INVESTIGATION OF A NURSING CAREER COUNSELING PROGRAM
IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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ABSTRACT

RUTH MCMURRAY HEDGPETH. Investigation of a nursing career counselor program in a community college. (Under the direction of DR. MARK D'AMICO)

Balancing the demands of heavy academics with everyday adult responsibilities often proves overwhelming for nontraditional nursing students in a community college nursing program. Too often, nontraditional students elect to leave school at a critical time when the nation needs even more new nurses. The goal of this mixed method research was to investigate a program-dedicated career counselor program utilized by one community college nursing program. This study examined the types of student needs most commonly addressed by the career counselor; how nontraditional nursing students perceived the value of a program-dedicated counselor; and, the relationship between the frequency of student-counselor interactions and student progression. Nontraditional nursing students sought the career counselor's assistance with stress and anxiety and their causes. They felt overwhelmed, uncertain, and stressed; they perceived comfort from the availability of a career counselor. No statistically significant relationship was found between the frequency of student-counselor interactions and student progression.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Nationwide, a majority of new nurses every year graduates with an Associate's Degree in Nursing (ADN), earned at a community college (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011; Viterito & Teich, 2002). In North Carolina, about 60% of registered nurses have a community college nursing education (N.C. Institute of Medicine [NCIOM], 2004). Nursing students attending community colleges typically fit a definition of nontraditional which includes being older than traditionally-aged students, providing single parent or primary care for children at home, struggling financially, commuting, attending college part time and working full time off campus (Burns, 2010).

Balancing the demands of heavy academics with everyday adult responsibilities often proves overwhelming for nontraditional nursing students in a community college nursing program. Too often, these students elect to leave school at a critical time when the nation needs even more new nurses and is depending upon community colleges to help meet the growing demand (Viterito & Teich, 2002).

The growing demand for nurses (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [USDHHS], 2013), along with the declining graduation rates, strengthens the urgency for community colleges to support nursing students through graduation. For example, enrollments in community college nursing programs nationwide increased 63% from 2001-2006; however, during this period of increased enrollment, graduation rates decreased almost 8% (Friedel, 2012). Retaining a greater percentage of community

college nursing students could help to minimize the growing shortage of nurses in North Carolina. To develop this potential, the Task Force on the North Carolina Nursing Workforce gave high priority to its recommendation that "North Carolina community colleges employ student support counselors specifically for nursing students" (NCIOM, 2004, p.72).

Statement of the Problem

Registered nurses constitute the largest healthcare occupation, holding 2.7 million jobs in the industry nationwide (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The outlook for meeting the increasing future nursing workforce needs is daunting. Vacancy rates for registered nurses have steadily increased for most hospitals nationwide. The effects of the shortages are evident in emergency department overcrowding, decreasing morale of hospital staff, and in other ways that have a direct effect on the quality of patient care (First Consulting Group [FCG], 2001).

From the perspective of nursing education, issues surrounding the shortage of registered nurses are multifaceted. The focus included in this proposal illustrates the multitude of factors contributing to the shortage, the impact the nursing shortage is having on the delivery of healthcare services, the various pathways to becoming a registered nurse (RN), the many challenges faced by nontraditional nursing students, and the possible interventions designed to assist nontraditional nursing students in completing their nursing degrees adequately prepared to achieve licensure.

Factors Contributing to Nursing Shortages

Among the factors contributing to the growing nursing shortage are the exploding population compounded by a rapid expansion of the oldest segment of the population, as

the elderly are now living longer than ever before; advancing technology; an aging

current nursing workforce; and, the nursing school bottleneck experienced by potential

nursing students (Boland, 2010; Kuehn, 2008). Contributing significantly to the

increasing need for nurses nationwide is the rapidly growing population of older citizens.

This segment of the population often receives healthcare services in settings such as long-

term care facilities, home health care arrangements, residential care settings, and

rehabilitation facilities; driving up the demand for registered nurses in each.

Compounding the decline in overall nursing numbers is the projection of a

continued aging of the nursing workforce until more than 40% will be older than 50 years

of age (Buerhaus, Staiger, & Auerbach, 2000). This change in the age structure of the RN

workforce has many implications for the shortage of nurses as predicted for the

healthcare industry.

Long-term strategies to increase the labor supply of nurses will be needed over

the next decade. While, nationwide, nursing schools have boosted enrollments, the

increase has not been sufficient to meet the growing demand (Kuehn, 2007). A shortage

of nursing faculty is seen as another barrier to entry into the nursing profession. Most

schools of nursing have identified the faculty shortage as a reason for limiting enrollment

(AACN, 2013).

The growing demand for elevated entry level to practice nursing, along with the

growing clinical need for registered nurses, has spawned creative collaborations between

schools of nursing that produce nurses with associate's degreesand those that produce

Bachelor's Degrees. Graduates of Associate's Degree Nursing programs, offered mostly

by community colleges, are encouraged to continue on to a university in order to

complete remaining credits toward an earned Bachelor's of Science in Nursing Degree (BSN).

Consortium programs creating a seamless pathway from the ADN to the BSN, and ADN-to-MSN programs that provide a direct link to graduate education have been encouraged (IOM, 2011). Initiatives such as dual enrollment agreements between the university and community college, designed to fast-track students to completion of both degrees, and local articulation programs designed to ensure a smooth transition from the ADN to the BSN are recommended (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard & Day, 2010).

Inadequate hospital nurse staffing contributes to an increased risk of adverse patient outcomes, including mortality (Buerhaus et al., 2007). Hospitals with high patient-to-nurse ratios risk higher surgical patient mortality and failure-to rescue rates, as well as higher nurse burnout and job dissatisfaction rates (Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Sochalski & Silber, 2002). Higher mortality rates have also been associated with the education preparation level of the nurse workforce. In one study, a 10% increase in the proportion of nurses holding a bachelor's degree was associated with a 5% decrease in patient mortality (Aiken, Clarke, Cheung, Sloane, & Silber, 2003). Another study, conducted in Canada, found lower 30-day hospital mortality rates associated with higher proportions of baccalaureate prepared nurses and lower nurse-to-patient ratios (Tourangeau et al., 2006). Needleman, Buerhaus, Mattke, Stewart and Zelevinsky (2002) found an association between registered nurse staffing and patient outcomes such as length of stay, lower rates of infection, and bleeding. Some hospital employers report negative impacts such as overcrowding in emergency departments, closing of units,

decreasing patient satisfaction, and decreasing physician satisfaction as a direct result of the shortage of registered nurses (Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies, 2006).

Regardless which pathway of nursing education is taken, to become a registered nurse requires successful graduation from a school of nursing and passage of the national licensure exam. In recent years, differing opinions have surfaced concerning the minimum education level registered nurses should have. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) report indicated that studies have demonstrated that a nurse's "clinical experience and qualifications obtained before entering nursing school must be considered in the debate" (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011, p. 5).

Associate's Degree Nursing (ADN) programs provide unique and flexible pathway opportunities. Community colleges offer the majority of ADN programs, as well as a limited but growing number of bachelor's degree nursing programs (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). Nearly 25% of nursing students in ADN programs held academic degrees in another field prior to entering nursing school (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011).

Compounding the faculty shortage, thus limiting nursing programs' capacities, is evidence that ample numbers of potential nurse educators are not being produced by master's and doctoral programs in nursing to meet demand. Enrollments in research-focused doctoral nursing programs increased by only 5% over a 4-year span, as qualified applicants to these colleges and universities were turned away due to a shortage of faculty (AACN, 2010).

Barriers to Nontraditional Nursing Student Progression

Once admitted into a nursing program, the nontraditional student faces a variety of barriers to graduation, proving a major challenge for nurse educators and

administrators. The first year of nursing study is the most critical for student progression (Kantek, 2010). Nursing students need the benefit of devoted attention and support during this time (Last & Fulbrook, 2003). Some identified key barriers to nursing student progression include: meeting the definition of a nontraditional student, managing the stress usually associated with being a nursing student, and having unrealistic expectations of nursing school. In addition, previous literature has shown that minority students are often less successful in nursing school.

Nontraditional Students. With attractive entry-level wages and assured job security, nursing has become a popular career option for people in their late twenties and early thirties to consider (Auerbach, Buerhaus, & Staiger, 2007). Today, larger numbers of nursing students are older, returning to college after being away for years, and do not blend well with the typical undergraduate student population (Auerbach et al., 2007).

The trend toward entry into nursing at a later age, regardless of education type, seems stable for years to come. "Registered nurses today are less likely to obtain their basic nursing education immediately after high school" (Auerbach, et al., 2007, p. 183).

Today, more than 47% of students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States are older than age 25. Part-time students have increased 87% compared to a 22% of full-time students. (Villella & Hu, 1991). Unlike their undergraduate counterparts, the nontraditional student has family and financial responsibilities, which must be managed along with the rigors of a nursing program (Wells, 2003). While students fitting the description of nontraditional may be found in both the university and community college settings, many have low incomes and are attracted to the affordability of the community college (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011).

Often evaluated as financially independent for financial aid purposes, affordability of tuition becomes critically important to the nontraditional college student (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). As part-time students are eligible for minimum financial aid, colleges should well-publicize its availability to nontraditional students. Work and family responsibilities are frequently cited by nontraditional students in a community college as reasons for discontinuing college courses (Sydow & Sandel, 1998).

Women over the age of 30 comprise one of the largest components of nontraditional students. Their motivation to return to college can vary from midlife transitions, divorced or widowed, or an economic need to earn money to support their family. Being a single parent may create additional needs for these nontraditional nursing students (Menson, 1982).

