participant 8

Maybe if we found out what the correct answers were before and then discuss why we had chosen the answer but when everybody comes right out of the test, and we're all anxious because we don't know what we made, we are upset, and everybody gets to arguing. I feel like it makes everybody more anxious, sometimes as you think you fail when you really pass and it's just made me really anxious.

Participant 13

I didn't like it because okay we took the test, we got in groups, and it was random groups. Loved my classmates, but everybody doesn't think the same way. During that process of doing that, I was going to have an anxiety attack half the time, because for one thing, it was a way of not seeing whether you got it right or wrong and then three other people might fight with you on the answer and say, "Well, this is the answer." Then, guess what? When you got your test back, you were right, and they were wrong. I really didn't care for cooperative testing at all. Some people might benefit from it, but it wasn't for me.

Participant 9

I did not care for cooperative testing. That's when the students get together afterwards. Cooperative testing made me real anxious. I don't like that, it was too much information, I think. Because everybody had an opinion about what the answer is and I'm thinking, "I don't want to know that, I just want to know what I did wrong". I did not care for cooperative testing.

Tinnon (2018) stated going over an examination with other students allowed them to hear one another's perspective on the missed question that helped them understand why they missed the question. The overall theme participants felt was cooperative testing was not beneficial; however, some students did like the concept as it was designed to learn from peers. The greatest

negative reason voiced regarding cooperative testing was dependent upon members and communication within the group.

Connect Groups. Connected relationships between faculty and students empower them to work hard and be a resource to help them succeed (Pralle, 2016). Connect groups were implemented in the fall of 2017 to help students with testing in understanding what they missed on a previous test and to prepare them for the upcoming test. Connect groups were led by course instructors who randomly divided students at the beginning of the semester to provide small group feedback for testing and content review. Connect groups also allow students to have one instructor to connect with and mentor throughout the semester. Connect group leaders changed as they progressed through the courses in the program. The participants stated they loved connect groups and the interaction with a small group of peers and faculty as a mentor. There was one participant who did not like the group portion of connect groups prior to meeting individually if required. The participant did not enjoy any group activities and preferred all interaction be one-on-one. The participant stated group interactions increased anxiety for her and was confusing.

Participant 1

I absolutely loved connect groups. I felt like it was a more personal experience with the instructor and the students. We were able to sit and go over the test. The instructor was able to give us a more in-depth answer and she really would take the extra mile to help you figure out why you missed it or what you were doing wrong. And you wouldn't have to wait to schedule an appointment with that instructor to review a test.

Participant 11

I liked the one on one that you get because my way of learning is different from someone else. The instructor was able to steer me in the right direction and if it would have been in a group, my weakness probably wouldn't have been pointed out.

Participant 12

I loved it because if you didn't understand something and even if it wasn't their content and you had some kind of a rationale that threw up a red flag for them, they would investigate it for you. Then if it wasn't what you thought it was or whatever the answer was, they had an explanation and I learned a lot with that. I mean, it made it easier to say okay, well, I know now why this is this because they broke it down for you. They allow for discussion. I thought that was great.

Participant 3

I love the connect groups. With the connect groups, you get into a smaller group. You're creating a relationship with your teacher. I like the one-on-one because it takes the time out where you can figure out what did you do wrong in the test or they give you good ideas like what can you do better or how can you study better or sometimes they pinpoint your testing errors better than you can.

Participant 4

I've always had my Connect Group leader be very willing to help in any way, shape, form, or fashion, door always open policy kind of thing. I think that's the main strong point of a Connect Group leader, just willingness to work with others and understand when people are in the time of need without them even having to come ask sometimes. I

feel more comfortable asking questions. You can be more focused on points, particular points.

Participant 2

Connect Group, it makes you more anxious, and sometimes you just wish you didn't do them, just cut it out.

Themes that emerged from connect groups were that it allows students to work in small groups to interact with peers and have a faculty member as a mentor. Connect groups allowed faculty to review tests with students in smaller groups and individually if needed. It strengthens the students testing ability on future tests by understanding why they missed a question. Test anxiety in nursing students is significant and having mentors increases student success in completing nursing courses (Miller, Forehand, & McBride, 2016).

Boot Camp. The program had been exploring ideas related to the implementation of boot camp after attending a conference and talking with faculty from other nursing programs about the effectiveness of implementing a similar experience for incoming freshman nursing students. Faculty discussed and implemented the one-week class in the fall of 2017 for the incoming freshman. The class was designed as an ice breaker to alleviate some anxiety for students during the transition to nursing school. The participants all voiced boot camp was a success and very helpful. There were two participants who did not begin until the end of the week of boot camp due to personal circumstances and could not be evaluated effectively. Bass, Walters, Toohill, and Sidebotham (2015) found establishing a sense of connection and belonging with support from peers and faculty increase motivation and success in nursing.

Participant 1

I think that boot camp was very beneficial not only for me but for the whole class. It eased you into the organized chaos that nursing school is. You just weren't thrown into something expecting right off the bat to know how to do, what to do and how to study ten chapters for a test. It eased you in and I liked that.

Participant 10

I think boot camp was great. I had spoken to some of the students from the previous year who did not get the boot camp experience and they all said, "Wow, I wish we would have had that." It really gave you a week to get to know your instructors and to learn how to use the resources that were available. We didn't know how to work those types of study resources or things that were required for us to complete before class. The instructors took the time during boot camp to explain it to us. I think if had we came straight in; it would have been a little overwhelming. I think boot camp was a great idea.

Participant 12

Absolutely loved it. It calmed my fears, again, going back to I'm older. I was really scared about coming into college and being in nursing school, but it gave you an expectation of what's to come and let's ease you into it.

Participant 15

I enjoyed and loved bootcamp. I feel it prepared us for what to expected in the semester even though it was still overwhelming and stressful. You had a better understanding of what was expected and what you could expect to come.

Participant 4

Boot camp was like a little kid getting candy on Halloween. It was like a treat. Everyone comes in not knowing what to expect and being super nervous on edge and if you're not, there's something wrong with you. Boot camp just really enabled me as a student to get back on the ground level and realize, "Okay, I'm here. I'm doing this." Yes, it's going to be hard but it's just a great encourager and just kind of lays out the next two years of your life for you and what to expect initially. I think boot camp was definitely helpful and something that I would recommend.

Participant 7

Well, I had friends that were in the program before and they said it's like you just get thrown into a nursing school. You just start right off the bat with school work and you don't really know what you're getting into. I felt like boot camp gave me the opportunity to say what I was going to get into and get my feet wet before we just dove in everything.

The participants voiced boot camp was very beneficial and some themes that emerged were ease of transition, getting to know peers and faculty, calmed anxiety, and expectations of nursing school. Kinney, Montegut, and McManus (2017) explained retention in first semester nursing courses is a challenge and found a boot camp experience was 92% effective for success which is proven by participants' voice in this study. The participants' voice in this study revealed 100% success for the intervention. The two participants that joined the class during the end of boot camp were unable to evaluate the intervention effectively.

PASS Class. The idea of PASS Class was developed to assist students with test-taking and study strategies led by the student navigator. Students are highly encouraged to attend all sessions as they prepare for the upcoming test; however, it is voluntary. The overall theme that

emerged from interviews on PASS Class was positive. There were a few participants who did not attend as much in the first year that were excelling. Depending on the content of the upcoming test, some participants found it confusing from one instructor view point, but overall found benefit.

Participant 1

With PASS class through the first year, it was highly encouraged if we had 82 or below. My grades normally maintained 86's or 88's so I did not attend PASS class but a few times.

Participant 10

I think PASS Class was certainly helpful. I think it was a great resource if a student needed it. I did not attend as many in the first year as I do now, but I definitely think it was good addition to the program.

Participant 13

I liked PASS first year. Regardless of what I ever made on the test, I have not missed out on one PASS Class, because there is always going to be something that I've missed in lecture, something in that book, or even something when I'm discussing with another student that I might get in PASS. PASS had different techniques as far as what you do to eliminate the wrong answer or get the right answer.

Participant 15

First year PASS, it had its good days and its bad days. Sometimes you went in there you were learned a lot and sometimes you walk out and become confused about what you learned. It could be contradicted sometimes.

