Nursing student retention is a growing global concern. Program attrition is higher among nursing students than the general college population and undergraduate nursing program completion rates continue to decline with an average of 50-53% students completing among various program types (Newton & Moore, 2009; Wells, 2007). High attrition negatively impacts many stakeholders including students, nursing programs, and healthcare employers. Students who fail to complete a nursing program experience mounting educational debt and are unqualified for professional employment positions (Gajewski & Mather, 2015; Yeom, 2013). Nursing program approval and accreditation status, reputation, and enrollment ability can be jeopardized by poor retention, resulting in lost tuition revenue and increased educational costs (Ascend Learning, 2012; Trofino, 2013). Further, the sustainability of the current nursing workforce remains uncertain as projected shortages are expected to severely impact the nation’s healthcare system (Juraschek, Zhang, Ranganathan, & Lin, 2012; Shelton, 2012). Low program completion rates, an aging nursing workforce, and fewer individuals choosing a nursing career during a growing national nursing shortage estimated to reach 1.05 million registered nurse job openings by the year 2022 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) significantly depletes the workforce and results in unfilled nursing job positions.

Nursing programs employ rigorous curricular standards to assure graduates are prepared with the knowledge, skills, and abilities essential for safe and competent nursing practice (Trofino, 2013). In this academic process, students often struggle to manage this intense workload with other competing life demands, which may result in academic failure for the student (Pulido-Martos, Augusto-Landa, & Lopez-Zafra, 2012). While nursing programs have little influence on external factors that distract students from academic success, such as personal issues, financial status, employment responsibilities, and family stressors, nursing programs have an opportunity to positively influence a student’s academic success through professional integration factors that promote institutional interaction and socialization within the context of faculty advisement and helpfulness, professional events, memberships in professional organizations, peer encouragement, peer mentoring and tutoring, and enrichment programs (Jeffreys, 2012). Retention challenges are well reported in the literature; however, there is limited information reporting specific retention strategies being implemented by nursing programs and of these strategies, which have been found to be most effective.

While a few instruments examine program retention issues, no published instrument is available that examines the collective institutional strategies of faculty helpfulness, professional events, memberships, peer encouragement, peer mentoring and tutoring, and enrichment programming to optimize nursing student retention. The Undergraduate Nursing Program Retention Strategy Survey has been designed utilizing Jeffrey’s NURS model (Jeffreys, 2012) as a conceptual framework and two instruments to inform development. One instrument, The Nursing Program Retention Strategies questionnaire, measures aspects of faculty helpfulness, peer mentor-tutoring, and availability of academic enrichment programming (Tracey, 2003) while the Online Survey Tool measures aspects of faculty helpfulness, peer mentor-tutoring, memberships, and availability of enrichment programming (Baker, 2007).

Constructs have been developed for the Undergraduate Nursing Program Retention Strategy Survey from their theoretical definitions to promote construct validity and have been aligned within the six domains of professional integration factors as outlined in the NURS model. This descriptive survey is divided into five sections to include program demographics, graduate and retention demographics, student demographics, survey consisting of six sub-scales according to the measured constructs, and an area for additional comments. Survey questions are estimated to comprise 30-59 items with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (unknown) to 4 (strongly agree) in alignment with classical measurement theory (Polit & Beck, 2017). Neutral responses have not been incorporated to illicit definitive responses. The survey combines...
summed scores for each sub-scale category to be measured as interval-level data for statistical analysis and will enroll sufficient participants to follow recommended estimates of ten participants for each survey item. Although the survey is designed for a single point of data collection, higher levels of non-responses beyond customary planned allowances for 10% attrition are anticipated (Polit & Beck, 2017); therefore, a 25% attrition rate allowance will be planned within the pilot sample size.

Four nursing education content specialists will review the instrument’s scale dimensions and items to verify content validity and will rate items for relevance and clarity. The instrument will undergo psychometric testing via a pilot study summer 2017 conducted with randomly-selected nursing program directors from among national nursing accredited traditional BSN nursing programs utilizing a probability, proportional sampling technique of random selection. Following pilot testing, a factor analysis will be conducted to ascertain scale construct validity and internal consistency and Cronbach’s α statistical index will measure internal reliability scores.