Stress. Time constraints of college academic terms and the demands of academic rigor required in college courses may lead to student stress and dissatisfaction, factors which can result in nontraditional students leaving college (Villella & Hu, 1991). A stressful academic environment may contribute significantly to a student's decision to leave a nursing program (Last & Fulbrook, 2003; Russler, 1991). Stress may be experienced as students struggle with both academics and with clinical performances. High levels of stress have been associated with low self-esteem in nursing students (Peterson-Graziose, Bryer, & Nikolaidou, 2013).

Many adult women students feel inadequate to deal with the multiple role stress of family, finances, and school (Johnson, Schwartz, & Bower, 2000). Multiple role stress is greater the longer the time since a nontraditional student was enrolled in school (Kirk

& Dorfman, 1983). As an adult learner, the fear of academic failure may cause the nontraditional nursing student the greatest amount of stress.

Unrealistic Expectations. Students' unrealistic career expectations have been implicated as a reason students leave nursing programs. Naively, students' understanding of the profession of nursing may be founded in their own personal observations of nurses at work or in the fictitious portrayal of nurses seen on a television or movie screen. Consequently, students may expect to spend class time learning and practicing nursing skills, rather than the extensive time actually spent on academics, such as learning medical processes, anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology. Nursing schools' focus on academics as priority over clinical skills can be unexpected by new students, causing them to drop out of nursing school, as they become less motivated to continue their studies (Coakley, 1999).

Representing a Minority. Retaining minority students must become a major focus of nursing programs in order for the cultural face of nursing to reflect the country's population (Nugent, Childs, Jones,& Cook, 2004). Attracting sufficient numbers of students representing minority into nursing programs has been less than successful (Andrews, 2003). The consequences of low enrollment and high attrition by students representing minority populations are realized in fewer staff nurses and nurse administrators to interact with an ethnically diverse clientele, affecting quality of care; and, fewer numbers of potential nurse faculty in the pipeline (Well, 2003).

Nursing education and practice also attracts students from a range of international cultures. Nursing students from other cultures may be at risk of not succeeding if nurse educators are not sensitive to the importance communication plays in the classroom

(Burnard, 2005). Besides possible language difficulties, other personal needs which may hinder the success of some ethnically diverse nursing students include finances, insufficient time, and family responsibilities (Amaro, Abriam-Yago, & Yoder, 2006). Students from other cultures may experience feelings of apprehension, loneliness or a lack of confidence, threatening their continuance in nursing school (Burnard, 2005).

Associate's Degree Nursing programs most often serve as gateways to the nursing profession for underrepresented groups (Viterito & Teich, 2002). In an effort to address the nursing shortage and the documented barriers to success, which prove overwhelming for many nontraditional students, various means of supporting these students until graduation have been studied.

Facilitators of Nontraditional Nursing Student Progression

Providing deliberate guidance and structure, particularly in the first year of nursing study when students need direction and support, is a responsibility of any nursing school (Last & Fulbrook, 2003). Some of the methods identified as deliberate efforts by some nursing schools to support students include tutoring, mentoring, and counseling. One popular strategy used to assist at-risk nursing students is tutoring. Actively involving the student in the learning process, via tutors, individualizes the learning process (Weinsheimer, 1998). In order for the strategy to be successful, the tutor must be knowledgeable of the subject matter and have good interpersonal skills (Rafoth, 1998).

Nursing students may also be supported through mentorship. Benefits from a structured mentorship program, as reported by nursing students, include reduced stress, orientation to program, and emotional support (Earnshaw, 1995). It is possible for

nursing students to perceive psychological support from faculty mentors, which contributes to student progression.

Early interventions of remediation and counseling may be helpful efforts toward progression. A statistically significant relationship between age and progression may be indicative of older, nontraditional nursing students being at risk for early departure from the nursing program during the first nursing course (Pence, 2011).

Many nontraditional female students experience psychological distress related to balancing their many personal roles with the role of academic student (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). The act of becoming a college student, either as a returning student or for the first time, can represent a stressful event for the nontraditional female student. She finds herself taking on a new role as a learner while interacting with fellow students who are often younger and with values and priorities different from hers (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006).

"Incorporating interventions into existing classes for nontraditional female students with children; and semester-long courses incorporating career interventions, group support and assistance with on-campus resources to assist with obtaining social support while transitioning to college, are two possible solutions" (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006, p.458). On-campus counselors can positively influence the successful transition of returning women. Counselors and therapists may play a direct role in advancing the personal and professional achievements of women returning to college (Rifenbary, 1995). Students who experienced a successful relationship with a college mentor or counselor contributed that experience to getting them through the difficulties of nursing school (Coakley, 1999).

While various efforts to retain nursing students in general have been studied, there are few studies (Colalillo, 2007; Rudel, 2006) that specifically address nontraditional nursing students and potential interventions designed to target their needs. Considering the severe nursing workforce shortage, and the community college as the institution type which educates many aspiring nurses, this study considered a career counseling intervention targeted specifically to retain this population and help them to progress toward completion and entering the workforce. The intent is to contribute to the important and growing body of literature that addresses the convergence of the following themes: the nursing shortage, the community college role in nursing education, the nontraditional college student, and student success interventions to assist progressing nursing students to success.

<div align="center">Statement of Purpose and Research Questions</div>

Based on the literature on nontraditional students, proactively providing students the tools needed to reduce the stress and pressures experienced as a nursing student may help students to remain in school until graduation, adding to the numbers of critically needed new nurses each year. The purpose of this study was to evaluate selected aspects of a nursing career counseling program in a community college. Specifically, the following questions were addressed:

1. What student needs are addressed by a program-dedicated career counselor for a community college nursing program?

2. How do progressing nontraditional nursing students at a community college perceive the value of a program-dedicated career counselor?

3. What is the relationship between the frequency of participation in counseling interventions and nontraditional nursing student progression in the community college setting?

Research Design

This study used a mixed method design to understand the student-counselor experience and the potential influence of the counseling intervention on student progression as defined by returning for the second semester of the nursing program. All students who enter the nursing program attend a series of group counseling sessions during their first semester. Topics of the sessions include: time management, managing stress, and organizational skills. After attending these sessions, each student may then select additional counseling sessions to attend, if any. Students may also seek out private, one-on-one time with the career counselor to discuss their personal challenges or issues which may be impeding their academic progress. Occasionally, a student may be referred to the career counselor by an instructor or an instructor may ask the career counselor to reach out to a particular student whom they perceive to be in need of counseling services. Students are not obligated to meet with the career counselor, regardless of referral route. Participation in the group sessions and one-on-one counseling sessions are tracked as a part of the counselor's recordkeeping process.

To address the first research question, archived data routinely maintained by the career counselor were examined. When a student met for a one-to-one session, the career counselor recorded the general purpose of the visit, using broad category descriptors such as: Stress/Anxiety; Study/Test-Taking Skills; Organization/Time Management; Work/School/Life Balance; and, Life Crisis Assistance. Each individual student visit was

categorized within one of these broad categories and recorded appropriately. Group

sessions covered these same broad topics. Student participation in the sessions was also

recorded and logged by category (see Appendix A).

Categories were totaled weekly and were reported monthly. Student names and

specific details of individual visits were not included as part of the monthly report. By

tallying these broad categorical data, the most common types of counseling needs

addressed by the counselor with the nursing students were able to be identified.

The second research question was addressed with qualitative data collected in the

form of individual student interviews conducted by the researcher. Face-to-face, 45-60

minute semistructured interviews were conducted. The interviews were protocol guided

by existing literature and by the counseling needs identified by the counselor's records.

Interview questions were designed to elicit evidence of students' perceptions about the

students' individual experience with the counselor, why they decided to meet with the

counselor, and the effect their interaction with the counselor may have had on their

progression in the nursing program.

Finally, the third research question on the relationship between the degree of

involvement in the career counselor intervention and the continued enrollment of

community college nursing students (academic progression), was explored using a

logistic regression to include the independent variables personal demographics,

commuting distances, work status, other degree earned, income proxies, counselor

contacts, and admission test score, with the dependent variable of third semester (second

year) progression. New students' progression semester-to-semester, since the counselor

intervention was initiated, was tracked. This comparison helped to identify to what extent the degree of intervention was associated with student progression.

Definitions

For purpose of this study of nursing students, nontraditional is defined as meeting one or more of these descriptors: being at least 24 years of age, single parenting or caring for children at home, and/or working either full time or part time (Burns, 2010).

Progression is defined as successfully completing one semester of study and enrolling in the next semester of study; successfully completing the first year of study and enrolling in the second year of study; and, progressing semester-to-semester in the nursing program on time, as defined by the North Carolina Board of Nursing guidelines (North Carolina Board of Nursing, 2012).

The intervention in this research is defined as a career counselor, employed by the community college to provide proactive educational assistive group sessions for all students in the community college nursing program, on topics such as organizational skills and time management skills; and, to be available to meet with students individually in response to their personal situations or crises. A student may self-refer to the career counselor, or a nursing instructor may refer a student to the career counselor. The primary variable of interest in the quantitative analysis was the numbers of interactions with the career counselor per student.

Delimitations

This study used archived data from one institution's nursing department database, as well as statistics pertaining to the nontraditional students enrolled in the associate's degree nursing program of a large, urban community college located in southeastern

United States. Only students admitted into the associate's degree nursing program and enrolled in nursing courses during three specified academic semesters were included in this research. The number of participants was dependent upon the enrollment in the upper level and lower level nursing courses during the specified academic semesters. Students not yet accepted into the nursing program were not included in the research.

Student participants were generally female and were generally greater than 24 years of age. Males represented 12.7% of the nursing student participants; students younger than 24 years represented only 15.1%; and, ethnic minorities represented 26.2% of the nursing student participants. These characteristics may, or may not, be generalized to other associate's degree nursing programs within other community colleges located in the United States.