Participant 3

I love PASS Class. With PASS Class, it gives you the opportunity to ask questions that you might not be comfortable asking in the classroom. You can get more of a clarification in PASS Class. Everything is broken down much more than it is in the classroom. I won't say it's one-on-one, but you get that feel when you're in PASS Class. Everything is not rushed like sometimes when you're in the classroom.

Participant 9

I saw PASS as a freebie really. As an opportunity to fill in some gaps and things that I might not have had. It gave me an opportunity to get closer to passing.

PASS Class was beneficial for students to have another opportunity for review, ask questions for clarification, peer and faculty interaction, and to fill in the gaps that were missing. PASS gave ideas for test taking strategies to enhance success on the tests. Froneman (2016) found students need a caring and supportive environment with a willingness from the educator to go the extra mile. The interaction of PASS from a different instructor's view for test review supports the students in understanding content. Some of the downfalls of PASS were that it was repetitive information already taught and always led by the same instructor. PASS was often during student's lunch break which made for a long day. Despite some of the downfalls, the class was a success among the participants.

Learning and Life Skills (LLS). The course was designed for first-semester nursing students to teach them how to manage study skills, critical thinking, time management and test-taking strategies to be successful in the program. The participants viewed LLS as an essential course that was effective but could be improved and was repetitive.

Participant 10

You know how it is when you first get into something, you are really nervous about it, but it just seemed like it was repeating itself. Repetition is good because you may miss it the first time. Come around the second time, you get it. It's just all about accepting it for what it is and utilize it because it's not bad. I didn't grasp the time management then, but you need the time management.

Participant 14

I liked LLS too, really the concept. I thought, it could definitely be improved. It felt like to me that the instructors weren't really communicating with each other. I thought, it might benefit from just one instructor, then having a guest teacher come in for a few minutes. I thought that might make it good. I felt it was a good idea, especially for nursing.

Participant 3

I loved the LLS course. It helped with the test technique strategies and I think it's very important for a freshman coming in to take that course because if you're not a strong test taker, you need to take that course and it'll help you with time management and how to pick out the right answer. Because you have a lot of stuff to read and get through, learning how to not have to read through all the materials and just read what's needed for that content is good.

Participant 6

I did not like LLS. There was a point of first semester we had so much stuff going on, I felt like I could be studying during these three hours.

Participant 5

It taught me how to think critically. We went over a lot of different strategies of how to think critically.

Participant 15

Some days when it was repetitive, you just felt you could have been studying or something else. It wasn't anything that the teacher had done, it was just you can hear time management so many times before your leave.

LLS was beneficial for all but two participants. The overall emerging themes were that it was repetitive; however, time management, test-taking strategies, and critical thinking were positive attributes from the course. The influence instructors have on identifying with new students in lecture to motivate them to be successful through teaching and support (Mckendry, Wright, & Stevenson, 2013). Participants specified that improvements such as topics being repetitive, could make the course very beneficial to first-semester students.

Summary of Intervention Strategies. Intervention strategies were beneficial overall in promoting student's success in their first year of nursing school to optimize their success in the program. Understanding if each retention intervention strategy was successful and how was one of the aims of this study in answering the first research question. The emerging themes were chosen after identifying the categories and subcategories from interview questions then grouping responses under subcategories from each participant using NVivo Qualitative Software. The grouped responses under the subcategories were then further grouped into themes based on participant responses that were similar. The emerging themes presented an understanding into which intervention strategies were successful to promote student success in their first year and why other strategies were unsuccessful.

Table 4

Intervention Strategies and Emerging Themes

| Intervention Strategies | Emerging Themes |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Cooperative Testing | Students' perception on test-taking Small group work increased anxiety Different group dynamics may or may not be beneficial |
| Connect Group | Small groups to interact with peers Faculty member as a mentor Rationales for future test questions |
| Boot Camp | Eased transition Peer and faculty interaction Calmed anxiety Expectations of nursing school |
| PASS | Opportunity for review Ask questions for clarification Peer and faculty interaction Filled in the gaps that were missing Test-taking strategies |
| LLS | Repetitive Time management skills Test-taking strategies Increased critical thinking |

Personal Motivation Strategies

Personal strategies students used to succeed in their first year of nursing school are valuable for faculty to help understand what motivates students in supporting future students to succeed. The categories and subcategories were developed from the research questions as described earlier in the intervention strategies and displayed in Table 3. The subcategories for personal strategies students utilized for success include student strategies, test-taking and study strategies, and changes as progressed. The emerging themes that answer the second research question is presented under each subcategory related to personal strategies and future recommendations.

Student Strategies. Looking at student's perceptions used to succeed in their first year was the aim of this study in answering part of the second research question. Themes that emerged from student strategies include reading, encouragement from fellow nurses and family, good lectures, answering lots of questions and quizzes, videos, notes, study group and time management.

Participant 13

The coolest one was motivation from other folks. The encouragement helped a whole lot. The understanding of my family, especially my kids.

Participant 14

A good lecture is what helped me the most. If the lecture wasn't that great, I really had to go back and read a lot more. The study group helped too because they might recall something that I missed, so that helped.

Participant 15

Take as many questions as you can, because the more questions you take the better you understand what the questions are asking and what they're looking for versus not really having any idea of what they're looking for or asking.

Participant 3

Quizly was one. You can make study notes and you can make your own quizzes on Quizly. I would take the material; read my book and I can make my own questions.

Taking a lot of questions helped. The more questions you take the more it helps you get comfortable with answering those types of questions.

Participant 5

My instructors, I had some really good instructors in my first semester. I put more study time in and questions with classmates.

Participant 6

So if there's a question on Coursepoint I know it's important because it's in my book. So I enjoy Coursepoint questions. I just found this out, but there's little videos on Coursepoint too, that you can watch. There's so much stuff in Coursepoint.

Participant 9

I did a lot of little things. I read one chapter maybe two to three times. Simple things like when I read the first time, I don't highlight. I'm not going to highlight anything because that's like a cheat sheet to me. I don't highlight, I read to understand. Then I went back and maybe I did some highlighting then. In a third time, if I went back to read the third time, I expected to be able to walk through the material by then and to be familiar. Nothing should catch me off guard when I read it through that time and my notes.

Participant 8

You have to want it, you have to make time and schedule to study and make sure you're paying attention and you just have to want it and you have to do all your work on time, be efficient with time management and all that.

Students' Test-taking and Study Strategies. The test-taking and study strategies were what the students felt helped them the most when taking tests. One theme that emerged several times in the interviews was PICK, an acronym taught in PASS and LLS to help the student select the correct answer to questions during testing. PICK stands for P= picture, patient; I= identifiers of the stem; C= choices; and K= keep your first answer. Another theme that emerged included covering and answering the question prior to looking at the answers, looking at stem words and marking out answers that are wrong first through the process of elimination. Other themes were to read and review notes, listen and look up key words in lecture not understood and taking NCLEX style questions.

Participant 13

With my first year, when I did not do well on the first test, I use to just look at the paper and mark an X over the alphabet that I didn't feel that was right. After I took that test, one of the other students and I were working together and going over test review, we realized it's a process of elimination. It's key words that were put in there that you know it wouldn't be that one, so we did process of elimination. Not only that, I also discovered that if I block, circle or highlight certain stuff in a passage, to look at what it's asking for, because sometimes it could have a lot of empty information.

Participant 2

I had me a red pen and a highlighter. What I do is I think that I read the question really quick, underline, and scroll through it. I look at the end, and I look at that first one, go back, and see what my subject matter is. You've got to be very careful with your choices and you just got to pick. You keep your first option because most likely you will second guess yourself and trick yourself out of the answer. In my first year I made a lot of note cards and vocabulary. On my test, I would get a blank sheet of paper and cover up my answers so that when I'm reading my question, I wouldn't focus so much on what the answers were so I can already pinpoint my answer before I look at what's on the answer choices.

Participant 4

Test-taking strategies, I know there's tons of acronyms and strategies out there, but I think, for me, the biggest thing starts the night before. You have to get a good night's rest. If your body isn't sharp, then your mind isn't going to be sharp and you're not going to be able to perform, so a good night's rest and adequate nutrition. Really figure out what the stem of that question is and take it like you're playing cards. Take it at face value. It's nothing more, it's nothing less. Whatever the question asked is what you need to answer.

