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### What Factors for Part-Time Online Nursing Faculty Influence Engagement With Their Online Institution?

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The study of factors that influence engagement of part-time, online nursing faculty with their online institutions provides some evidence to base faculty retention practices for online administrators. Data from this study can help to translate the research findings into educational policy for working with, and retaining, part time faculty in online nursing programs. The purpose of the study was to determine what factors influence part-time online nursing faculty engagement with their institution. What follows is a discussion of the study scope and significance to nursing.

#### Scope and Significance to Nursing

Study scope was limited to online faculty teaching part-time. Definition of part-time online nursing faculty was any nursing faculty who are contracted term-to-term and based on program need. Full-time online faculty, who were not also teaching at other institutions, were excluded from the study. The research presented is significant to nursing education.

With the influx of online learning opportunities, nursing programs often depend upon educators to serve in a part-time, visiting, or affiliate teaching capacity (AACN, 2015). Part of this growth has been attributed to the call for nurses to earn advanced degrees secondary to the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) groundbreaking 2010 publication, *The Future of Nursing*. The report proposed the need to make higher education in nursing a priority to better meet the demands of the future healthcare environment (Claywell, Wallace, Price, Reneau, & Carlson, 2016). This call for increased advanced nursing education can present challenges for online programs, as the part-time faculty members' engagement with the university or college's mission may not be adequate (Akroyd, Patton, & Bracken 2013; Brannagan & Oriol, 2014). It is this lack of engagement that could impact the student experience (Yen & Abdous, 2013). Both faculty and student engagement in online nursing education are of primary concern to leadership within online nursing programs. The significance to nursing is data to provide evidence based policy for improving part-time online nursing faculty engagement and ultimately part-time faculty retention. Retaining quality part-time online faculty helps keep recruiting and training costs down (Faculty Focus, 2017). Engaged online faculty actually increase student engagement in online classes to improve student retention (Poll, Widen, & Weller, 2014). Consistent quality part-time faculty helps to maintain the quality of online education for students. Currently there is a lack of research associated with factors influencing the level of engagement for online part-time, nursing faculty to his/her university or college.

#### Methods

##### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the factors influencing engagement for part-time online nursing faculty with their online institution. Part time online nursing faculty were defined as, any nursing faculty who were contracted term to term and based on program need. This study is based on self-assessed judgments of the extent of the influences on that person's sense of engagement. The self-reported belief about such an influence is the same as the actual presence of such an influence.

##### Research Question.

What factors for part-time online nursing faculty influence engagement with their online institution?

### **Data Collection**

An a-priori sample analysis with medium effect size was conducted to ensure adequate study power. The survey, created and delivered using Survey Planet®, consisted of 33 questions, which were broken down into three categories: Institutional Culture, Contact with the Institution, and Online Course Design. Each quantitative, non-demographic survey question was answered using the 5-point Likert scale, where (5) meant strongly agree and (1) meant strongly disagree. There were two qualitative questions. The survey also consisted of eight demographic questions querying participants regarding age, gender, length of online teaching, years of being a nurse educator, primary role in online teaching position, highest level of education, and the main reason for teaching online.

The survey tool was tested for content validity and was piloted by six part time online faculty, who are experts in online nursing education and have taught online for at least ten years. The six faculty piloting the survey were excluded from the main study. Clarifications were made to the original survey tool and IRB re-approval was granted. Following the survey modifications, an email with the revised survey link, using Survey Planet®, was sent to 447 part-time online faculty among the three research sites using convenience sampling. To increase the response rate, two reminder emails were sent, each one week apart.

Study information was part of the email statement to participants notifying them of their auto consent by clicking on the survey link contained in the email. The email for the survey request for participation indicated participation was completely voluntary and no incentives or disincentives were associated for survey completion.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from Survey Planet® were exported to excel and analyzed with SPSS v. 23 software (IBM Corporation, 2014). The data analysis consisted of measures of central tendency for each of the quantitative survey questions, where the mean was sufficient in answering the survey question. The qualitative responses were examined using thematic analysis with pattern identified and recorded.