<center>Limitations</center>

The large, urban community college setting is able to provide some beneficial resources to enrolled students which may not be available to students enrolled in smaller, rural institutions. The intervention studied by this research is a beneficial resource to students not found in most community colleges.

This particular urban community college is set in a large, metropolitan region of the state. The general population of the region and the college's student population both have large representations of many ethnicities and cultures. A smaller community college set in a small, rural region may have less diversity represented in its student population. This community college's size and resources, as well as the diversity of its population served must be considered when generalizing the results of this research.

The author of this research served at the large, urban community college in the role of direct administrative supervisor of the nursing director and faculty, and is, herself a registered nurse. The author's own professional bias could be a limitation of this research. This potential bias was controlled by having all data results reviewed and validated by a professional colleague not associated with the nursing department.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter II provides a detailed review of literature surrounding attrition of associate's degree nursing students, the nontraditional college student, and interventions for student progression. Chapter III describes in detail the design and methodology of the study. Chapter IV of the dissertation includes the results of the study. Chapter V provides a discussion with conclusions and interpretation of these results, as well as implications and recommendations for further research.

Summary

The nation's shortage of nurses continues to grow as a result of an exploding general population, shifting demographics, and an aging nursing workforce. Most new nurses earn an associate's degree in nursing in a community college. The majority of these students meet the definition of nontraditional, thus struggle to balance adult responsibilities with academic demands. Besides being a nontraditional college student, other barriers to graduation include dealing with stress, overcoming unrealistic expectations of nursing school, and representing a minority ethnicity.

Nursing program initiatives which help to facilitate student success include tutoring, mentoring, and counseling efforts. In particular, counseling efforts may be helpful toward student progression. Assisting nursing students to progress academically

until graduation has direct implications for the development of nurse faculty as nursing graduates continue their education beyond the associate's degree, further enhancing and contributing to the vision of nursing education in the future.

An intervention program designed to increase the progression potential of these nursing students could help minimize the shortage of nurses, thus lessen the negative impact of the shortage on the delivery of healthcare services. This study examined the common counseling needs of nontraditional nursing students; the extent to which nontraditional nursing students valued the availability of a counseling resource; and, the impact such an intervention had on the academic progression of nontraditional nursing students.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Nationwide, the majority (60%) of all new nurses every year graduates with an Associate's Degree in Nursing earned at a community college (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011; Viterito & Teich, 2002). Community colleges serve students who typically are older than traditionally-aged students, are single parents, care for children at home, struggle with finances, commute to class, and may be attending college part time and working full time off campus (Burns, 2010). The purpose of this study was to better understand (a) the counseling needs of nontraditional-aged community college nursing students, and (b) the relationship between a counseling intervention and student progression. According to the literature, by proactively providing nontraditional students the tools needed to better cope with the stress and pressure of nursing education, it may be possible to increase their rate of progression.

The need for the proposed research was evidenced by the heightening shortage of registered nurses. Leveraging successful student progression efforts by the producers of most new nurses, the nation's community colleges, may positively impact the growing shortage. The jeopardy in which the nursing shortage places the delivery of safe healthcare services makes identifying solutions to the shortage critical. A career counselor program, designed to help ensure the success of nontraditional nursing students in community college nursing programs, could improve student progression numbers.

The Nursing Shortage

Factors Contributing to the Nursing Shortage

The ever-sharpening shortage of nurses is the result of various contributing factors. Among them, the unprecedented growth of the general population, compounded by an increasing expansion of the oldest segment of the general population, as the elderly are now living longer than ever before; advancing technology which makes diagnoses and treatments more accurate and effective than ever before; an aging current nursing workforce; and, the nursing school bottleneck experienced by potential nursing students (Boland, 2010; Kuehn, 2008).

Registered nurses constitute the largest healthcare occupation, holding 2.7 million jobs in the industry nationwide (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The outlook for meeting the future nursing workforce needs is daunting. In January, 2014, workforce analysts with the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) predicted a need for 526,800 new RN positions by 2022, an increase of 19 percent; a faster rate of growth than the average for all occupations. The projected growth rate is driven in small part by advances in technology used in patient care, allowing for the treatment of more health conditions than ever before, and by an increasing emphasis on preventive care. Health problems that once required inpatient treatment are now able to be addressed in the physician's office and hospital outpatient centers, driving up the demand for registered nurses in those settings (BLS, 2014).

The rapidly growing population of older citizens, who are much more likely than younger people to visit their physician and to be hospitalized for treatment and care, contribute significantly to the increasing need for nurses nationwide. This segment of the

population dramatically increases the demand for nurses in settings such as long-term nursing care facilities, home health care, residential care and long-term rehabilitation facilities. According to the American Health Care Association (2009), more than 19,400 registered nurse vacancies existed in long-term care settings in July 2008, and are predicted to increase to 142,000 in 2020.

The change in the age structure of the RN workforce has many implications for the shortage of nurses as predicted for the healthcare industry. In addition to the decline in overall nursing numbers, projections indicate a continued aging of the workforce until more that 40% will be older than 50 years (Buerhaus, Staiger, & Auerbach, 2000). When the cohort of practicing nurses born during the baby-boomer generation begins to reach retirement age in 2020, the projected age distribution will begin to shift back toward a younger nursing workforce (Buerhaus et al., 2000). This shift in age structure will serve to further exacerbate the already existing workforce shortage, and will make it that much more important for community colleges to fill that need.

Further, the decline in this critical component of healthcare workforce will be occurring when the oldest of the 78 million baby boomers begin to retire and enroll in Medicare programs, where registered nurses play a vital role in ensuring patients' access to quality healthcare (Buerhaus et al., 2000). Long-term strategies to increase the labor supply of nurses will be needed over the next decade. Loosening the bottleneck to entry into the profession is one point of focus. While nursing schools nationwide have boosted enrollment over the past several years, the increase has not been at the level necessary to meet the future demand for nurses (Kuehn, 2007).

A faculty shortage is seen as another major higher education capacity barrier to entry into the nursing profession. Heavy faculty workloads and salaries perceived lower than clinical positions hamper efforts to recruit nurse faculty (Benner et al., 2010). In its 2012 - 2013 policy brief, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) stated that U.S. nursing schools turned away 78,089 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2013. Most of the schools responding to the survey implicated faculty shortages as a reason for not accepting all qualified applicants into baccalaureate programs. Other reasons given for limited enrollment included a lack of clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors and budget constraints (AACN, 2013).

After becoming registered nurses, only 24% of Associate's Degree graduates who earn an additional degree achieve a graduate degree, needed for becoming a nurse educator. While 20.9% are likely to continue their education, fewer achieve a master's degree in nursing than do graduates of BSN programs. The RN-to-MSN pathway, designed with graduates of ADN programs in mind, has been endorsed as a means of increasing the potential for nursing faculty development (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011).

Age structure also impacts the outlook for faculty shortages. Vacated faculty positions, faculty resignations and retirements, and the shortage of nursing graduates prepared for the faculty role pose a real threat to the nursing education workforce of the future (AACN, 2013). Fewer young adults have elected to become RNs at a time when the average age of the working RN has been steadily increasing over time, as the baby boom generation of RNs has aged (Buerhaus, 2008). Projections suggest that the average age of RNs will soon reach 44.5, and that RNs in their 50s will comprise the largest age

group in the workforce, with numbers approaching 750,000 (Buerhaus, 2008). In 2002, the average age of nurse faculty at retirement was 62.5 years, with a wave of retirements predicted to ensue during the following decade (Berlin & Sechrist, 2002). Given the many and varied factors contributing to the growing need for nurses, progression of nursing students in associate's degree programs becomes a critical issue to be addressed.

Impact of Nursing Shortage on Healthcare

A direct correlation exists between a higher proportion of hours of nursing care provided by registered nurses and a higher quality of care delivered to patients in hospitals (Needleman et al., 2002). Inadequate hospital nurse staffing contributes to an increased risk of adverse patient outcomes, including mortality (Buerhaus et al., 2007).

Needleman et al. (2002) found an association between registered nurse staffing and patient outcomes such as length of stay, lower rates of urinary tract infections and upper gastrointestinal bleeding. The same study also found that a higher proportion of registered nurse hours per day resulted in lower rates of pneumonia, shock or cardiac arrest, and failure to rescue, or death among patients in acute care hospitals. "Doctors, nurses and hospital administrators agree that the nurse shortage has had an effect in areas of communication, nurse-patient relationships, hospital capacity, and quality of care" (Buerhaus et al., 2007, p.860).

Some hospital employers report negative impacts such as overcrowding in emergency departments, closing or reducing the size of units, decreasing patient satisfaction and decreasing physician satisfaction as a direct result of the registered nurse shortage (Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies, 2006). A 2001 report produced by First Consulting Group indicated over one in seven hospitals had experienced a severe

shortage of nurses with more than 20% of RN positions vacant (FCG, 2001). The same report revealed decreasing tenure and increasing turnover rates among nurses as a result of retirement and job dissatisfaction.

Nurse staffing ratios are strongly associated with higher emotional exhaustion and greater job dissatisfaction in nurses, as well as patient mortality and post-surgical complications (Aiken et al., 2002); thus, the production of greater numbers of graduate nurses is paramount to providing high quality healthcare. Because nationally, Associate's degree programs produce a majority of new nurses each year, it is important to retain students in those programs until graduation.

Education Pathways for Nurses

Becoming a registered nurse requires successful graduation from a school of nursing and passage of the national licensure exam. Nursing education has multiple pathways leading to a license to practice as a registered nurse. For more than 50 years, nurses have been prepared to obtain their RN licensure by completing a basic course of study from a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Associate Degree's in Nursing (ADN), or hospital-based diploma program, and by passing the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN). As the science of nursing has developed a stronger theoretical foundation, the number of hospital-based diploma programs has declined remarkably, except in a few states, such as North Carolina and Pennsylvania (AACN, 2013).