Participant 8

Test taking strategies I cover up answers and try to figure out an answer before I even look at the answer choices and identify my steam to make sure if it's positive or negative because that's gotten me a few times along with not changing my answer. I don't really take really good notes while the teacher talks but I write down one or two words that she

said because it's hard for me to listen and write. I will either put a star or something in the book to go back and look at that what she said in the book.

Participant 1

I answered hundreds and hundreds of NCLEX style questions that correlated with every topic we did.

Participant 12

If I know the answer, I know it. If I don't, I'm going to do a process of elimination between normally two answers and try to rationalize one either to myself or not, that's how I do it.

Changes as Progressed. As an instructor, seeing changes the students implemented as they progressed through their first year is rewarding to witness growth on things they learned from instructors, peers or from resources. Two participants adjusted from a geographical move due to personal circumstances which allowed them more time to focus and study. Emerging themes were figuring out how to study, having some free time to destress, use of colors for highlighting and reading to understand.

Participant 10

I started using colors. I'm an extremely visual learner and swapping up colors and everything not just being black really helped me. I probably started taking notes a little bit differently, really just hitting more of the nursing process versus a lot of things that we've already gone over, and I already knew. I really started adapting to how would the nurse treat this patient. I think it's really been working for me.

Participant 12

Instead of trying to write the whole book, I learned to pick out what the problem was, how to take care of the problem and then answer the questions to myself.

Participant 4

I started designating some more free time for myself like one day a week, where I would not do anything school related if at all possible because I think your mind really needs a break and your body needs a break. I started actually using a planner to stay organized; that was crucial. I just started learning to do a more in-depth slower reading instead of just skimming through it. Then while you're reading if you don't get something put a note there, stop, go figure that thing out and then come back and continue.

Participant 7

Just figuring out how to study. Writing notes better than I had previously.

Summary of Personal Strategies. The strategies each student applied while in the first year as they progressed helps them in gaining awareness of what makes them succeed. Looking at personal strategies employed by students was another aim of this study in answering part of the second research question.

Table 5

Personal Strategies and Emerging Themes

| Personal Strategies | Emerging Themes |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Student's Strategies | Reading Encouragement from fellow nurses Family support Good lectures Answering lots of questions and quizzes Videos Good notes Study groups Time management |
| Test-taking & Study Strategies | Covering and answering the question prior to looking at the answers Look at stem words and mark out answers that are wrong first Read and review notes Listen and look up key words in lecture not understood Taking NCLEX style questions |
| Changes as Progressed | Learning how to study Having some free time Use of colors for highlighting Reading to understand |

Future Recommendations. In grasping personal strategies students employed and successful retention intervention strategies faculty implemented have shed light on what made students flourish in their first year in HCCADNP. The last category portrays future recommendations that includes obstacles students had to overcome, what helped the most and would've helped earlier, and overall perceptions for recommendations to help future students achieve their goals in nursing.

Obstacles. Nursing school is tough and there are many obstacles to juggle in order to achieve your goals. Some of the emerging themes were time management, financial stability, study habits, test-taking, and balance between work, school and family.

Participant 1

Learning how to study and what to study.

Participant 11

My first year my biggest obstacle was time.

Participant 12

Trying to find the balance between what was expected from me in school in order to progress and finding that balance between the studying in my own way or going back to old habits.

Participant 15

The biggest obstacle has been learning how to take a test. Definitely it's not like what you are use to doing. You have to learn how to apply things and that's been the hardest thing so far.

Participant 5

As I went through my first year, the most thing to overcome was my study habits. I got use to somebody else having my children so I could have uninterrupted time to study. Getting use to those style of questions because I'm knowledgeable about a lot of things in the medical field, but when it comes to answering those NCLEX style questions, I have a hard time. I have to study more on how to answer questions.

Participant 6

It was just really overwhelming, and I use to cry all the time because I couldn't pay for my stuff. I prayed and prayed about it. Then I ended up getting the scholarship from the WIN Job Center second semester. First semester, I paid for everything in cash. I didn't have any scholarships, it was horrible. Now I have scholarships, so everything's good now.

Participant 1

The biggest obstacle was time management for me. I do work every weekend and still spend time with my kids.

What Helped the Most/Earlier. Observing what helped students the most and what would have helped earlier could help the program adjust curriculum and make positive changes to ease the burden of nursing school for students. Emerging themes include intervention strategies, time management, study groups, peer and instructor's attitude and self-determination.

Participant 3

I would say LLS. That helped me the most because like I said, I'm not a real strong test taker but with that class, it helped me build the confidence to answer questions

confidently and not erase my answers. I used the test-taking skills that I learned and time management.

Participant 9

Honestly, the instructor's attitude. I get that it was about learning the material, not about memorizing anything but knowing stuff. I just felt like they wanted me to do good. It's one thing to walk into a classroom and feel that your just another student, but it's another when you feel like people care for you on a deeper level or personal.

Participant 11

I would say working with other classmates because I like to be to myself and when I need to talk to somebody I can't go to my family because they don't understand. The only person that understands what you're going through is a fellow classmate. I would recommend a study group or one or two particular people in your class for you to get close to and vent. Reading, getting in there doing time management and knowing in the beginning that I was a visual learner.

Participant 14

The reading and the group work. Group work and a study group, that was pretty beneficial. I also liked the PASS class, I thought it was pretty good. ATI, it was pretty good, it helped a lot. The connect group, it was pretty good too, especially if we met before each test, that was good, I thought.

Participant 2

What helped me the most in succeeding in my first year was just making sure that I stuck to my study plan and with a study group.

Participant 1

I think the most that helped me succeed through was self-determination. Just being that, time management and reading.

Participant 12

My goal, that was the biggest thing that helped me succeed. We had some really great instructors our first year. They really believed in us and really wanted us to succeed. That made a huge difference to know that somebody believes in you and will stand right there beside you.

Participant 5

If I would have probably went to some of my instructors earlier and talked to him about my stressors or how my lifestyle is set up right now, they probably could have given me pointers on how to study, how to organize my day, plan my day out and plan study time.

Overall perceptions and future recommendations. Students' overall perceptions of intervention strategies and personal strategies used in their first year to triumph and progress was apparent. Harnessing these strategies will help shape the program and benefit future students. Emerging themes were personal intervention strategies, instructor interaction, learn how to study, time management, stay motivated, have a plan, and read.

Participant 14

It was tough having to come from normal to a program like this. I felt that boot camp definitely helped to calm nerves and get you ready. I liked PASS class. I liked LLS, but it was repetitive, it seemed like to me.

Participant 15

First year was very tough, you learn a lot your first year and not really just about school itself. You learned a lot about yourself, how do you study, who you work well with and all of that. First year was stressful and overwhelming but you learn that you can do it if you just put your mind to it.

Participant 4

Overall perception, this is probably one of the hardest things I've ever done, but I'm here. You might as well do the absolute best that you can. I think it enabled me to have a better ability to reason and critically think as well because that's a super important aspect of nursing. It is being able to put the whole picture together at a quick pace on your feet. I think that really opened up my eyes that I can do this. It was tough but I really wouldn't have traded this. The only thing that I regret is not starting it sooner.

Participant 12

I wouldn't trade it for anything in this world. It was a great learning experience, a lot of Motivation and exceeded my expectations.

Participant 6

I enjoyed my first year. I feel like I made a lot of friends. I have made some good relationships with my instructors that I had. I really enjoyed my instructors in my first and second semester they are very helpful. Anytime I came to their office they were always asking what you need. I did enjoy my first and second semester. We had really good instructors. I feel like instructors are so important, their attitude and I just feel like it's so important.

Participant 5

I would say just start now. For people who go on into the program in the future, make sure you have a plan. You've got to have a plan. If you have a family and kids you've got to have a plan. You've got to allow your support system to help you. If you don't you will not make it in nursing school. A lot of stuff you're going to have to miss. You're not going to get to go to a lot of social events. You're not going to get to participate in a lot of things outside of studying. Your whole life is really going to be dedicated to studying and school. You may be able to work, and you may not. You want to be prepared financially.

