Developing a Virtual Community of Nursing Scholars among PhD Students

Lynnea H. Myers, MSN, RN, PHN, CPNP | Alvin D. Jeffery, MSN, RN-BC, CCRN-K, FNP-BC | Jennifer A. Werthman, BSN, MS, MBA | Heather L. Nimmagadda, BSN, MS | PhD Students

Introduction
• AACN (2014) found that 96/132 programs (72.7%) provide doctoral coursework to at least some extent in online format
• AACN (2001) identifies student collaboration within nursing and other disciplines as a key indicator of quality
• Developing a COS is essential component of professional development
• Imperative students utilize technology and other social media resources to develop their COS

Online/Distance Education
Pym (1992) defines distance education as teacher and student in separate geographic locations:
“Simply put, distance education can be viewed as a set of teaching and learning strategies for connecting people who have learning needs with the resources required to meet those needs”

Benefits | Challenges
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Online/distance education programs seek to combine the flexibility of working from home with the rigor of classroom education and training by combining any method of online and in person instruction (Marty, 2003) | Difficulty in the online/distance learning environment due to trouble with group commitment and finding adequate time to participate (Moule, Ward, & Lockyer, 2010; Place, MacLeod, John, Adamack, & Lindsay, 2012)
Distance from peers and mentors (Terrell, Snyder, Dringus, & Maddrey, 2012) | Video communication resulted in relationships that were comparable to face-to-face courses
Holecion between peers was not as strongly affected

Online/Distance Education
• Interactive Teaching Strategies:
  – Instructor-facilitated interactions
  – Introductions
  – Group projects
  – Relating personal stories
  – Class discussions
  – Sharing resources
  – Multiple teaching-learning formats that target different types of learners (VARK: visual, aural, read/write, kinesthetic)
• Course Delivery Methods:
  – Online courses with beginning and end dates resulted in higher satisfaction, confidence, and knowledge
  – Video communication resulted in relationships that were comparable to face-to-face courses
  – Cohesion between peers was not as strongly affected

Educational Experience

Course Delivery Methods

Socialization via Technology:
• Custom social networks
  – Promote access to course information
  – Joining learning communities
• Facebook
  – Students participating in an optional Facebook group reported feeling more engaged with peers and better prepared for exams

Our Class

Our Experience
• Online/Distance Program
  – 2 years of didactic coursework
    – 6 in-person weeks of coursework
    – In-person weeks also include seminars and socialization activities

Recommendations for Future Research
• Explore COS
  – Other nursing degrees: DNP
• Descriptive studies
• Experimental methods
• Longitudinal Studies

Quotes
Video Conferencing:
“Videoconferencing makes me feel like everyone is so much closer than they actually are. I think the weekly sessions we have with just my students has resulted in my classmates being some of my best friends.”

“The video software has been extremely helpful in allowing us to bond as a group. I especially appreciate that they have allowed us our own CSNspace for meeting.”

“Classmates and faculty are accessible in more ways and at more times then my past experiences in traditional in-person courses and programs.”

“I feel like I am in the classroom. You have a direct line of communication with your instructor.”

Course Management:
“Using discussion boards for some discussions has allowed me more time to formulate my thoughts and provide richer responses to my classmates.”

“I have used discussion boards since my undergraduate. I consider them a standard part of a class, whether distance-based or in-person.”

“The use of discussion boards as one of multiple technology-based educational modalities has enriched my experience. Also, I appreciate that this is not the main method of communication and coursework.”

“It is a helpful and organized platform. I can return to review posted information to study for finals and it makes completing assignments easy and stress free.”

Social Media:
“I love that we can share photos of our face-to-face time together or even encouraging messages for those difficult times in the semester.”

“Social media provides a convenient outlet to be light-hearted about school.”

“I enjoy the use of social media to communicate relevant material along side humorous and personal information.”

“It keeps students in contact with each other outside of the classroom.”

Reference