In the decade from 2001 to 2011, the number of bachelor's degree candidates taking the NCLEX-RN more than doubled (USDHHS, 2013). Despite this increase in bachelor's degree NCLEX-RN testers, nearly 60% are not bachelor's degree prepared

(USDHHS, 2013). Associate's degree nursing programs graduate the majority of new registered nurses, and the largest number of minorities (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). Community colleges offer the majority of ADN programs as well a few BSN programs (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). Over time, the ADN has become the preferred pathway to the profession (IOM, 2010). As of March 2008, 45.4% of all registered nurses were initially educated in associate's degree programs; 20.4% were educated in diploma programs; and 34.2% were educated in bachelor's degree and higher programs (HRSA, 2010). Of the RNs who graduated in 2005 or later, 56.6% initially received an associate's degree in nursing, while 33.6% initially received a bachelor's degree in nursing (HRSA, 2010).

In recent years, differing opinions have surfaced concerning the minimum education level registered nurses should have. However, research has not been able to substantiate the need for every registered nurse to have a 4-year degree. The IOM report, within its summary pages, concluded that research has not yet demonstrated a direct cause and effect relationship between academic preparation of registered nurses and patient outcomes (IOM, 2011). The report indicated that studies have demonstrated that a nurse's clinical experiences and academic qualifications before entering nursing school must be considered in the debate (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). Increased nurse staffing, rather than increased education levels, has been also shown to decrease patient adverse events on hospital units. This same study demonstrated a correlation between the nurse's preparation level and nursing communication and patient advocacy (Schuelke, Young, Folkerts, & Hawkins, 2014).

In 2008, three quarters of RNs in rural settings received their initial nursing degrees through an ADN or diploma program (HRSA, 2010), suggesting that many rural

and underserved communities rely on community colleges for their nursing workforce. One study suggested that nurses tend to work near where they were trained, so the location of nursing education matters (Urban Institute, 2009). ADN programs provide unique and flexible pathway opportunities, "allowing nontraditional students with adult responsibilities and other disadvantages to earn the RN credential" (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011, p. 11).

Prior to entering nursing school, nearly 25% of nursing students held academic degrees in another field (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). In deciding to make a career change and seek a nursing education, usually from a community college, these nontraditional students choose to give up their existing employment, some voluntarily, others as displaced workers. Students in one study cited "an intense desire and genuine love of helping others", as well as "prior work experiences and hands on caring for family and friends" as frequent reasons for pursuing a nursing career (Beck, 2000, p. 321).

Compounding the faculty shortage, thus nursing programs' capacities, is evidence that master's and doctoral programs in nursing are not producing enough potential nurse educators to meet demand. Enrollments in research-focused doctoral nursing programs were up by only 5% over a 4 year span. Thousands of qualified applicants to these colleges and universities were turned away due to a shortage of faculty (AACN, 2013).

The gateway into nursing for most students is through an associate's degree program, and most ADN programs are offered by community colleges (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). Nontraditional students with adult responsibilities find community colleges to be easily accessible and flexible (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). An initiative

specifically designed to help ensure their success could also have an effect on the growing shortage of nurses.

<div align="center">Barriers and Facilitators of Nursing Student Progression</div>

Once admitted into a nursing program, a student's progression from semester to semester, and successful completion of the nursing program may be impeded by barriers or may be enhanced by facilitators. Table 1 outlines the barriers and facilitators of nursing student progression, as identified in the literature, and as discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 1: Barriers and facilitators of nursing student progression

Barriers	Facilitators
Nontraditional student status (Burns, 2010; Wells, 2003)	Tutoring (Weinsheimer, 1998)
Stress (Kirk & Dorfman, 1983; Russler, 1991)	Mentoring (Colalillo, 2007; Earnshaw, 1995)
Unrealistic expectations (Last & Fulbrook, 2003)	Counseling (Pence, 2011; Quimby & O'Brien, 2006)

Barriers to Progression

Achieving admission into a nursing program is an accomplishment in and of itself. Most students must spend at least a year preparing to apply and then must qualify to apply by scoring competitively on an admissions exam. Surviving this yearlong exercise demonstrates the student's determination, perseverance, aptitude, and ability to be academically successful. Students do not enter a nursing program with an expectation

of leaving. However, attrition rates of nursing programs remain consistently higher than desired (AACC, 2010). The following are key barriers to nursing student success: meeting the definition of a nontraditional student, coping with stress, and having unrealistic expectations of nursing school.

Nontraditional Student Status. Characteristics of the nontraditional student include age, marital and parental status, ethnicity, and gender (Marlow, 1989). Large numbers of nursing students today are older students returning to college after years of being away, and they do not fit in with the typical undergraduate population of students (Auerbach et al., 2007). These nontraditional students are managing family responsibilities while meeting the challenges of a rigorous nursing program (Wells, 2003). Most new nurses graduate from a community college nursing program. According to Tinto (1982), it is important to understand that learning environment and how it might impact progression of students "of different gender, race, age, and social status backgrounds" (p. 691). Tinto noted that community colleges, in particular, have large nontraditional student populations, and should focus progression efforts toward these students (Tinto, 1993).

Besides their course studies, the nontraditional student often must deal with personal finances, employment hours, and family responsibilities. These additional demands on their time can negatively affect their grades and may even lead them to give up on school (Jeffreys, 1998). Nontraditional nursing students identified family responsibilities and family crisis as most threatening to their academic success (Jeffreys, 1998). Time constraints within 2-year associate's degree programs, combined with

multiple role conflicts of nontraditional students have been shown to present obstacles that must be overcome in order for students to remain enrolled (Jeffreys, 2007).

Women over 30 comprise one of the largest groups of nontraditional students as well as a significant component of the community college nursing student population. For many women, the act of returning to college marks a transition point in their lives. Motivation to enter college may result from midlife transitions, divorced or widowed, an empty nest or the need to earn money to assist with the support of their family. Many women delay going to college until their children are in school (Menson, 1982).

Women and men experience the return to college differently. Students who are single parents have different needs from students who are not or who have no children. Finances, childcare and time management become critical issues for a nursing student who is also a single parent. Balancing all can sometimes prove too overwhelming. The trend of older, nontraditional students entering nursing programs has been increasing and will continue for the next few years (Auerbach et al., 2007).

Nontraditional female students are more prone to underestimate their abilities and to lack self-confidence in their potential to succeed as a student, leading to psychological distress and increased risk of attrition (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). The decision to go to college alone can be stressful for the nontraditional female student who is taking on a new role as a learner while interacting with peers who are often younger and have different values and priorities (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006).

While many reasons for attrition are the same for female students and male students, there may be additional reasons for the attrition of male students who may have difficulty with the "socialization process of becoming a nurse" (Kelly, Shoemaker &

Steele, 1996, p. 171). Male nursing students can experience feelings of isolation and self-doubt, and can perceive they are being treated differently than female students, which can possibly lead to self-attrition (Kelly et al., 1996).

Stress. Research conducted on possible reasons a student decides to leave a nursing program often identifies a stressful academic environment as a major contributing factor (Last & Fulbrook, 2003; Russler, 1991). Nursing students in one such study demonstrated consistently higher levels of threat and challenge compared to nonnursing students, suggesting that the emotional needs of students may not be clearly recognized by nurse faculty (Russler, 1991). Stress may be especially evident while students are in the clinical setting. There, the professional practice is increasingly demanding as nurses must work harder to keep up with demands to provide more accessible, high-quality care to meet the high expectations of clients and physicians. Nursing students' observation of nurses constantly under stress, without the time to deliver the high standards of care they would like to give, may have a bearing on students' perception of their own stress and their career choice (Last & Fulbrook, 2003).

Many adult women who return to college later in life make the decision to drop out before completing their program of study because they feel inadequate to deal with the multiple role stress caused by family, job, children, finances, and school (Johnson et al., 2000). Even the decision to return to the classroom can be a threatening experience and can cause stress for an adult woman. The fear of academic failure can cause the greatest stress, however (Johnson et al., 2000). Adult students may have been motivated to return to college by a life-altering event such as divorce, loss of a job, or the death of a

spouse. Managing these circumstances along with returning to college may cause high levels of stress for some (Johnson et al., 2000).

Students who are also mothers are at risk for multiple role stress (Gigliotti, 1999). Multiple role stress may be felt when the demands of one role collide with the demands of another role, causing role conflict within the individual (Gigliotti, 1999). Conflicts of time, location, allocation of resources, and contradictory role performances contribute to multiple role stress (Brandenburg, 1974). The longer the time since a nontraditional female student was enrolled in school, the greater she will probably experience multiple role stress (Kirk & Dorfman, 1983). Nontraditional students who are also mothers identify family issues and time limitations as barriers to attaining their academic goals (Read, Elliott, Escobar, & Slaney, 1988). Childcare, finances and personal problems have been identified as predictors of stress in nursing students (Pryjmachuk & Richards, 2007).

Despite their determination, commitment, and proven abilities, adult women students often underestimate the personal sacrifices needed and resources needed in order to be academically successful in a nursing program. Childcare concerns may be the greatest source of stress for adult women students (Johnson et al., 2000). Adult women returning to college need additional sources of support. "Faculty awareness of the stressful demands adult women experience as they begin college classes can be very encouraging and reassuring" (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 297).

Adult women students in community colleges are vulnerable to many sources of daily stress and could benefit from interventions provided by the college to help them manage the stresses and to improve their potential for success. Many women students

become so overwhelmed with conflicting responsibilities, they choose to leave school

before completing their studies (Johnson et al., 2000).