Participant 10

I think to be successful; you need to be comfortable with who you are and what you believe. You need to come in with an open mind and a really good positive attitude. You need to have already prepared yourself to devote 100% of your time and effort to this program. It's lengthy and it's very in-depth but if you really stick to it and you're organized, pay attention and you devote yourself; you'll get through it. You just really need to have a really open mind and positive attitude.

Participant 4

Remember that you started this program for a reason and you just need to maintain your priorities. I don't realize things come up every day in your personal life but at the end of the day, you really need to focus on what you're doing here.

Participant 11

Read, read, read and really talk to your instructors. Even if they do seem intimidating, go to them. Voice what you feel like you are doing wrong and ask them what you can do to improve yourself. That's what I'll recommend because you cannot do it by yourself.

Participant 3

I would recommend that before they start to get good study habits, practice time management, answer as many questions that they can answer and practice vocabulary.

Sometimes it's not so much of the question, it's more of that word in the question that you don't know and that can drive you to picking the wrong answer.

Summary of Future Recommendations. The participants stated many obstacles they overcame, identified what helped them the most and reflected to progress in the program. Their overall perceptions and future recommendations were very positive. Participants appreciated rigor in the program and recognized what it takes to succeed.

Table 6

Future Recommendations and Emerging Themes

| Future Recommendations | Emerging Themes |
|--|---|
| Obstacles | Time management Financial stability Study habits Test-taking Balance between work, school and family |
| Helped the Most/Earlier | Intervention strategies Time management Study group with peers Develop a plan Instructor's attitude Self-determination |
| Overall Perceptions/Recommendations | Intervention strategies Instructor interaction Learn how to study Time management Stay motivated Have a plan Read |

Summary of findings. The intervention strategies that were implemented in the fall of 2017 were successful and evident in the interviews. Boot camp received an overwhelming response of success as the most beneficial intervention in the first semester. Boot camp allowed the students time to transition into nursing school and alleviate some stress before jumping into course content and testing. Connect groups and PASS were second of benefit to the students. LLS group was beneficial but needs adapting to remove the overlapping response of repetition. Cooperative testing was not as beneficial for most participants due to group dynamics. The students' personal strategies and future recommendation themes presented time management, peer and instructor interaction, reading, lots of questions, staying motivated, learning how to study, balancing time for self, work, school, and family, along with use of intervention strategies to all be benefiting factors leading to progression in the program.

Participants' voiced the importance of overcoming obstacles while progressing through their first-year. The emerging themes that were identified include time management, financial stability, study habits, test-taking and finding a good balance between work, family and school. Some of the obstacles such as test-taking, time management and study habits were included in the retention intervention strategies to help students be successful. Exploring other ways to support students with financial resources and balancing work, family and school would be an area for further research. It is important to recognize obstacles students conquer as they progress. Overcoming difficulties would also benefit them as they enter the workforce.

The adaptation of Jeffrey's NURS model as the conceptual framework used for this study was effective in proving that multiple adaptations affect student retention and success. The study results show how the personal interviews illuminated factors and strategies that influenced students to succeed. As educators, innovative changes can be made to make a positive difference

in optimizing outcomes. Jeffreys (2015) found the concept of retention and success to be dichotomous; however, it is complex with several paths to reach the desired outcome.

Optimizing the outcomes benefits the students in becoming responsible citizens, competent and competitive in society. Instilling equity, ethics and social justice into the students impacts the student's future as a practitioner.

Focus Group Interview

A focus group interview was held in a classroom per the participants request. The participants had a choice in the date, time and place for the focus group interview. Each student reviewed their transcribed individual transcript from the individual interviews for accuracy to add, delete or edit anything they deemed needed to be changed. The participants were asked the focus group questions with no additional input surrounding retention intervention strategies or personal strategies utilized. The students voiced they would have liked more pharmacology resources and to continue using the retention intervention strategies to keep students motivated. One participant also wanted more resource representatives to show them additional resources and how to use the resources available in more detail.

Participant 8

Having the individual meeting with their connect leader/assigned instructor. They can kind of individualize what areas you have and that you need improvement on. It can help individualize instead of just in general test taking.

Participant 10

Keep doing what you're doing.

Participant 11

I feel like boot camp, it just really helped with Nursing I.

Participant 12

More pharmacology.

Participant 14

Pharmacology from direct sources. Sometimes we have sources, but some are needed more than others. Some sources you could just read in first semester as opposed to second semester. Courses are getting on a higher level in second semester than what we did our first semester.

Participant 16

Maybe more visits from resource reps on how to use resources

Participant 17

I like when we get to be with the first-year students in third, it motivated me. I don't know it just it did something for me just to be able to be with them because it helped me remember my struggle. It motivated me to keep trying to do better so I like having more contact with them.

Summary of Focus Group. The focus group interview reiterated the accomplishment of the intervention strategies and structure of the first year to help students be successful. The focus group interview showed three new themes that would be beneficial changes for future students. One suggestion was to offer more resources to understand pharmacology. Another suggestion was how to increase resource representatives to explain online resources utilized in the course and offer additional ones. The third suggestion of allowing second year students to interact more with first-year students as a mentor to motivate the first-year students and empower second year students to press forward. This type of interaction permits peer interaction for learning to take place, vests all level students and promotes inspiration for success.

Table 7

Group Interviews and Emerging Themes

| Focus Group Emerging Themes |
|--|
| More Pharmacology resources |
| Increase resource representatives |
| Additional interaction between first- and second-year students |

Research Questions

1. How do students in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program perceive the effectiveness of retention interventions in their first year? *The questions in the individual interviews related to retention interventions answer this research question.*

The intervention strategies proved to be effective as shown in the findings of the interviews. There was significant support of boot camp, connect groups and PASS being key factors in the success for first-year students. LLS was noteworthy in promoting strategies to progress but requires restructuring to remove repetition. Cooperative testing was not beneficial for student success because of group dynamics. The continual improvement in the retention intervention strategies show promise in supporting future students to be retained and flourish.

2. What personal strategies can be observed to enhance student success in their first year at Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program? *The questions in the individual interviews related to personal strategies and future recommendations answer this research question.*

The personal strategies and future recommendations yielded overlapping themes of the importance of study groups, peer and faculty interaction, reading, time management, planning, answering lots of questions and staying motivated. The use of resources and support from others is crucial to surviving nursing school. Heeding advice from successful students could make a difference in retention for future students and decrease their anxiety and frustrations.

An essential part of professional development and attrition in nursing students consists of learning their environment and interaction with peers and mentors (Hoeve, Castelein, Jansen & Roodbol, 2017). Interacting with peers and faculty and learning what prior students have overcome can alleviate stress and attribute to a positive start. Nursing students experience anxiety related to test taking more than other college students due to the demanding nature of the program and balancing schoolwork, family and work (Liu & Xu, 2017). Discovering ways to assist students with test-taking strategies and study habits for success was the main goal of the intervention strategies that was proven to be beneficial in this study.

NEXT STEPS

The qualitative study proposed two research questions to identify what retention intervention strategies were effective for first year nursing students and what personal strategies enhanced their success. The results of the two questions were PASS, connect groups, and boot camp were very beneficial in enhancing success. LLS had beneficial qualities for test-taking and study habits but requires some alterations to avoid repetitiveness. Cooperative testing was found not beneficial as a result of group dynamics. The findings indicated student strategies and recommendations overlapped with participants stressing the importance of reading, time management, planning, balancing aspects of school, work, and family, interaction with peers for study groups, faculty interaction and remaining positive.

Focus group interviews further supported success of intervention strategies implemented in the fall of 2017 to improve student achievement. In addition, three new themes emerged for improvement in developing the program such as integrating additional helpful resource for pharmacology, increase resource representatives, and provide additional interaction between first- and second-year nursing students. Allotting more time for positive interactions of students between levels can boost motivation and morale. “Students have to want to persist and expend the effort to do so even when faced with the challenges they sometimes encounter” (Tinto, 2017, pg. 255).

The findings exposed areas of improvement for faculty to enhance intervention strategies and the importance of faculty mentoring. The need for support from peers, faculty, family and others was evident and extremely important to thrive. The findings are relevant to nursing programs related to ensuring the generation of new knowledge require ongoing assessment and refinement. The necessity to develop students who are fair, responsible, have equal access to learning and uphold ethical responsibilities is of the utmost importance for faculty and the success of the program.