### **Findings**

The response rate was 57% with n=257. Respect from supervisors and feeling supported in navigating student issues influenced engagement of part time online faculty with their online institutions with a mean of 4.60 out of 5 and 4.72 out of 5 respectively. Quality of online education provided by the institution influenced part-time faculty engagement with that institution with a mean of 4.61. Communication regarding guidance and support was another factor identified as influencing engagement with a mean of 4.55 out of 5.

Qualitative themes, which reflected the quantitative findings, emerged to include communication, support, respect and value, which are notable in the responses below:

- "Having a manager that supports my actions with students is important."
- "Demonstrate respect for the expertise of your faculty who have been with you for 3 years or greater and have demonstrated exemplary status."
- "I can teach anywhere online--being treated respectfully as a colleague and being recognized for the value good faculty bring makes the difference in my selection."
- "Strong support from faculty administrators is key for on-line instructors."

Ages of respondents ranged from 30 to greater than 70 years. The majority (65.7%) of respondents were >50 years. Of these, 37% were 50-59 years and 26.8% were 60-69 years. The majority of respondents had been teaching part-time online for five to 10 years (59.5%) with 17.9% teaching less than five years. The length of time teaching online part-time for respondents of 10 years or more was 22.6%.

## **Discussion**

The response rate of 57% may indicate that the part-time online nursing faculty were eager to share their perceptions of what factors influenced engagement with their online institutions. Administrative respect for faculty and support with navigating student issues influences faculty engagement with their online institutions. Quality online education increases part-time nursing faculty engagement. Because 65.7% of respondents were >50 years, perhaps the data reflected a low importance on the factor of job security and compensation due to plans for retirement or a sense of clarity with pace and direction of their careers. The data reflect the overall demographic of nursing faculty, which NLN (2015) also reflects. Further, it is possible that the number of part-time positions held, or the fact that many are full-time at one institution while teaching part-time at another, may also inform the lack of emphasis on job security as an engaging factor.

Interestingly, 34.4% of part-time online nursing faculty surveyed, teach online to augment their income with 21% teaching part-time online for multiple employers. A greater number (38.5%) teach part-time for one online employer. Online nursing education leaders need to be flexible in allowing for multiple employers for part-time online nursing faculty. Now that factors, which influence part-time nursing faculty engagement, are identified, more research is needed to evaluate if online nursing programs incorporate these engagement factors when working with part-time online nursing faculty. In addition, research is needed to evaluate if using the identified engagement factors translates into success for the online nursing programs and their students.

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### **Title:**

What Factors for Part-Time Online Nursing Faculty Influence Engagement With Their Online Institution?

### **Keywords:**

nursing faculty policy, online faculty engagement and online faculty retention

### **References:**

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### **Abstract Summary:**

Find out what factors influence part-time/adjunct/affiliate online nursing faculty engagement with their online institutions. Research findings are presented to help leaders of online academic programs attract and retain seasoned, highly-skilled, online nursing faculty which promotes delivery of quality online experiences for students. The results surprised even the investigators.

### **Content Outline:**

#### **A. Introduction**

1. The study of factors that influence engagement of part-time online nursing faculty with their online institutions provides some evidence upon which to base faculty retention practices for online administrators.

2. Data from this study can help to translate the research findings into educational policy for working with part time faculty in online nursing programs.

#### **B. Body**

##### **1. Scope and Significance to Nursing**

- a. The purpose of the study was to determine which of the factors related to Institution Culture, Contact with the Institution, and Online Course Design, influence part-time online nursing faculty engagement.
- b. Study scope was limited to online faculty teaching part-time.
- c. Definition of part-time online nursing faculty is any nursing faculty who are contracted term to term and based on program need.
- d. Full time online faculty were excluded from the study.
- e. The significance to nursing is that these data provide evidence for policy development toward improving part-time online nursing faculty engagement and ultimately expanding the ability to deliver the highest quality online instruction from seasoned, skillful faculty.
- f. Engaged online faculty advance the student experience in online classes which may improve student retention.
- g. Retaining quality, part-time, online faculty helps keep recruiting and training costs down.
- h. A program delivered by a consistent team of engaged, high-quality part-time faculty supports the quality of online education for students.