Unrealistic Expectations. Unrealistic expectations of incoming nursing students

have also contributed to departure. Students may expect more time to be spent on

practical application and less time on academic work dealing with medical processes and

anatomy (Last & Fulbrook, 2003). In another study, a majority of faculty surveyed

believed that nursing students do not have a realistic view of the job of nursing, and that

nursing schools should ensure that students enter with a realistic view of the career

expectations and should provide students with coping techniques for the more

challenging aspects of the nursing profession. There is an implied connection between

unrealistic expectations and progression of nursing students (Crow, Hartman, &

McLendon, 2009).

Representing a Minority. For the cultural face of nursing to reflect the country's

population, retaining minority students must become a major focus of nursing programs

(Nugent et al., 2004). Despite ambitious recruitment efforts by nursing programs, they

have yet to successfully attract, in sufficient numbers, students representing minority

populations within the United States (Andrews, 2003).

Nursing recognizes the need for connectivity between a culturally diverse nursing

workforce and providing quality, culturally-sensitive patient care. In its seminal report,

the IOM called for increasing the diversity of the nation's nursing workforce (IOM,

2011). Ethnic and racial minorities account for more than a third of the United States

population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). However, the number of students enrolled in

nursing programs from minority backgrounds does not reflect the rate of growth of

minority populations within the United States, despite recruitment efforts by all nursing programs (Andrews, 2003).

Access to college and completion rates for African American, Hispanic, Native American, and low-income students are historically reported as lower than white and Asian students (Swail, 2003). For many minority and low-income students, the availability of financial aid often determines their ability to remain in college. These students are more likely to progress in academia if they receive grants than if they receive loans (Swail, 2003).

Graduation rates for ethnic minority students enrolled in nursing programs are a concern for nurse educators, as the rates have not improved after years of research and efforts focused on progression. As a result, the ability to reduce health care disparities while meeting the health care needs of diverse populations becomes more of a challenge.

Personal needs perceived to be barriers to completion by ethnically diverse recent nursing graduates included finances, insufficient time, family responsibilities, and language difficulties (Amaro et al., 2006). Other perceived barriers to completion included academic needs such as study workload and the need for tutoring, as well as language and cultural needs (Amaro et al., 2006). Nurses in this study represented Latino, Portuguese, Asian, and African-American population groups. They identified four coping strategies which influenced their success including: self-motivation and determination, the importance of teachers, peer support, and ethnic nursing student associations (Amaro et al., 2006).

While adjusting to the demands of nursing school, students from other cultures may experience problems with language – speaking and listening, writing, nonverbal messages, different traditions, personal confidence, family expectations, money, prejudices – perceived and actual, and uncertainty at home (Burnard, 2005). The challenges with language may be further compounded as medical terminology and meanings are introduced throughout the nursing school curriculum.

The literature is clear about the various barriers to nursing student progression and success. Being a nontraditional student implies many challenges to academic success: financial challenges, family responsibilities, and employment. Stress often results from students' attempts to balance the academic demands with the many demands of their personal lives, and can be overwhelming for nontraditional students, especially female students. Students, who are admitted into a nursing program expecting to learn more about applied skills and less about anatomy and nursing theory, may unsuspectingly realize the amount of study time required of them and become disenchanted early in the program. Ethnic minority students often face language difficulties, in addition to financial and family responsibilities, while a student in nursing program.

The literature does not provide insight into whether an on-site professional career counselor, readily accessible to nontraditional nursing students, is able to assist students to balance their adult responsibilities with the rigorous demands of academics, enabling the student to remain enrolled. The literature does not identify the impact an on-site professional career counselor can have on nursing students' ability to cope with stress associated with being a nontraditional nursing student or to deal with the challenges faced

by ethnic minority college students, preventing the student from dropping out of school. This study explored these areas.

Facilitators of Progression

As more is learned through research about why students elect to leave nursing school, a review of literature provides insight into methods of addressing attrition and the various types of progression efforts suggested by researchers. Early interventions of remediation and counseling may be helpful efforts toward student progression. According to Tinto (1982), interactions with other students and with the faculty outside the classroom can deter a student's decision to drop out of college.

A statistically significant relationship between age and progression may be indicative of older, nontraditional nursing students being at risk for early departure from the nursing program during the first nursing course (Pence, 2011). Early identification of students at risk for failure could provide faculty information for early intervention efforts. A review of newly admitted students' academic ability, stress levels, and learning styles may provide nurse faculty insight into proper support systems that need to be implemented in order to assist students' success (Hopkins, 2008).

Tutoring. Tutoring is one strategy that has been used to prevent the exodus of at-risk nursing students from college. This strategy allows the learning process to become more individualized by actively involving students in the learning process (Weinsheimer, 1998). Tutors must have knowledge of the subject matter, good interpersonal skills, time to commit to tutoring, and the insight required in order to identify problem areas preventing the success of at-risk students (Rafoth, 1998).

In one study, pairing student peers who had scored well on the first two tests

in a medical-surgical nursing course with students who had not scored well and were at-risk of failing for the purpose of structured tutoring sessions resulted in the attrition rate in the medical-surgical course decreasing from 12% to 3% (Higgins, 2004).

Mentoring. Another means of supporting nursing students is through mentorships. The term mentor has been traditionally associated with professions such as melaw, Mentoring. Another means of supporting nursing students is through mentorships. The term mentor has been traditionally associated with professions such as medicine, law, and business, and first appeared in nursing literature in the early 1980s (Andrews & Wallis, 1999). In an effort to improve the progression and graduation rates of minority nursing students in particular, a supportive educational environment must first exist (Nugent et al., 2004). Mentoring has been defined as "a process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements and prestige, instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development" (Nugent et al., 2004, p. 91) of the nursing student.

Benefits nursing students have reported from having a structured mentorship include reducing stress, helping with orientation, giving a sense of belonging, emotional support, and assisting with technical competence (Earnshaw, 1995). Structured mentoring is a useful tool for decreasing stress experienced by associate's degree nursing students when used to prepare students for what to expect and to understand their accountability in learning (Colalillo, 2007). A contributor to student progression is psychological support. Students who persist in a nursing program until graduation often perceive such support from faculty mentors (Shelton, 2003).

Counseling. Counseling services, including individual counseling and group counseling, have been shown to be significantly associated with student progression (Lee,

Olson, Locke, & Michelson, 2009). Counseling efforts may be useful directed toward

decreasing test anxiety by helping students to develop effective coping mechanisms,

stress-reducing strategies, and test-taking skills (Pence, 2011).

Nursing education can be particularly challenging for male students. Increasing

the availability and use of counselors for discussing problems unique to men that can

emerge during their educational experiences is one progression strategy (Boughn, 1994).

Counselors who work with nontraditional female students with children can be

most helpful toward student progression by "assessing students' levels of secure

attachment, parent and student self-efficacy, and perceived social support" (Quimby &

O'Brien, 2006, p. 457). Counseling services provided by personnel knowledgeable about

the unique challenges faced by minority nursing aspirants can be helpful (Perin, 2006).

"Counselors may assist nontraditional female students by identifying areas where support

may be lacking and working toward creating a more supportive environment" (Quimby &

O'Brien, 2006, p. 458).

Educating women about the potential for increased stress in returning to school

and encouraging them to join support groups or even initiating groups designed

specifically to provide social support for nontraditional female students with children are

counseling activities that prove effective with retaining students

 (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). Counselor-led "interactive programs, workshops, and

groups can provide support, social networking, and assistance specifically for

nontraditional female students with children" (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006, p. 458).

Because most nontraditional female college students report the lack of time as a major

stressor in their busy lives, counseling interventions that further impinge on their schedules should be avoided (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006).

In one study of nontraditional female college students with children, the main reasons identified for leaving college included the stress of family responsibilities, the lack of support at home, child care concerns, and the students' own lack of confidence in their ability to succeed (Scott, Burns, & Cooney, 1996). While these students have strong potential for success, they feel pressure to drop out of college because of life stresses. Colleges should be aware of the difficulties these students face, and consider providing counseling to assist them (Scott et al., 1996).

Diversity typical of associate's degree nursing programs tends to attract greater numbers of nontraditional students who can be at greater risk of dropping out and taking longer to complete their education (Jeffreys, 2006). Counseling interventions for these students may include workshops on study skills, time management, stress management, and test-taking skills (Jeffreys, 2006).

Intensive proactive interventions provided by nursing programs, such as developing student support strategies that support nonacademic student concerns, can prove effective for student success (Jeffreys, 2006). Taking a proactive role in addressing the needs of students of diversity, specifically students' social and personal needs, has been shown to be effective (Igbo et al., 2007).

Supportive counseling and listening carefully to needs can help minority students with issues such as worries about home and perceptions of prejudice (Burnard, 2005). Minority students can feel lonely and isolated. Minority support groups, led by skilled

counselors, provide minority students a supportive environment in which to articulate their thoughts and feelings (Gardner, 2005).

Student nurses experience significant stress during their nursing courses. This high level of stress may contribute to sickness, absence, and even the decision to drop-out of nursing school (Galbraith & Brown, 2011). Stress management programs provided by a professional, can significantly reduce the stress experienced by nursing students (Galbraith & Brown, 2011). Interventions which provide skills for coping with stressful situations, such as relaxation skills and skills to reduce the intensity or number of stressors can be very successful (Galbraith & Brown, 2011).

In the 2-year college, helpful interventions for dealing with student stress might include educating faculty about personal stress and detecting signs that students are experiencing high stress, as well as healthy ways to cope with stress (Pierceall & Keim, 2007). Providing students with time management and life-school-work balance skills should also be considered (Pierceall & Keim, 2007).

Counselors in community colleges have reported significant increases in the frequency and severity of personal problems indicated by students (Durodoye, Harris & Bolden, 2000). Traditionally, the majority of counseling encounters had tended to be in the academic and career areas. The diversity represented within today's community college student population reflects the differing personal and emotional needs and motivations of students (Durodoye et al., 2000).