The third manuscript for this study will reveal implementation and dissemination plans for the HCCADNP and may be used to improve other community college nursing programs. The study identified strategies that improve student support and success in the program. Recommendations for future students were identified which could boost forthcoming implementation programs for retention and support of students. The results confirm faculty efforts in supporting student achievement and ways to enhance teaching strategies and mentoring students.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEE AND CIRCUMSTANCES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEE AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Nursing is accountable to report retention, attrition, and graduation rates to Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN, 2018). ACEN is the accrediting body for the Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCADNP). In the spring of 2013, an increase in the difficulty of the RN licensure examination as the National Council of State Board of Nursing (NCSBN) changes every three years by the NCLEX Examination Committee. As a result, the Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) program's rigor increased and restructuring of the courses for the program rapidly changed. Retention of the students in the Fundamentals or Nursing I course in the day program suffered the most significant loss over the next three years falling as low as 40.74%. Implementation of retention interventions in the fall of 2017 increased retention to 77.36% with the HCCADNP standard set at 80% retention rate for the first-semester nursing course. Retention interventions strategies that were implemented include: PASS Class, LLS Course, Boot Camp, Co-operative testing, and Connect Groups (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018). In an effort to further improve retention of students, it is essential to understand what students experienced related to retention interventions in their first-semester and their perceptions which increased their success in their first year of nursing school. The purpose of this case study is to understand students' perceptions and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students regarding retention interventions utilized in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCANDP).

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER TO POTENTIAL RESEARCH SUBJECTS

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER TO POTENTIAL RESEARCH SUBJECTS

October 28, 2018

Theresa Hargett
EdD Graduate Student
University of Mississippi
Oxford, MS
662-934-7565
tbhargett@go.olemiss.edu

Dear Holmes Grenada, ADN Nursing III Students:

As a doctoral student, I am writing to let you know that a research study is being planned that may be of interest to you. It is possible that you may be eligible to participate in this study.

Please be aware that, even if you are eligible, your participation in this or any research study is completely voluntary. There will be no consequences to you whatsoever if you choose not to participate, and your status as a student will not be affected by that choice.

If you do choose to participate, the study will involve a 30-45-minute personal interview in a quiet location regarding your success strategies of progression in the nursing program and your perception of intervention strategies utilized in the first year. The questions will focus on your personal successes in the program and the obstacles you overcame as a nursing student to be successful. Once the interviews are complete, the data will be organized into themes and presented to all students in the study as a one-hour focus group session. The purpose of the focus groups is to validate the reliability of the findings from the personal interviews and initiate any further or missed themes from the interviews.

In order to determine your eligibility and interest in participating as a Nursing III student, you will email me of your interest to participate. You will need to have taken the LLS Course in the Fall of 2017. All of the other intervention strategies were mandatory for all students in their first year. You may choose not to participate or respond to this letter. If you do respond, any questions you have regarding the study will be answered by a prompt return email.

If you would prefer not to be contacted at all, please call 662-227-2305 or email Theresa Hargett at thargett@holmescc.edu that you would NOT like to be contacted regarding this research study.

Of course, if you have any questions for me, please contact me.

Thank you for your interest in this research possibility,

Theresa Hargett
EdD Graduate Student
Recruitment Letter

APPENDIX C: INTRODUCTION TO STUDY LETTER

APPENDIX C: INTRODUCTION TO STUDY LETTER

November 05, 2018

Theresa Hargett
EdD Graduate Student
University of Mississippi
Oxford, MS
662-934-7565
tbhargett@go.olemiss.edu

Dear Nursing III Students:

I am writing you to let you know regarding a research study that you have the option to take part in. The research study is being conducted by Theresa Hargett, EdD graduate student at the University of Mississippi as part of a research study. I am contacting you because you have responded as interested in a personal interview regarding your nursing student experiences.

My research study is focused on your success strategies of progression in the Grenada ADN Program and your perception of intervention strategies utilized in the first year. Understanding ways students overcome obstacles and have success in the program is the priority interest of my research and purpose for this interview. It is my desire to obtain some information helpful in forthcoming interviews for my research with the goal of helping future students who are struggling.

You will be asked to reveal your experiences you had while in nursing school during this interview. Some of the topics may be uncomfortable for you in your reflection of your struggles during the nursing program. Future decisions regarding your nursing career and status in this program will not be affected by your participation in this interview. Although your personal reflections may be difficult for you, it may also lead to a better understanding of the struggle's students have in the program to gain insight in assisting future students with obstacles to be successful in the program.

Your name will be completely confidential throughout the life of this research. Data and results of information gathered, utilized, and shared with your permission, will not be linked to your identify. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identify. I will ensure protection and confidentiality of the information written and recorded during this interview. The information and recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research project.

Taking part in research is always optional. We are looking for people who want to take part in this research study and who are:

- Third semester nursing students that overcame obstacles to progress through the program
- Willing to share information that may assist future students
- Must have taken LLS Course in the Fall of 2017

If you decided to take part in the study, we would:

- Schedule a 30-45-minute personal interview in a quiet location of your choice to receive input of your success in the Grenada ADN Program

There is no cost to participate in the study other than your time. As a thank you for taking part in the study, you would receive the gratification of assisting future students succeed and have your voice heard regarding obstacles you perceive in the Holmes ADN Grenada Program.

Taking part in this research study is voluntary and you are under no obligation. If you would like to stop your participation at any point during the study, you will not be penalized in any way. Your status in the nursing program will not be affected in any way if you choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would like to proceed in scheduling an interview or have any further questions regarding the study, please do not hesitate to call or email me at 662-227-2308 thargett@holmescc.edu.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Theresa Hargett
EdD Graduate Student

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Students' Perceptions and Strategies for Success in An Associate Degree Nursing Program

Theresa Hargett
EdD Graduate Student
University of Mississippi
Oxford, MS
662-934-7565
tbhargett@go.olemiss.edu

Description

My research study is focused on your success strategies of progression in the Grenada ADN Program and your perception of intervention strategies utilized in the first year. Understanding ways students overcome obstacles and have success in the program is the priority interest of my research and purpose for this interview. It is my desire to obtain some information helpful in forthcoming interviews for my research with the goal of helping future students who are struggling.

Risks and Benefits

You will be asked to reveal your experiences you had while in nursing school during this interview. Some of the topics may be uncomfortable for you in your reflection of your struggles during the nursing program. Future decisions regarding your nursing career and status in this program will not be affected by your participation in this interview. Although your personal reflections may be difficult for you, it may also lead to a better understanding of the struggle's students have in the program to gain insight in assisting future students with obstacles to be successful in the program.

Cost and Payments

The individual interview will take approximately 30-45- minutes to finish. Other than your time, there are no other costs for helping us with this study. As a thank you for taking part in the study, you would receive the gratification of assisting future students succeed and have your voice heard regarding obstacles you perceive in the Holmes ADN Grenada Program.

Confidentiality

Your name will be completely confidential throughout the life of this research. Data and results of information gathered, utilized, and shared with your permission, will not be linked to your identify. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identify. I will ensure protection and confidentiality of the information written and recorded during this interview. The information and recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research project.

Right to Withdraw

You are under no obligation to take part in this study. If you would like to stop your participation at any point during the study, you will not be penalized in any way. Your status in the nursing program will not be affected in any way if you choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to participate or to withdraw will remain confidential.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

This study has been reviewed by Holmes Community College Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness and Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL). Completed CITI training in Human Research.

Release of Rights to Written or Recorded Information

By signing below, I release all rights of any recorded or written information that I provided during this study. With this release, I grant the University of Mississippi, Theresa Hargett and research committee the permission to full disclosure of the interview without limitation.