In conclusion, nursing programs employ rigorous curricular standards to assure graduates are prepared with the knowledge, skills, and abilities essential for safe and competent nursing practice in a dynamic healthcare environment. Proactive strategies are necessary to promote academic progression and retention to assure adequate numbers of qualified and trained registered nurses are available to enter an already depleted workforce. A pilot study will assist in developing a valid and reliable instrument guided by the NURS model to evaluate the use and effectiveness of retention strategies by programs of nursing. A valid instrument is needed to more comprehensively evaluate the role of professional integration factors on student retention.

Title:
Development and Testing of an Undergraduate Nursing Program Retention Strategies Survey

Keywords:
retention strategies, student retention and undergraduate nursing students

References:


Trofino, R.M. (2013). Relationship of associate degree nursing program criteria with NCLEX-RN success: What are the best predictors in a nursing program of passing the NCLEX-RN the first time? *Teaching and Learning in Nursing, 8*, 4-12. DOI: 10.1016/j.teln.2012.08.001


**Abstract Summary:**
Development, testing, and psychometric quality measurement of a research instrument designed to identify strategies used by programs of nursing that incorporate the professional integration factors of faculty helpfulness, professional memberships and events, peer encouragement, peer mentoring and tutoring, and/or enrichment programming and how these strategies affect undergraduate nursing student retention.

**Content Outline:**

1. Introduction
   1. Student retention is a global concern for programs of nursing and the nursing profession.
   2. Nursing program retention statistics
   3. High attrition negatively impacts:
      i. The Student
      ii. The Nursing Program
      iii. Society and Healthcare Employers

1. Body
   1. Main Point #1
      i. Rigorous curricular standards increase risks of program failure
ii. Nursing programs have little influence on external factors impacting retention

1. Main Point #2
   i. Nursing programs can implement strategies to promote professional integration factors as outlined in Jeffrey’s NURS model
   1. Faculty Advisement and helpfulness
   2. Professional events
   3. Memberships
   4. Peer encouragement
   5. Peer mentoring and tutoring
   6. Enrichment programs
   7. Main Point #3
      i. Limited information published regarding effective retention strategies being implemented by nursing programs and which strategies are most effective.
      ii. Noted absence of perspectives of nursing program administrators.
      iii. No published instrument to survey the six professional integration factors collectively

1. Instrument
   1. Main Point #1
      i. Constructs developed from theoretical definitions, helping to reduce threats to construct validity.
      ii. Reviewed by four nursing education content specialists to verify content validity. Items rated for relevance and clarity.
      iii. Instrument being piloted summer 2017 via email for psychometric testing among randomly-selected nursing program directors from national nursing accredited traditional BSN nursing programs utilizing a probability, proportional sampling technique of random selection.
      iv. Following pilot testing, will conduct factor analysis to ascertain scale construct validity and internal consistency. Cronbach’s α statistical index will measure internal reliability scores.
      v. Following validity and reliability confirmation, a national study will be conducted.

1. Conclusion
   1. Rigorous curricular standards assure nursing graduates are prepared to provide safe and competent nursing care in a dynamic healthcare environment, but result in high risk for academic failure
   2. Proactive strategies are needed to promote academic retention among nursing students.
   3. A pilot study will assist in developing a valid and reliable instrument to evaluate retention strategies guided by the professional integration factors of faculty helpfulness, professional memberships and events, peer encouragement, peer mentoring and tutoring, and/or enrichment programming and how these strategies affect student retention.
   4. More research is needed to evaluate the role of professional integration factors on student retention. A valid instrument is needed.
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**Author Summary:** Beth Gamble currently serves as Department Chair and Assistant Professor of the Associate Degree Nursing Program at Eastern Kentucky University Department. She is completing her PhD in Nursing through the University of Texas at Tyler with research emphasis in nursing student retention and success.