Community college counselors most frequently encounter students experiencing problems relating to issues of family, alcohol, and self-esteem (Coll, 1995). Mounting societal pressures have made it necessary for counselors to deal with the personal

adjustments and turmoil that students face (Durodoye et al., 2000). Community college counselors may work with students experiencing

"personal problems such as stress and anxiety, depression, suicide, domestic violence, substance abuse and other concerns of societal marginalization" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 229).

The lack of self-confidence and its accompanying stressors are common issues for nontraditional college students. Counselors using a group approach may be able to meet the needs of more students, while also allowing students the opportunity to explore, identify, and express their feelings in a safe environment and discover their thoughts and feelings are also being experienced by their peer students (Durodoye et al., 2000).

When students receive counseling services, there is an association with student progression (Lee et al., 2009). Counseling can play an important role in retaining high quality students (Coll & Stewart, 2008). Supportive counseling programs can positively affect academic performance of nursing students (Jannati, Khaki, Sangtarashani, Peyrovi, & Nojadeh, 2012). Group counseling made available to struggling nursing students can serve to help the students survive the rigors of nursing until graduation (Rubin & Cohen, 1974). Students entering a nursing program who were provided information on time management, stress management, and study skills reported using the skills in their routines by setting goals, priorities, and scheduling (McDonald, Collins, & Walker, 1983).

The literature supports that tutors have a positive impact on a student's academic success, and that mentors can positively affect academic success by helping students to

reduce stress and to feel a sense of belonging. However, the facilitator of nursing and/or nontraditional student success often referenced in the

 literature is counseling services.

Counseling services on college campuses have been shown to improve progression. The literature provides evidence of positive student outcomes when professional counselors assist college students with stress-reducing strategies, time management and test-taking skills. Counseling interventions can help minority students and students of diversity with special issues affecting each, respectively. It is clear from the literature that group activities and workshops, led by counselors, can benefit college students who need help with study skills and social networking. Such activities could also serve "to increase a student's intellectual and social integration" into the program (Tinto, 1982, p. 697).

For the nontraditional female nursing student with children, it is often the life stresses, in addition to academic stress, that cause her to drop out of college. Counselors in community colleges have reported an increase in frequency and severity of personal problems indicated by college students. From the literature we know that educating faculty about personal stress and detecting signs that students are experiencing high levels of stress can be helpful.

What is missing from the literature is an examination of the benefits to nontraditional nursing students in a community college of having a professional career counselor dedicated to a cohort of nursing students, available to provide counseling services to groups of nursing students and counseling to individual students when the stress of life issues arises. This study was designed to examine to what extent such

counseling support may be associated with academic progression of nontraditional nursing students in a community college.

Summary

The growing shortage of registered nurses demands that community college programs explore ways of improving progression rates and graduation rates. Across the country community colleges educate the majority of new nurses annually (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011; Viterito & Teich, 2002). For this reason, healthcare providers and policy makers are depending on these programs to help minimize the impending critical shortage of nurses. This review of literature has shown that attrition is a complex concern, influenced by a wide variety of factors both personal and institutional. The complexity of these factors makes designing an appropriate intervention particularly challenging.

Past research studies have explored various methods designed to help ensure nursing students remain in school, such as faculty mentoring, social influences, and counseling of diverse students. Missing from the literature is research on the affect of a dedicated career counselor, made available as a resource of personal support for nontraditional students in associate's degree nursing programs, as a method of improving student success.

By referencing theorists such as Tinto, nursing programs may be better able to identify the factors found to be most prevalent with their student population and to develop an effective intervention. Tinto (1993), theorized that universities and colleges should become more aware of students not connected with academia and at risk of dropping out. By doing so, institutions can more effectively develop strategies for

engaging interactions between faculty and students, improving both academic and social integration of the students. In particular, community colleges should focus efforts on the nontraditional student and the minority student, as these students typically make up a large proportion of the student population at community colleges. The nontraditional adult learner who typically attends community colleges brings with him or her life experiences which may enhance and contribute to learning.

Unlike traditional college students, nontraditional students are at many different transitional points in their life as a result of situations such as loss of employment, divorce, or death of a spouse. Research is necessary to investigate whether a dedicated professional career counselor could help nontraditional nursing students in a community college to recognize and draw upon their own assets in coping with the stresses of returning to college.

With a better understanding of the personal and societal factors which may contribute to some nursing students' decisions to drop out of nursing school, it may be possible for community colleges to develop an appropriate intervention program designed to address those factors early on and to more effectively help ensure student success.

By providing nontraditional nursing students in a community college with the resources for dealing with some of the stresses experienced while balancing adult responsibilities with working to meet the demands of nursing school, the hope is that the students will be encouraged to remain in school until graduation. This study examined various interactions with the career counselor and the categories of student needs addressed during the interactions; the value placed on the availability of a career

counselor by nontraditional nursing students; and, the effect the intervention had on

progression of nontraditional students in a community college nursing program.

CHAPTER III: METHOD

Nationwide, the majority of all new nurses every year graduates with an Associate's Degree in Nursing earned at a community college (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011; Viterito & Teich, 2002). Community colleges serve students who typically are older than traditionally-aged students, are single parents, care for children at home, struggle with finances, commute to class, and may be attending college part time or working full time off campus (Burns, 2010).

Too often, the challenges associated with balancing the demands of heavy academics with everyday adult responsibilities proves too great for nontraditional nursing students in a community college nursing program. Annually, many elect to leave school at a time when the nation's need for more nurses is growing. Nationally, community college nursing programs contribute significantly to the number of newly educated nurses. Identifying successful interventions, designed to support academic progression of nontraditional nursing students, will help address the problem.

For the nontraditional community college nursing student, balancing the demands of heavy nursing curriculum academics with these everyday adult responsibilities often proves overwhelming. The literature on nontraditional students supports proactively providing these students with the tools needed to reduce the stress and pressures experienced as a nursing student. Doing so may help nontraditional nursing students to remain in school until graduation, adding to the number of needed new nurses each year.

Research Questions

Academic progression of students in community college nursing programs is of significant concern as it relates to the growing shortage of registered nurses, nationally. Review of literature revealed that reasons other than academics often lead to students' decisions to leave nursing programs. The literature also revealed that counseling services provided to college students have improved student outcomes.

The purpose of this mixed method study was to evaluate selected aspects of a particular nursing career counseling program in a community college. The following questions were addressed in the study:

1. What are common student needs addressed by a program-dedicated career counselor for a community college nursing program?

2. How do progressing nontraditional nursing students at a community college perceive the value of a program-dedicated career counselor?

3. What is the relationship between the frequency of participation in counseling interventions and nontraditional nursing student progression in the community college setting?

This chapter includes descriptions of the research setting, the research participants, the data collection procedures, the dedicated career counselor program intervention, and analysis procedures.

Setting

This study was conducted in a large urban community college located in a metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. The multi-campus institution is

regionally accredited and has offered an associate's degree nursing program to educate registered nurses for nearly 50 years.

The nursing program has an approved capacity of 200 students and graduates an average of 100 new nurses annually. Admissions occur twice a year. Fifty students begin in the fall and 50 in the spring. Admission into the program is highly competitive through a merit-based process. Applicants are evaluated mainly on scores earned on the admissions test, which was designed to assess aptitudes in reading as well as English, mathematics, and science. Minimum scores in reading, mathematics, and science are required in order to be considered for admission, and applicants with the highest scores in these areas have the greatest chance for acceptance into the program. Additional factors considered for admission include the number of general education (nonnursing) course hours the applicant has already successfully completed. Applicants who are not successful being admitted into the program are encouraged to apply again, as waiting lists are not maintained.

The admission criteria were designed to identify applicants who are academically prepared and capable of being successful in the nursing program, and whose academic course load would consist mostly of nursing course requirements, providing the student ample hours weekly to dedicate to nursing course assignments. In addition, a reduced academic course load provides the nontraditional nursing student more time to devote to other typical responsibilities, such as children and work.

Using these admission criteria, at the time of the study, the nursing program had an aggregate 3-year, on-time completion rate of 79% (NCBON, 2012). By comparison, the most recent aggregate 3-year, on-time completion rates of two other community

college associate's degree nursing programs, within the same state, and of similar size, were 60% and 58%; the state average for all Associate's Degree Programs was 57% (NCBON, 2012).

These rates contrasted to the most recent aggregate 3-year, on-time completion rates of two university 4-year degree nursing programs, located in the same city as the associate's degree program being studied, which were 86% and 91%; the state average for all 4-year degree programs was 75% (NCBON, 2012). Where the community college in this study had higher on-time completion rates than peer community colleges, the university comparisons demonstrated room for improvement.

Community college Associate's Degree Nursing programs graduate the majority (60%) of all new nurses annually (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011; Viterito & Teich, 2002). Community colleges attract high numbers of students fitting the definition of nontraditional (Burns, 2010). Identifying successful programs designed to improve student progression in community colleges could help to align state averages for Associate's Degree Nursing programs with those of f4-year degree nursing programs.

Sample

Common Student Needs

An examination of the student profile of this nursing program was conducted to determine the percentage of students who met the operational definition of nontraditional student, including being at least twenty-four, being a single parent, caring for children at home, and/or working either part time or full time off campus (Burns, 2010). Participants in the quantitative study for Research Question 1 represented a convenience sample of nontraditional students ($n = 126$) for whom initial enrollment in the associate's degree

nursing program was the 2011 fall semester, the 2012 spring semester, or the 2012 fall

semester. The sample of enrolled nursing students fit the definition of nontraditional

community college nursing student used for this study.