My signature below means that I agree to all the above terms.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Title of Study: Students' Perceptions and Strategies for Success in An Associate Degree Nursing Program

Theresa Hargett
EdD Graduate Student
University of Mississippi
Oxford, MS
662-934-7565
tbhargett@go.olemiss.edu

Standard Procedures:

The interviews will take place in a quiet location the interviewee has chosen for 30-45-minutes. The interviewer will allow the participant time to read and sign informed consent after any questions have been answered. The interviewer will begin once the voice recording once informed consent has been signed and recorder started. Questions will be asked in sequence with additional side questions recorded as pertinent to the interview. Once the interview is completed, the interviewee will be thanked for their time and contribution to the nursing program. Finally, a brief debriefing will entail how and when the interviewee will be contacted to approve the transcript for use in the study in a one-hour focus group session once all of the individual interviews are completed. The focus group session will allow the interviewees to edit, clarify, or add additional comments to their individual recorded transcripts and respond to the group questions.

Individual Interview Questions:

1. Taking a moment to reflect, tell me regarding yourself and how you felt when you first started the nursing program?
2. Can you describe to me what obstacles you faced as you progressed through your first year of the nursing program?
3. Tell me what type of learner you are and describe some of the teaching strategies used throughout the program were beneficial to you.
4. Did you begin doing anything differently as you progressed in the program?
5. Describe to me some of the test taking strategies and study techniques you utilized in your first year.
6. Tell me regarding your perceptions of PASS classes through your first year.
7. How did you feel regarding co-operative testing in your first semester?
8. What perceptions do you have regarding Connect Groups in your first year?
9. What are your thoughts regarding the LLS Course offered in your first semester?
10. Tell me how Boot Camp affected your first semester?
11. What are your overall perceptions regarding your first year?
12. Can you tell me what helped you the most in succeeding through the first year?
13. What are some things that would have helped you earlier to help you succeed?
14. Can you describe the strategies you used other than the retention interventions to help you succeed in your first year?
15. What recommendations do you have for future nursing student's success in the program?

Focus Group Questions:

1. After presenting the themes, do they seem consistent with your experiences with success?
2. Are there any themes missing in the interpretation of the individual interviews?
3. Do any themes need to be added or edited that were found in the interviews?
4. Do you feel some themes are more important than others to authenticate your experiences with success?
5. Is there anything else I need to know regarding student success in the first year of nursing school?
6. What are some possible themes that need to be explored related to future research of student success in nursing school?

Thank You:

I would like to thank you for sharing your experiences and successes with me today to enhance my understanding of student struggles and triumphs in nursing school and if intervention strategies implemented by faculty in the fall of 2017 had any impact on student success. The input will be valuable to me for to gain insight for future interviews and data collection for my study. I anticipate the study increasing success for future nursing students who struggle through the program. If you think of any further questions or thoughts for me, please feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX F: BOOTCAMP

APPENDIX F: BOOTCAMP

Fundamental's Bootcamp **Fall 2017**

Day 1 Monday, 8/14:

Introduction- LLS course

Faculty- calendar, syllabus, handbook, paperwork, tour, backpacks

Student Navigator- PASS, Test taking and remediation with stress reduction strategies, study habits, role as navigator, purchase ATI

Guest- library, ATI- Docucare, TC's- uniforms, writing center rep

Day 2 Tuesday, 8/15:

Faculty- SNA & officers, MOSA, ATI- dimensional analysis & drug calculation fundamentals, prefixes, cooperative testing, skills groups, connect groups

Day 3 Wednesday, 8/16:

Faculty - abbreviations, LWW coursepoint plus (assignments for class & test with loss of 5 pts), handwashing lab and sterile gloving, ATI: self-assessment inventory, nurse logic, testing & remediation, community service hours, critical thinking exercises

Day 4 Thursday, 8/17:

Faculty - notebook & name, Erikson, Maslow, suffixes, forms for notebook: CPR, background check, TB, immunizations, drug test, etc., professionalism (social media, dress)

APPENDIX G: PASS

APPENDIX G: PASS

Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCADNP) Program for Accelerated Student Success

The Program for Accelerated Student Success (PASS) is designed to provide a proactive means to increase the success of nursing students. PASS is designed to retain nursing students who will graduate and successfully complete the licensure exam. The program is composed of admission criteria, continuous student evaluation and progression.

Students will be equally divided among the instructors of each course and assigned a Student Success Coach or Connect Group Leader who will monitor academic progress and provide information and assistance with educational concerns. Each student will complete the Assessment Technology Institute (ATI) Self-Assessment Inventory and a Student Success Assessment to identify learning styles, life stressors and risk factors. Students will meet with assigned coach at the beginning of each semester and as needed in order to discuss ways to enhance success and address any identified risk factors with strategies to minimize those risk factors.

PASS records are maintained of students for evaluation by Student Success Coach or Connect Group Leader and the Student Navigator, each student will sign an individual PASS contract at the beginning of each semester. A copy of each PASS contract will be retained in the student's HCCADNP Student Records. Each student is expected to actively participate in PASS as it is their professional accountability and responsibility.

The PASS class will be organized and conducted by the Student Navigator who will emphasize content and concepts driven by the syllabus content related to the student's upcoming unit test. The Student Navigator will not be "re-teaching" the material -they will be guiding the student how to use information, stressing test taking strategies and study skills, and help students navigate required course resources.

ALL students are strongly encouraged to attend the first assigned PASS class of each semester. All PASS classes are open to any student throughout the semester. Students who have been identified as "high risk" by the Student Success Coach and/or a student who scores an 82% or below on Unit Test are strongly encouraged to attend upcoming PASS class prior to next unit test.

APPENDIX H: PASS CONTRACT

APPENDIX H: PASS CONTRACT

Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program for
Accelerated Student Success
(PASS)

| |
|----------------|
| Date: _____ |
| Student: _____ |
| Coach: _____ |

Program for Student Success (PASS) Contract: (initial all items)

- _____The student will be assigned a Student Success Coach/Connect Group Leader at the beginning of each semester who will monitor academic progress and provide information along with assistance with education concerns.
- _____The student will complete an ATI Self-Assessment Inventory and a Student Success Assessment to identify learning styles, risk factors and life stressors.
- _____Any student who scores a grade equal to or less than an 82% on a unit test is strongly encouraged to attend the following PASS class in order to prepare for upcoming unit test.

Student Signature and date: _____

Circle Correct Class: NUR I NUR II NUR III NURIV

Appendix I: PICK

Appendix I: PICK

Test Taking Strategies using PICK

*Test blueprint on the National Council of State Board of Nursing Website:

<http://www.ncsbn.org>

P= what is the **problem, picture, point** (patient/client and the issue)

I= Identifiers of the stem: is it a true or false stem? Prioritize using Maslow/Nursing Process/Erikson/ABC's. Sources of safety and risk reduction: least restrictive or least invasive. Consider is it acute/chronic; stable/unstable, emergent/urgent/non-urgent/expectant; early/late signs; pre/intra/post op; time elapsed.

C= Consider choices; what you know about the question and a positive answer to the problem before carefully considering each choice (if multiple choice is each answer true or false; must look at all answers if prioritizing or putting in order)

K= Keep you first answer and do not change!!

APPENDIX J: LLS

APPENDIX J: LLS

LLS 1413 Grenada FALL 2017 IMPROVEMENT OF STUDY FOR NURSING STUDENTS

| Date | Time | Content | Faculty |
|------|-----------|--|---------|
| | | WEEK 1 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Orientation, Empowerment, Preparing Study Skills, Good Thinking | |
| | | WEEK 2 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Study Skills, Time Management, Study Techniques | |
| | | WEEK 3 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Study Skills, Test Success, Test Question Format | |
| | | WEEK 4 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Strategies for Success, Test Anxiety, Stress | |
| | | WEEK 5 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Test #1 | |
| | | Test Taking Strategies: Alternate Format Testing, Thinking and Reasoning Skills, SLO's, Bloom's Taxonomy | |
| | | WEEK 6 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | NCLEX Test Plan, Pharmacology review | |
| | | WEEK 7 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Learning Styles, Nursing Process <i>(10/5 MT Grades Due)</i> | |
| | | WEEK 8 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Cognitive Restructuring, Information Literacy | |
| | | WEEK 9 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Test-taking Strategies, Critical Thinking, Prioritization, Acute vs Chronic | |
| | | WEEK 10 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Test #2 | |
| | | Test-Taking Strategies, Communication Questions | |
| | | WEEK 11 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Role of the Nurse, Educational Theory (11/2 Last Day to Drop) | |
| | | WEEK 12 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Computerized Testing | |
| | | WEEK 13 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Practice Exams and Review | |
| | | WEEK 14 | |
| | 2:30-5:30 | Practice Exams and Review | |
| | | WEEK 15 | |
| | TBA | Final Exam | |

