INTRODUCTION

As the nursing shortage enters crisis stages, nursing student retention must be a priority to stabilize and bolster the workforce. Nursing student retention is lower than the general college population and continues to decline, negatively impacting:

- **Students**: educational debt, unqualified for nursing employment
- **Nursing Programs**: approval and accreditation status, reputation, enrollment ability, lost tuition revenue, increased costs
- **Healthcare Employers**: nursing shortages, aging workforce

Nursing programs employ rigorous curricular standards to prepare graduates with the knowledge, skills, and abilities essential for safe and competent nursing practice. In this academic process, students often struggle to manage intense workloads with other competing life demands, distracting students from academic success, such as personal issues, financial status, employment responsibilities, and family stressors; however, nursing programs can positively influence a student’s academic success through strategies designed to support professional integration factors (PIFs) to promote institutional and professional socialization within the context of faculty advisement and helpfulness, professional events, professional memberships, peer encouragement, peer mentoring and tutoring, and enrichment programs. Such interaction can optimize student persistence behaviors and retention.

Retention challenges are well reported in the literature, yet limited in reporting the effectiveness of retention strategies guided by PIFs. A systematic approach was needed to evaluate retention strategies to optimize student retention.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Institutions have little influence on external factors that distract students from academic success, such as personal issues, financial status, employment responsibilities, and family stressors; however, nursing programs can positively influence a student’s academic success through strategies designed to support professional integration factors (PIFs) to promote institutional and professional socialization within the context of faculty advisement and helpfulness, professional events, professional memberships, peer encouragement, peer mentoring and tutoring, and enrichment programs. Such interaction can optimize student persistence behaviors and retention.

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FRAMEWORK

Jeffrey’s NURS Model

Understanding the relationship of Professional Integration Factors on student retention is necessary to identify the most effective institutionally-driven strategies to optimize student retention. At the center of the NURS model are PIFs that enhance student interactions within the institution’s social system and promote professional socialization and career development:

- **Nursing Faculty Advisement and Helpfulness**
- **Professional Events**
- **Encouragement by Friends in Class**
- **Peer Mentoring-Tutoring (PMT)**
- **Enrichment Programs (EP)**

**Professional Integration Factors: Retention Strategies Survey (PIF-RSS)**

1. Concept analysis of the term optimize clarified application within an academic strategic planning context.
2. Literature review of persistence and retention strategies supported PIF constructs. Constructs were supported by theoretical definitions to reduce threats to construct validity.
3. Instrument review: none incorporated all PIF factors, only partial measures: Nursing Program Retention Strategies (NPRS) measured aspects of faculty helpfulness, PMT, and availability of academic EP while the Online Survey Tool (OST) measured aspects of faculty helpfulness, PMT, memberships, and availability of EP. No items were utilized in tool development.
4. Four nursing education content specialists reviewed PIF-RSS scale dimensions and items to verify content validity. Items were rated for relevance, clarity, and experts provided recommendations to either retain, revise, or discard items.
5. Content experts identified all 49 scale items to be moderately-to-highly relevant with no items suggested to be discarded, only revised. Faculty items were rephrased for clarity, three items within Friends in Class subscale were combined, and additional items added within Membership and EP sub-scales for clarity for a total of 54 final items.
6. A Content Validity Index (Table 1) summarized the degree of expert panel agreement.

**Psychometric Testing**

The PIF-RSS instrument was distributed via research survey to deans/directors of 961 accredited traditional Bachelor’s in Nursing programs during the timeframe of October-December 2017. Evaluation of the instrument’s psychometric properties includes an exploratory factor analysis to further ascertain construct validity and examine the relationship between concepts to determine if underlying dimensions in the data are supported. Cronbach’s a statistical index will measure internal consistency and reliability.

CONCLUSIONS

Rigorous curricular standards assure adequate preparation for nursing graduates to provide safe and competent care, but result in high risk for academic failure. Proactive strategies are needed to promote academic retention. A psychometric study provides structure for developing a valid and reliable instrument to evaluate retention strategies guided by PIFs and how these strategies can optimize student retention.

REFERENCES