Among the sample cohort ($n= 126$), 84.9% were at least 24 years of age, and a

large majority, 87.3%, were female. Most, (73%), were employed at least part time , and

over one fourth, 26.2%, represented an ethic minority, mostly Black. 26.2% of the cohort

had already earned a college degree before enrolling in the Associate's Degree Nursing

program (21% had a 4-year degree, 4% had a 2-year degree; and, 1.2% had a graduate

degree). It was determined that at least 23.8% of the student cohort was responsible for

the care of children in their homes. Table 2 includes additional demographic information.

Table 2: Demographic variables of participants

Variable	$n=126$	Percentage
Aged 24 or older	107	84.9
Female	110	87.3
Employed part time or full time	92	73.0
Ethnic/minority representation	33	26.2
Previous college degree	33	26.2
Caring for children at home	30	23.8
Reside inside the county	34	27.0
Commute > 10 miles	59	46.8

Perceived Value

      To address Research Question 2, a total of 25 students, known only to the career counselor, met the criteria and received the letter of invitation (see Appendix B). Their ages ranged from 24 to 45 years old and included three male students. Only four students responded to the letter of invitation. Each was interviewed and was assigned the following pseudonyms: October, April, Joe, and, November.

      October was a 45-year-old Caucasian male enrolled in the final semester of the nursing program, while also working as a Certified Nurse Assistant II (CNA II) and as a medical technician. He worked approximately 24 hours per month. He and his partner of 14 years had no children. October chose nursing as a second career after changes in the economy.

      April was a 29-year-old Caucasian female recent graduate of the nursing program. Licensed as a registered nurse, she was anxious to begin her nursing practice and was actively seeking employment as a nurse. Meanwhile, she was working part time as a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA), and had recently returned to live with her parents in order to save on expenses and be able to pay her student loans, credit card balances, and utility expenses.

      Joe was a Caucasian male and another recent graduate of the nursing program. He had recently been licensed to practice as a registered nurse. He was
 working part time as a registered nurse for a Home Health agency, while he continued to search for a full-time nursing position. Joe was a single father of four young children, whose ages ranged from 7 to 12 years old. The children's mother was not involved in

their care. During the time Joe was a nursing student, he and his children became homeless and had to rely on public assistance and shelter.

November, was a 42-year-old Caucasian female completing her final semester of the nursing program. She had three young-adult children, aged 20 to 24, all still living at home. November usually works two 12-hour shifts each month at a local major acute care center as a Certified Nurse Assistant II (CNAII). She is married and says she does not worry about finances. November had repeated the first semester of the nursing program. Admittedly, during her first attempt, she had not accepted responsibility for her own success.

Relationship between Participation and Progression

The same convenience sample of nontraditional nursing students ($n=126$) used for the first Research Question was also used for Research Question 3. Students in the cohort were initially enrolled in the nursing program from the 2011 fall semester through the 2012 fall semester. Data pertaining to individual students were mined for purpose of logistic regression analysis. The data were combined in spreadsheet form; and then, de-identified before being provided to the researcher.

<div align="center">Procedure</div>

A better understanding of the personal needs of nontraditional students in a community college nursing program; the value they place on a career counselor intervention; and the relationship between the intervention and the progression of nontraditional nursing students were the areas of focus for this study.

Common Student Needs

To answer the first Research Question, "What are common student needs addressed by a program-dedicated career counselor for a community college nursing program?", data routinely maintained by the career counselor were collected to be examined for the most common purposes of counseling interactions by students. Interactions included attendance at group student success sessions, and any individual student-counselor visits.

The career counselor routinely records total attendance at group topic sessions, as well as individual student visits, according to appropriate, established broad category descriptors such as:

- Stress/Anxiety

- Study/Test-taking skills

- Work/School/Life balance

- Miscellaneous Crisis Assistance

- Academic performance.

The frequencies are tallied and reported monthly in a student service log (see Appendix A). These data are not recorded by student identity; rather, only by broad category totals.

A third party at the college collected the monthly reports from the career counselor recorded within the timeframe identified for this investigation. Using the monthly reports, the tallies for each month within the timeframe of the study were totaled, per broad category. This summative report revealed the most common need categories addressed by the program-dedicated career counselor.

Perceived Value

The second research question, "How do progressing nontraditional students at a community college perceive the value of a program-dedicated career counselor?", was addressed through analysis of individual interviews conducted with selected students who had met with the career counselor for private counseling sessions while enrolled in the nursing program. After receiving IRB approval, a letter inviting participation in the interviews was distributed by the career counselor to only those students who had met with her for private counseling sessions during the timeframe of this investigation (see Appendix B). Only the career counselor knew the identity of the students.

A group e-mail, with recipients' names blinded, was issued by the career counselor to the appropriate students with a brief explanation of the purpose of the letter of invitation attached to the e-mail. The letter of invitation, signed by a peer-colleague of the researcher, provided information about the study, how it was being conducted, and gave instructions for the student to contact the researcher if he/she was willing to participate in an interview.

Of 25 students invited to participate, only four students responded to the researcher indicating their willingness to participate in an interview for the study. The four respondents were currently enrolled in either first-year or second-year nursing courses, or had recently graduated; and, they met the definition of nontraditional community college nursing student. Some of these participants were also participants in the quantitative portion of the study. All four respondents were interviewed.

Each of the four students was contacted by the researcher via e-mail for purpose of scheduling a date and time to conduct the interview. Interview times were scheduled on differing days and at times far apart to avoid the possibility of students encountering each other.

The interview setting provided privacy and an environment free from distractions. Before the start of each interview, each participant and the researcher agreed on a pseudonym. The participant was given opportunity to ask questions; and, was asked to read and sign the informed consent explaining the purpose of the research, a description of their participation, any risks and benefits of their participation, and a confidentiality statement (see Appendix C).

Each interview was audio-recorded, using each pseudonym throughout the interview. Interview topics were designed to examine the value nontraditional students placed on the intervention, to solicit their impressions of the career counselor intervention, and to generate suggestions for its improvement.

During the interviews, the researcher made interpretive, written notes as a beginning to the analysis. The recordings were each transcribed verbatim. Copies of the transcriptions were sent to each participant, via e-mail, for their review and approval.

Upon receiving approval from each participant, the researcher analyzed the content of each interview, using thematic analysis, searching for emerging themes consistent with all of the interviews. The interview questions focused on the participants' individual experiences with the career counselor.

Semi structured interviews, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, of the four student participants who responded to the letter were conducted in a comfortable, on-

campus setting by the researcher. The interview protocol listed several key questions about her/his experience(s) with the career counselor.

Questions asked of each participant included a warm up question, inviting the participant to share a little bit about themselves and about their situation, which helped define them as a nontraditional student. Next, a general question designed to examine their experiences with the career counselor was asked, followed by a question designed to identify how the student made the decision to visit with the counselor in a one-on-one setting. Finally, a question designed to solicit the student's perception of the career counselor and the value the student placed on the counselor as a resource to the nursing program and to nursing students was asked (see Appendix D).

Relationship between Participation and Progression

The third Research Question was answered through logistic regression analysis that included de-identified data on all students meeting the definition of nontraditional, who entered the nursing program in Fall 2011, Spring 2012, and Fall 2012. The assistant third party at the college collected the appropriate data from available college files and from the career counselor. Several variables of interest were included on pre-college characteristics, the frequency of group sessions and one-on-one counseling interventions, and progression to the third semester, representing the start of their second year.

Pre-entry attributes and first-to-second year progression were captured and assembled by college personnel with responsibility for student data. These were matched with the counselor's records on the frequency of participation in group workshops and one-on-one counseling. Once the data were combined and approval was obtained by the

Institutional Review Board at UNC Charlotte, they were de-identified, and the complete dataset was provided to the researcher.

Variables. For the logistic regression analysis to answer Research Question 3, independent variables included:

- Gender - male or female

- Race and Ethnicity - White or Minority

- Age - 24 years and older or younger than 24

- Commuting distance to class - greater than 10 miles or less than 10 miles

- Employment status - work, either FT or PT; or not working

- Other degree - none; or 2-yr or 4-yr degree or more

- Financial aid eligibility- Yes or no

- Admission test - adjusted total score

- The number of group counseling workshops attended

- The number of one-on-one counseling sessions while in the program.

The selection of variables was determined by the literature review on progression of nontraditional nursing students. Additionally, frequencies of group-meeting participation and individual participation in private sessions with the counselor were provided to the third party agent of the college by the career counselor.

The dependent variable used for the logistic regression was students' progression to the second year of study (i.e., third-semester). Students who started the nursing program in Fall 2011, returned to begin their second year in Fall 2012. Students who began the program in Spring 2012 would have returned to begin their second year in

Spring 2013. The students who started the program in fall of 2012 would enter their

second year of study in fall of 2014.

These data were collected by the third party agent of the college from routinely

maintained student files. All of the data were de-identified before being provided to the

researcher for analysis. Analyses were completed using SPSS software (IBM, 2013) and

the .05 level of significance was used for all statistical tests.

<div align="center">Design and Data Analysis</div>

For this mixed method research, a separate data analysis occurred for each

research question. For Research Question 1, "What are common student needs addressed

by a program-dedicated career counselor for a community college nursing program?", the

frequencies of counselor interactions were tabulated and provided in table form with raw

data tabulation and percentages.

For Research Question 2, "How do progressing nontraditional nursing students at

a community college perceive the value of a program-dedicated career counselor?", each

of the four individual interviews was transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis,

incorporating open coding, axial coding and selective coding, was used to identify themes

within the data,and a core category. Beginning with open coding, each line of the data

was explored for thoughts, ideas, feelings, and meaning. Axial coding, the next phase of

qualitative analysis, was then used to determine any

relationships between the open codes. Finally, the use of selective coding resulted in

identifying the core code from the analysis. From the data, three axial categories

emerged: overwhelmed, uncertainty, and stress. From the three axial codes emerged the

core category, Comfort. The core category, Comfort, defines how progressing

nontraditional nursing students perceived the value of a program-dedicated career counselor. The three axial codes each relate to the core category of Comfort.