MANUSCRIPT III: IMPLEMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Retention has been widely studied and is an ongoing problem for colleges over the past four decades (Xu, 2016). Nursing retention in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCADNP) is no exception. The problem of practice researched in this qualitative study was to understand perceptions of retention intervention strategies and personal strategies of successful third-semester nursing students utilized in their first year at Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program (HCCANDP). Nursing education's goal is to provide educational strategies to enhance problem solving skills and critical thinking vital for the application of knowledge as students' progress in the program and in their career (Rivaz, Momennasab, & Skokrollahi, 2015). The HCCADNP Self-Study Report (2018) shows the retention rate dropped in the fall of 2014 to 56.36% from 77.78% in the fall of 2013 after an increase in difficulty of the national licensure examination to become a registered nurse. A decrease in retention remained below 60% for the next two years as a result of an increase in rigor and testing. The increase in rigor was imperative in preparing students to pass the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN). Retention interventions were implemented in the fall of 2017 to increase student retention and success. Retention interventions strategies that were implemented and explained in the previous two manuscripts include PASS Class, LLS Course, Boot Camp, Co-operative testing, and Connect Groups. The retention rate of successful students increased in the first-semester for the fall of 2017 to 77.36% with the implementation by faculty of retention interventions. The purpose of this study is understanding students' perceptions of the retention interventions and personal strategies of

success in their first year. Understanding students' perceptions and personal strategies will improve retention and promote success of future students in the first year and as they progress in the program.

The conceptual framework used to explore this problem of practice was an adapted Nursing Model for Success from Jeffreys' Nursing Universal Retention and Success (NURS) model. Jeffreys (2012) stated understanding students' perceptions can positively influence retention efforts and success. Retention interventions designed to target student retention can increase success. Using Jeffreys' NURS model with adaptations provided the framework in this study to explore the problem in practice for optimizing student success outcomes. The conceptual framework and literature review supported factors affecting student success in nursing education. The framework and literature review supported the findings related to retention interventions that were implemented and personal strategies used for success of nursing students. Interventions employed were successful in promoting student-instructor communication, peer support, decrease in anxiety, time management, test-taking tips, and motivation for success.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of HCCADNP was to improve retention and promote success in the program. Determining outcomes related to success of the retention interventions implemented in the fall of 2017 was explored in this qualitative study utilizing personal interviews and a focus group interview. The findings explored third semester students' personal strategies and success of the intervention strategies implemented in their first year resulting in progression. There were 15 participants in their third semester of the HCCADNP who partook in individual interviews and 11 who progressed to fourth semester for the focus group interview. The participants shared in

the five retention interventions in their first semester in the fall of 2017 through their first year. The open-ended questions guided the interviews and allowing participants' honest perceptions of personal strategies and retention interventions during their first year. The participants reviewed their transcribed responses from the audio-recorded interviews to edit, clarify, or add any changes in the group interview. Data was secured for confidentiality, numbers were assigned for anonymity and written consent was obtained prior to the interviews.

Data was transcribed for accuracy and organized using NVivo, a qualitative software, to assist in identifying themes and patterns. The interview questions were divided into three categories: intervention strategies, personal strategies, and future recommendations. The categories were then further divided into subcategories related to the topics of the interview questions. Table 3 in manuscript two displayed the five retention interventions and student personal strategies categories and subcategories for success. Participant responses were placed in the subcategories revealing emerging themes to answer the research questions. The interviews were designed to answer the research questions proposed in this study:

1. How do students in Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program perceive the effectiveness of retention interventions in their first year?
2. What personal strategies can be observed to enhance student success in their first year at Holmes Community College Associate Degree Nursing Program?

The findings related to the first research question supported faculty implemented retention interventions to be successful in nursing student's first year. Retention rates in HCCADNP increased from below 60% from 2014-2016 to 77.36% in the fall of 2017 (HCCADNP Self-Study Report, 2018). The responses under connect groups indicated positive qualities such as small groups were better to interact with peers and faculty to grasp a better understanding of

rationales for future testing. Cooperative testing responses indicated positive qualities such as understanding other student's perspectives on test-taking. Some cooperative testing responses indicated the need for improvement due to group dynamics to help decrease anxiety and confusion. Boot camp collected a 100% positive response of success for those who participated as the most beneficial intervention in the first semester. Boot camp allowed the students time to transition into nursing school, alleviated some stress before jumping into the course content and provided positive interaction between students, peers, and faculty. PASS class provided an opportunity for review to fill in missing content gaps from lecture and connect students with the Student Navigator who led the class. The LLS Course was beneficial for learning time management, test-taking strategies and increased critical thinking, but needs adapting to remove the overlapping response of repetition. The retention interventions were beneficial overall in promoting student success in their first year. One aspect in every retention intervention is to increase critical thinking with test-taking by interacting with peers and instructors. An essential test-taking strategy is a reflective test review allowing students to understand why they chose the incorrect answer when taking tests to improve thought processes on future tests (Tinnon, 2018).

The findings related to the second research question indicated personal strategies students utilized during their first year are valuable in understanding what motivates students. Personal strategies used by participants revealed themes of effective time management, peer and instructor interaction, listening and taking key notes in class, reading to understand, answering lots of questions, staying motivated with a positive attitude, self-accountability, learning how to study and take tests, and balancing time for self, work, school, and family. One example described how to look at the stem word in the question and mark out incorrect answers. Another example was the use of color coding to highlight while reading and testing to choose the correct answer.

Extrinsic factors such as the influence of family, peers and self-motivation are keys to students' perseverance in nursing school in becoming a nurse, despite the disappointments (Hoeve, Castelein, Jansen, & Roodbol, 2017).

The participants' future recommendations included learning more in-depth about how to use course resources that could be beneficial for studying and test-taking. An example suggested was the need for more resources in studying and understanding pharmacology. Pharmacology in the past was a separate course in the HCCADNP and was integrated throughout the curriculum to place content with the corresponding medical surgical content. This would be an area of importance for future research to determine if pharmacology is more beneficial to students integrated or as a separate course. Pharmacology is vital to nursing students passing the licensure examination and safety in nursing practice.

Additional positive future recommendations included maintaining balance with work, family and school, interacting with peers and faculty and developing a plan for studying and time management. The importance of interaction between first- and second-year students and faculty develop support systems to increase motivation and alleviate some anxiety related to nursing school. Students can learn from one another and form study groups to assist in preparing for tests, lecture, labs and clinical. Faculty should encourage study groups that will be a support system throughout the program to help decrease stress and anxiety in nursing students experience (Tagher, 2017).

The personal strategies and future recommendations suggested overlapping themes to the retention interventions strategies on the importance of study groups, peer and faculty interaction, reading to understand, time management, planning, answering lots of questions and staying motivated. The positive themes that emerged from the retention interventions provided

recommendations to enhance students' outcomes in their first year. Some of the test-taking and time management elements participants identified in the personal strategies that were most beneficial in the success of their first year is important to this study in assisting future students' success. Garcia, (2016) in a similar study about student's perceptions for retention, found students were feeling over stressed, realized self-motivation was important, and the reality of making changes were relevant to increase their success. Providing feedback to faculty to increase understanding of resources, reducing stress, and understanding student success and failure is imperative to student and program success (Garcia, 2016). Gaining insights into students' perceptions of what increased their success in the first-year assist faculty to implement changes that have a positive impact for future students' success and the retention for the program.

IMPROVING PRACTICE TO ENHANCE EQUITY, ETHICS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Education programs and future workforce are dependent upon retention of students in their respective fields of study (Bass, Walters, Toohill, & Sidebotham, 2016). Two of the leading factors for students not progressing include lack of preparedness for study and lack of interaction with peers and faculty (Bass et. al., 2016). This study reinforces that students, when asked about their success, voiced the need to learn how to study, take test and be supported by mentors and peers. Administrators should consider similar interviews with students in the college and in all cohorts of the nursing program to assess students' experiences, learning needs, and outcomes of student success. Understanding student experiences for success could increase retention and success of future students in the college and nursing program.

