Theoretical Framework

Jeffreys (2004) Nursing Undergraduate Retention and Success (NURS) conceptual model provided the framework for this descriptive correlational study.

As a model of student retention, the underlying assumptions of the NURS model (Jeffreys, 2012, p. 11) are:
- Retention is a priority concern for nursing leaders
- All students have the potential to benefit from professional socialization and enrichment throughout education
- Persistence can be influenced by psychological factors
- Professional integration and environmental factors greatly influence retention

Methods

The purpose of this study is to determine if perceived instructor immediacy behaviors impact the retention and student success in an online RN to BSN program.

Design: A descriptive correlational design for this study was utilized. A convenience sample of 128 undergraduate nursing students in a rural university in central Pennsylvania were recruited to participate in the study. This study employed two instruments to measure immediacy and retention. Both used a five-point Likert scale. Demographics and self-reported GPA was also collected.

Setting: Lock Haven University, Nursing Department, Clearfield Campus, Pennsylvania

Sample: In the spring 2016 semester, junior and senior nursing students (N=105) completed the survey. Students were notified via email and online learning platform announcements.

Data Collection: IRB approval was obtained prior to recruitment and data collection. An anonymous Qualtrics online survey was used.

Instruments

Jeffreys’ Student Perception Appraisal (Jeffreys, 2007). The SPA-R is a 27-item survey, which addresses five factors thought to be influential in the retention of students. The five factors:
- environmental (10 items);
- institutional and integration (5 items);
- personal academic (5 items)
- college facilities (5 items)
- friend support (2 items).

Corona’s Immediacy Scale (Corona, 2011). The 11-item survey, which addresses factors though to be influential on instructor immediacy behaviors.

The three groups:
- Words of Approval
- Gestures (using emoticons)
- Animated moves (emotions with movement)

Environmental Factors

- Personal study skills
- Faculty advisement/helpfulness
- Family emotional support
- Encouragement by friends outside of school

Non-verbal Instructor immediacy behaviors

- Smiling (happy face emotion)
- Avoid monotone voice (italics or caps: WELL or GOOD)
- Vocal expressions (TODAY)
- Gestures (using emoticons)
- Vocalization (interactions in online immediacy)
- Animated moves (emotions with movement)

Instructor Retention Behaviors

Foster a sense of community
- First day of on-line class should be both welcoming and informative.
- Provide constructive recommendations for improvement that are highly motivating and encouraging.
- Practice proven adult learning principles and strategies:
  - goals of their learning experience are related to their own personal goals
  - organized around relevance
  - self-directed and independent learning activities supported with mutual trust and respect.
  - freedom of expression and acceptance of differences.
- Establish a peer/mentor support program

Results

It was hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between instructor immediacy and retention. The hypothesis was supported with the results demonstrating a strong correlation \((r=0.79, P<0.01)\). It was also hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between instructor immediacy and academic success. The resulting Pearson coefficient \((r=0.64, P<0.01)\) demonstrates a moderate positive correlation.

Since the eleven-item measure of instructor immediacy behaviors can also be divided into three smaller 3-4 item groups indicating specific behaviors (words of approval, providing examples and words of support), similar correlations were performed on these components with similar results.

Discussion

This study found instructor immediacy behaviors impact the online RN to BSN student’s academic success and retention. Understanding immediacy behaviors in the online classroom provides educators another tool for increasing retention and academic success. Increased levels of student success and retention as a result of instructor immediacy would provide institutions of higher education with active teaching strategies to ensure success for the RN to BSN online student, thus improved retention and higher graduation rates. Smaller rural university offering web-based courses should strive to better understand instructor immediacy behaviors and the impact on student success and retention.

The pursuit of a BSN rests ultimately with the individual nurse; however, institutional support can play a significant role in contributing to the successful completion of a BSN.

References