

Evidence to Increase Retention Rates in an Undergraduate Nursing Program

Susan Kowalski, PhD, RN, susan.kowalski@univ.edu

University of Nevada Las Vegas

Problem: Despite the ongoing nursing shortage, qualified students are frequently denied admission to nursing programs. While admission denial statistics may be multifaceted, student retention rates may also contribute greatly to the shortage of registered nurses.

Evidence: The federal government has projected a shortfall of 800,000 registered nurses by the year 2020; yet 32,617 qualified applicants were denied entry in colleges of nursing in 2005.

Strategy: The purpose of this study was to determine factors associated with students who did not progress to graduation in our baccalaureate nursing program.

Procedure: The Nursing Entrance Test (NET) was administered upon admission and was used in all analyses. A cohort of students was followed through our four-semester program with baseline demographic and NET data collected upon admission. Upon completion of four semesters, the cohort was divided in two groups, those who progressed to graduation and those who did not.

Evaluation/Results: Thirty of 46 students (65%) progressed to graduation. Significant between-group differences were found in the NET subscale scores. Students who progressed to graduation had higher scores in critical thinking related to the main ideas of a passage ($p = 0.03$), and lower scores for stress levels related to family, and money and time ($p = 0.04$, $p = 0.02$); additionally, this group were less often writing dependent learners ($p = 0.01$). Significant correlations were found between the NET composite scores in the group that did not progress to graduation ($r = .53 - .74$, $p = 0.001 - 0.03$); no significant correlations were found for the same items in the group that progressed.

Recommendations: These data suggest that NET subscales may be more useful in determining non-progressing students compared to those that do progress. Subscale scores need to be more critically examined and considered when determining admission criteria in an effort to increase student retention.

Bibliography: December 12, 2005 press release. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) survey data. <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/ppt/94-05EnrChgs.ppt>