Safeguarding retention standards is vital for the program's success, funding, and accreditation outcomes. Assuring every student entering the program receives an equal opportunity for success is a goal of the college and nursing program (HCC Bulletin, 2018). "According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Projections 2016-2026, Registered Nursing (RN) is listed among the top occupations in terms of job growth through 2026. The RN workforce is expected to grow from 2.9 million in 2016 to 3.4 million in 2026, an increase of 438,100 or 15%. The Bureau also projects the need for an additional 203,700 new RNs each year through 2026 to fill newly created positions and to replace retiring nurses" (AACN, 2019). Increasing retention to meet the needs of this shortage is a concern for the HCCADNP. Understanding students' perceptions of retention interventions and personal strategies utilized in their first year is the purpose of this study and vital for the success of students and the program. There is a nursing shortage in Mississippi and a health care provider shortage in the majority of the state as baby boomers age and nurses are retiring or leaving positions (Ciurczak, 2018). Strategies for student success in nursing improves social mobility and social efficiency by increasing students' chances to graduate, pass the licensure examination, enter the workforce, and continue their education to meet the needs of the aging population. Designing interventions that will provide equity among nursing students that are successful could be shared with other schools of nursing to improve student success and improve retention programs.

According to the HCCADNP Self-Study Report (2018) and data examined utilizing student interviews, success was increased in the first-semester nursing students following implementation of retention interventions. The report exposed retention increased in the first-semester to 77.36% in the fall of 2017 with implementation of retention interventions compared

to below 60% for the previous three years. Individual student interviews revealed students embraced the interventions and employed personal strategies that boosted their success. Participants offered recommendations of improvement for the interventions that were not beneficial in some respects.

Boot Camp

The participants revealed boot camp to be very beneficial in easing transition in their first semester to alleviate anxiety associated with starting nursing school. Boot camp assisted the students in easing into the semester before jumping straight into course content and testing. The first week also allowed students time to connect with peers and faculty. Kinney, Montegut, Carlton, & McManus (2017) concluded in a study that boot camp was not only beneficial to student success, but the knowledge gained from the workshop made a positive impact to improve confidence in the first year of nursing students. Strategies learned in boot camp could alter the students' perception of nursing school and influence their success in the program.

Connect Groups, LLS & PASS

Teaching students' successful team-based learning strategies are effective in improving student's role as a professional to improve future outcomes (Wong, Wong, Chan, Chan, Ganotice, & Ho, 2017). Faculty and peer mentoring gained with retention interventions such as connect groups, LLS and PASS class provided support through group interactions and student-faculty relationships to develop strategies for test-taking, studying, time management and motivation. Increasing student to faculty collaboration enhances communication and student success tactics. Recommendations to enhance group dynamics in connect groups and decreasing repetition of topics in LLS were areas gained from the interviews to improve retention interventions.

Cooperative Testing

Cooperative testing was an intervention that was beneficial providing group dynamics were allowing students an equal voice. An area of development for cooperative testing would be to gain a better understanding of what makes student group testing and collaborating successful. Collaborative testing improves test performance and retention of course content to improve long-term learning (Rivaz et al., 2015). This promotes peer interaction in learning from current or former students' strategies that enhance success in the program. Hoeve et. al. (2017) found working in a good team with support from mentors and peers were very important factors leading to increased retention.

The information gained from this study could be used as a pathway to enhance planning for curriculum changes and improve student success in the nursing program. Revision of retention interventions to increase student and program success throughout the nursing program was a positive impact of the study. There were strengths of this study revealing students' perceptions of faculty implemented retention interventions and personal strategies used in their first year to promote success. Participants freely voiced their opinion regarding these strategies and offered recommendations for future students' success in the program. In striving to increase retention and improve student success in the nursing program, understanding students views on what makes them successful to enhance retention for future students is a strength for this study.

A limitation to this study is the number of students in the sample (n=15) for individual interviews and (n=11) for the focus group interview. All students from the first semester did not participate in all of the intervention strategies and were not included in the study. An exit interview with students after each semester would benefit to improve outcomes. The small sample size poses no threat to the reliability and transferability of results. Repetition of

responses was obtained among the small sample size and themes were overlapping among different questions. Examples of these include student and peer interaction, time management and test-taking strategies. Another limitation of the study was the students' recall of strategies as they were interviewed in their third semester regarding strategies used in their first-semester. Reaching more students at the end of each semester and encouraging them to voice their strategies for success and evaluating implementations would lead to a larger reflection of student success and success of the program.

There were no budgetary constraints with this research or the implementation of the retention interventions for this study. However; figuring out cost per student of each course in comparison to intervention strategies and students' perceptions of resources could impact the budget for the program. Implementing an evaluation over a three-year period to examine the use of resources and benefits of the implementation strategies could be implications for a future study. This could strengthen and assist with spending costs that would affect the program and the college.

An intervention action based upon the data revealed in the findings would be for faculty to evaluate the use of cooperative testing and group work to ensure all students are benefiting. Participants voiced the effectiveness of group work with cooperative testing were dependent upon group dynamics. Group dynamics depended on who was in the group, success on the test and personalities. Group work involving working with peers and faculty are used throughout the program to enhance teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration in the nursing profession to provide high quality patient care. The ability to communicate and share experience among peers and with educators in providing feedback is key to positive learning experience for students (Chan, Tong, & Henderson, 2017).

Another intervention over the next year would be for faculty to explore options in explaining and applying resources in each course to enhance topics such as pharmacology. Collaborating with outside sources such as representatives to explain current available resources with pharmacology and additional resources that could be helpful to supplement studying. Other options could include guest speakers or allowing more time during lecture for students to interact related to pharmacology concepts. This study provides insight to enhance student learning outcomes from the student's perspective. Improving intervention strategies will not only enhance student success but increase retention and success within the nursing program. Creating an ad hoc committee could be valuable for making improvements in retention.

Finding ways to improve student success is important from personal experience in my struggles through nursing school. Test-taking, studying, and finding support systems through peers and instructor interaction were some of the strategies I used through school and are still evident through this study. As an instructor in the program for ten years and currently serving as an administrator while working towards my doctorate degree, has encouraged me to reflect on the importance of making program revisions based on evidence-based practice with input from students who may be struggling to navigate through the program. Reflecting upon the process of this study and requirements for obtaining my doctorate has changed the way I view students' perspectives and the configuration of the program. My focus has shifted to view the program as a whole and implement ways to facilitate faculty-student and peer mentoring to improve student success. Viewing students' perceptions of the course, retention interventions, personal struggles and ways to develop the course should be evaluated for every student at the end of each semester as they progress in the program. Burns (2017) found in looking at program retention, student success has many variables that provide limitless opportunities for research.

Understanding students' struggles and successes can support improving retention in the HCCADNP and gain stakeholder involvement to improve success by sharing findings with other faculty, programs of nursing and partnerships. Collaboration among stakeholders can boost partnerships and provide development opportunities for faculty to recommend changes that would further supplement student success. Faculty are required to continue their education for learning to enhance teaching through in-services, conferences and collaborating with peers. Presenting findings of this study will aid faculty in assisting students to succeed in the program and seek new opportunities for improvement in the program.

SUMMARY OF THE MANUSCRIPT

The purpose of this study sought to investigate student perceptions of faculty implemented retention interventions and personal strategies utilized by students to successfully complete their first year in nursing school. "Beneficial changes such as increasing the status of being a mentor, providing additional support through the use of practice facilitators/educators, as well as, continuous education and feedback to mentors could improve the students' experiences" (Foster, Ooms, & Marks-Maran, 2015). The results of the study illustrate boot camp as being the most successful intervention faculty implemented. All of the strategies were successful in aiding students to progress in their first year. Students voiced recommendations for improvement on intervention strategies dealing with resources and group related interventions.

The implementation and dissemination plans for this study seek to educate faculty on the findings to improve the retention intervention strategies and understand students' success strategies used in their first year to further improve perseverance in the program. The nursing program is rigorous and will continue to improve with increases every three years with the licensure examination changes. This study will assist faculty and administration in serving

students to be successful and achieve their goals of graduation, passing the licensure examination, being successful in their careers and advancing their studies.

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