##### **C. Evaluation Process (Research Methods)**

## 1. Study design

- a. The study was a mixed method survey design, involving three separate research sites.
- b. The research question was: What factors for part-time online nursing faculty influence engagement with their online institution?
- c. After IRB approval, a pilot study was conducted with N=6 and a 100% response rate from six expert online educators with at least 10 years experience each.
- d. The survey tool was tested for content validity and used a Likert scale from 1-5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree.
- e. Clarifications were made to the original survey tool and IRB re-approval was granted.

## 2. Data Collection

- a. Data were collected via Survey Planet® over a three week period of time.
- b. Valid email addresses for an N=447 were sent the request for participation with information sheet and survey URL.
- c. Two email reminders were sent, each one week apart to help increase the survey response rate.

## 3. Data Analysis

- a. Survey data were entered into SPSS v. 23.
- b. Measures of central tendency were sufficient to answer the research question and thus were the focus of the quantitative data analysis
- c. The qualitative questions were examined using thematic analysis where patterns were identified and recorded. Themes of communication, support, respect and value emerged echoing the quantitative findings.
- d. Post-hoc correlations are underway to examine possible relationships that may inform future studies.

## 4. Findings

- a. The response rate was 57% with n=257
- b. Respect from supervisors and feeling supported in navigating student issues influenced engagement of part time online faculty with their online institutions with a mean of 4.60 out of 5 and 4.72 out of 5 respectively.
- c. Quality of online education provided by the institution influenced part-time faculty engagement with that institution with a mean of 4.61 on the five point scale.
- d. Communication regarding guidance and support was another factor identified as influencing engagement with a mean of 4.55 out of 5.
- e. Ages of respondents ranged from 30 to greater than 70 years. The majority (65.7%) were >50 years; of these 37% were aged 50-59 years and 26.8% were 60-69 years.
- f. Qualitative themes of communication, support, respect and value were found in responses including:
  - “Having a manager that supports my actions with students is important.”
  - “Demonstrate respect for the expertise of your faculty who have been with you for 3 years or greater and have demonstrated exemplary status.”
  - “I can teach anywhere online--being treated respectfully as a colleague and being recognized for the value good faculty bring makes the difference in my selection.”
  - “Strong support from faculty administrators is key for on-line instructors.”

## D. Conclusion and Implications for Nursing Education Leadership

1. Administrative respect for faculty and support with navigating student issues influences faculty engagement with their online institutions.
2. Quality online education increases part time nursing faculty engagement.
3. Because 65.7% of respondents were >50 years, perhaps explains why the data reflected a low importance on the factor of job security and compensation due to plans for retirement or a more general sense of being settled into a pace in one's career. The data seems to reflect the overall demographic of nursing faculty noted by which NLN reflects. Alternatively, perhaps these data support the next data point regarding the number of part-time positions nursing faculty may hold.
4. A significant percentage (34.4%) of part-time online nursing faculty surveyed, teach online to augment income with 21 % teaching part-time online for multiple employers and 38.5% teaching part-time for one online employer. Online nursing education leaders need to be flexible in allowing for multiple employers for part-time online nursing faculty
5. Now that factors, which influence part-time nursing faculty engagement, are identified, more research is needed to evaluate if online nursing programs incorporate these engagement factors when working with part-time online nursing faculty.

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**Professional Experience:** Margaret Reneau, PhD, BSN, has been involved with online nursing education since 2002. Her PhD is in Education, nursing specialty and a minor in distance education from Capella University. She received her MSN from Drexel University and her BSN from the University of Illinois. Dr. Reneau has presented the principles of evidence based online nursing education around the country and is an approved speaker for Sigma Theta Tau in the specialty of online nursing education. She has taught and developed online nursing courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels of nursing education. Margaret is an active online education researcher. She is currently an assistant professor and director for the Center of Instructional Design and Academic Technology for Saint Xavier University.

**Author Summary:** Dr. Reneau is director of the top ranked Saint Xavier University, School of Nursing Online MSN program. She earned her doctorate in Education, Nursing Specialty and Distance Education from Capella University, her MSN from Drexel University and her BSN from the University of Illinois. Dr. Reneau is an active online nursing education researcher. She is also the director for the Center of Instructional Design and Academic Technology for Saint Xavier University.

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