Introduction

- Less than 1% of nurses in the U.S. hold a doctoral degree (ION, 2010)
- IOM recommends doubling the number of nurses with a doctoral degree by 2020
- Two terminal degrees in nursing have been identified by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) (2004)
- Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) – clinical doctorate
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) – research doctorate
- AACN and National League for Nursing (NLN) have published position statements supporting doctoral education for nurses (AACN, 2010; NLN, 2013)
- Advancement of nursing science requires collaboration between DNP- and PhD-prepared nurses

DNP-to-PhD Pathways

- A small subset of nurses have earned both a DNP and PhD
- Dual degrees prepare nurses to be expert clinicians and scientists, poised to lead innovations in collaborative practice
- AACN recognizes the importance of the dual-role and supports DNP/PhD combination and DNP-to-PhD pathway programs
- 11 DNP-to-PhD pathway programs have been developed in the U.S.
- Despite this growing trend, there is a dearth of literature examining DNP-to-PhD pathway programs

Research Question

- What are the experiences of DNP-prepared nurses enrolled in a DNP-to-PhD pathway program?

Method

- Descriptive, qualitative study
- Setting:
  - Doctoral granting public university in the Northeast
  - University offers baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral level programs including a 60-credit PhD in nursing and a 33-credit DNP to PhD program
- Sampling:
  - Purposive
  - Introductory letter emailed to DNP-to-PhD pathway students by the PhD program coordinator
- Data Collection:
  - September 2017 – November 2017
  - Semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with five open-ended questions

Sample

N=6
- Age: 42-60 (mean = 49)
- Gender: 82.2% (N=5) female and 16.7% (N=1) male
- Ethnicity: 50% (N=3) Caucasian and 50% (N=3) African American
- Nursing Practice: 50% (N=3) Advanced Practice Registered Nurses and 50% (N=3) Registered Nurses
- Employment in Academia: 66.4% (N=4)
- DNP Graduation Dates: 2010 to 2016

Data Analysis

- Audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and then reviewed for accuracy
- Utilizing content analysis, recurrent concepts were identified and developed into meaning units
- Meaning units were then clustered until patterns and categories emerged
- To increase rigor and validity, patterns and categories were revised until consensus was achieved
- Data analysis was verified by the second researcher who did not conduct the interviews to minimize potential bias

Results

- Two categories were identified
  - Overall theme: DNP-to-PhD students want to be accepted in academia
- Preparation in Academia
  - Participants described a desire to be an educator, conduct research, and have a career in academia, recognizing the need for additional education to prepare for this role
  - “probably my main reason is to advance my understanding of education strategies and kind of grow that knowledge”
  - “there’s really a kind of a lack of not respect, but lack of recognition of the DNP in teaching…”
  - “I didn’t feel as though all the doors were open to me with a DNP since it was such a new degree”
  - “… I feel like the PhD will certainly give me the credibility”
  - “well I didn’t feel that I had the research undertakings, or that I received all of the research that I needed with the DNP”

Degree Significance

- All participants clearly articulated that the DNP is a clinical or practice doctorate while the PhD is a research doctorate
- There was again differentiation between the degrees in an academic setting
  - “They don’t seem to want to hire DNP’s to teach. But if I have a PhD, it adds a more significant point to my education in terms of being an educator and a researcher”
  - “I think it’s unique that nurses at this level can translate evidence even at the bedside where I currently work, and for the PhD to generate new information is also unique”
  - “There is a place in academia for both degrees… but it puts a DNP at a disadvantage because you don’t have that research program established”
  - “The standards in academia are the same for both degrees, “which is not fair in reality”

Limitations

- Purposive sample of six students enrolled in one DNP-to-PhD pathway program
- Participants actively chose to pursue a second terminal degree

Discussion & Conclusions

Implications for DNP-to-PhD Education

- DNP-to-PhD programs are necessary to provide expert clinicians with the skills necessary to develop the science, steward the discipline, and educate the next generation (AACN, 2010)
- DNP to PhD programs should provide academic credit for overlapping coursework

Implications for Faculty

- Nurses educators should pursue formal education in the science of pedagogy (AACN, 2010)
- Nurse educators should pursue formal education related to teaching/learning, curriculum design, and assessment and evaluation
- Nurses seeking advanced research and teaching careers should be encouraged to pursue a PhD
- Nurses seeking advanced clinical and teaching careers should be encouraged to pursue a DNP

Implications for DNP Programs

- Program directors should have candid discussions about DNP degree outcomes and differences between DNP and PhD education
- Honest communication by program directors can appropriately direct students to enroll in a program that aligns with their career goals

Implications for DNP-Prepared Faculty

- Continue to seek roles in academia, serving as expert clinicians assisting with the application and translation of evidence into practice (AACN, 2015)
- Colleges and universities should re-examine current policies related to scholarship for DNP-prepared faculty to set standards that align with their academic preparation
- Future recommendations from the AACN regarding the definition of scholarship may provide clarity for DNP-prepared faculty, allowing them to meet scholarship expectations appropriate for a practice doctorate in an academic setting

Implications for DNP/PhD Collaboration

- Strengthening collaboration between DNP- and PhD-prepared faculty is necessary
- Faculty with clinical and research-focused doctorates should partner to develop innovative clinical and original research projects, utilizing the expertise of each degree

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