For Research Question 3, "What is the relationship between the frequency of participation in counseling interventions and nontraditional nursing student progression in the community college setting?", a logistic regression included all of the independent variables listed in the section above with the dependent variable of second year progression. The second year progression, represented by enrolling in the third semester, was considered the definition of successful student progression.

Summary

Balancing the demands of heavy academics with everyday adult and parental responsibilities often proves overwhelming for nontraditional nursing students in community college nursing programs. Too often, these students elect to leave school at a time when the nation needs more nurses. The literature tells us that by supporting nontraditional students with various counseling services, it is possible to increase student success and progression.

This mixed-method research was designed to study selected aspects of a nursing career counselor intervention to document the student-counselor experience and the relationship between the counseling intervention and progression of nursing students in a community college. By studying this dedicated career counselor model for student progression and determining to what extent an intervention of a dedicated career counselor affects students' decisions and abilities to remain in school, the researcher provided a pilot evaluation of a model for retaining nontraditional students in community college associate's degree nursing schools.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to evaluate selected aspects of a dedicated career counselor program in an Associate's Degree Nursing program in a community college. Findings are documented related to (a) common student needs addressed by a program-dedicated career counselor, (b) perceived value of the counselor intervention; and, (c) the relationship between participation in the intervention program and student progression.

Common Student Needs

Archived quantitative data were de-identified and examined for the most common purpose of counselor interactions with students, according to broad category descriptors. The broad category topics included the following:

- Stress/Anxiety

- Test/Study Strategies

- Organization/Time Management

- Work/School/Life Balance

- Personal Crisis Assistance

- School Performance

Methods of interacting with students included student success sessions presented to groups; presentations to identified classes, or individual interactions in the form of face to face meetings, e-mails, and/or telephone calls. Included in the tallies are also interactions with faculty about a student and that student's particular situation, about which the instructor had concerns. Table 3 includes the Counselor Interaction Category

Totals. Each broad category topic is listed beside the total interactions for each, and the percentage of total interactions each represents.

Table 3: Counselor interaction category totals

Interaction category	Total	Percentage
Student success group sessions	312	39.0
Stress/anxiety	131	16.5
Work/ school/life balance	104	13.0
Study/ test strategies	76	9.5
School performance	66	8.3
Personal life crisis	65	8.1
Organization/time management	45	5.6
Total interactions	799	100.0

During the 2-year academic timeline being investigated, the career counselor recorded 799 (100%) direct student or student-related interactions. Large group overview sessions, conducted by the career counselor and designed to help promote student success, recorded 312 (39.0%) duplicated student encounters. The categories of Stress/Anxiety and Work/School/Life Balance were the next most frequent reasons for seeking assistance, with 131 (16.5%) and 104 (13.0%), respectively; followed by Study/Testing Strategies with 76 (9.5%) tallies, and School Performance with 66 (8.3%) tallies. Interestingly, the School Performance category showed increased activity on dates coinciding with the end of semester/final exam schedules.

Data revealed the career counselor responded to students for purposes that were categorized as Personal Crisis Assistance, a total of 65 (8.1%) times. Included within the category of Personal Crisis Assistance were concerns such as personal transportation, food referrals, childcare, shelter, and overall financial needs. The category topic with the fewest tallies was Organization/Time Management with 45 (5.6%) tallies over 2 years. Some students may have attended multiple group sessions; some students met privately with the counselor multiple times.

The category with the highest percentage of counselor interaction, (39.0%), Student Success Group Sessions, was large group overview sessions which provided information on multiple topics during group sessions. Topics covered by the career counselor during each overview session included time management, managing stress, and organizational skills. Student attendance was required during the first semester of study. While tallies for this category were the highest, the group category cannot be used to answer the research question, "What are the common student needs addressed by a program-dedicated career counselor for a community college nursing program?".

The next highest category of career counselor interaction was Stress/Anxiety. A total of 131 counselor interactions, 16.5% of all career counselor interactions, were to assist students, either in groups or individually, who needed help dealing with stress and/or anxiety. The total interactions included attendance to small group sessions, including the topic of Stress/Anxiety; as well as, private career counselor meetings with individual students to discuss Stress/Anxiety.

The next highest category of student need for career counselor interaction was the topic of Work/School/Life Balance, 13% of all interactions. The total number of

interactions, 104, included attendance to small group sessions on the topic, as well as individual, private meetings to discuss this need with the career counselor.

Based on this study, the common needs addressed by a program-dedicated career counselor for a community college nursing program were dealing with Stress/Anxiety; and, dealing with Work/School/Life Balance. The career counselor dedicated 29.4% of her time assisting nontraditional nursing students with these areas of need.

Perceived Value

Individual interviews were conducted with four students who met the definition of nontraditional, and had each met individually with the career counselor while enrolled in the nursing program. Analysis of the qualitative data from the transcribed interviews revealed three axial codes: overwhelmed, uncertainty and stress. The core code of Comfort emerged from the axial codes.

Overwhelmed. The first of three axial codes to emerge was overwhelmed. Careful analysis of verbatim transcription revealed participants felt inundated with course assignments and deadlines, while struggling to manage adult responsibilities of family and work. Being able to devote ample time to each, and to succeed at their studies in order to progress, was overwhelming.

As a single father of four children, Joe had the significant responsibility for their well-being while he was a nursing student. As a result of circumstances, he and the children became homeless.

> She was a wonderful resource. She was someone I could go to and I could talk to about what was going on. I faced an enormous number of challenges in my fourth semester. In fact, they were insurmountable. Certainly, it made a qualitative difference in how I was able to function; maybe it is possible that if I had not had her I would not have been able to do as well as I did.

October was a 45-year-old career changer, returning to school after years of being away. He was struggling with academics while also dealing with life crises.

> I was hoping she would be able to help me with my situations. She helped me find the balance. I was referred by one of my instructors to see her; I was on the verge of not proceeding successfully. I am glad that happened because it was very beneficial; I probably would not be here going into my fourth semester had it not been for her services earlier in the program.

As November reflected back on the semesters she had already completed, she remembered the feeling of being overwhelmed as she tried to balance her home life with serious study as a nursing student.

> I was having a problem focusing and was feeling anxious. So, I went to (the career counselor) and it was amazing. My problem was organization and I did not see that at the time; she helped me get very organized. It just really helps to have an outlet, somebody strong to put things in perspective.

Uncertainty. The second of three axial codes to emerge from analysis was uncertainty. This was exhibited by some participants as feelings of doubt in their ability to be successful in their academics; others felt insecure about progressing toward graduation. The lack of confidence in their abilities, along with the ever-present possibility of failure, resulted in feelings of uncertainty about their future.

Although April had previously earned a college degree, she struggled in nursing school. The method she had used to study in college, previously, was not working for her nursing studies. She had done poorly on tests.

> I went to her for help with kind of to cope with nursing school; how to study a little bit better; one time I went on my own, and then one time I was sent by a teacher because my grades were suffering a little bit. Going to see her made me know that I was on the right path. I did really bad on the first test and then after that, I think I was the highest grade in the class. After I met with her, I studied harder; she told me, she said, 'You can do this, you just have to put your best foot forward and just keep going'. It gave me more confidence.

November could probably be identified as someone who began nursing school with unrealistic expectations. She admits that she sometimes missed class and did not take studying seriously. Eventually, she failed the first semester and had to repeat at a later time.

> So, when I left the first semester, I was not going to come back, I was just so defeated. I blamed the school, and she sat down with me one day, and she said, you know if you do not take responsibility for your part of things, you cannot grow. And it was probably the most profound thing anyone said to me to date, because when I got to really think about what she said, 'I thought, it is all my fault, they did not do anything wrong. She helped me accept responsibility and to grow in my own self confidence.'

Stress. Interviews conducted with the nontraditional nursing students revealed an axial code of feeling stressed. This feeling was often manifested in the form of anxiousness, worry and/or apprehension. Some students had so much to deal with and to balance personally and academically, they stressed over what failure could mean for their futures and that of their families.

Joe and his four children became homeless while he was a nursing student. While he was strongly determined to complete nursing school, his personal challenges were so great, he was stressed over his ability to surmount them in order to provide a more secure future for his children.

> I faced an enormous number of challenges in my fourth semester. In fact, they were insurmountable. I had another incident of domestic violence when my mother was living with me, with my children became violent, threw us out of the house, so I was homeless.

November clearly articulated her feelings of stress during her interview. While she used the term stress frequently during the interview, underlying, she also described her fear of failing out of the program, again.

The stress is enormous at nursing school and trying to work full-time,
have a family, any of that stuff. I mean, you do have a life in nursing
school but you do not have a life in nursing school. The best you can get is
a little time with your family once in a while. I think the stress that nursing
students are under, in my personal opinion, to have a nursing program
without a resource outlet like (the career counselor) is not responsible. The stress
that these students go through....it ruins relationships, it ruins health, it ruins finances,
and in the end of the day, you may not even make it....I mean, some of us do   not
make it out of the program....which adds to the stress! You only get one
chance....so, I think it is really prudent to have someone like (the career
counselor). If you are going to put people under that kind of pressure at least be
able to say, 'go talk to someone'. Nursing school is a very hard program...it is not
your normal college...you have people's lives in your hands and it is not a joke...it
is a very serious thing.

Comfort. The core code of Comfort is derived from the axial codes. The term

represents the central story in this analysis. The student participants' feelings of

overwhelmed, uncertainty, and stress were diminished or relieved after interacting with

the career counselor, providing them comfort. Knowing that the counselor was available

to listen to their concerns, and would render them assistance, provided a sense of comfort

to each student.

For Joe, comfort came in the form of security, wellbeing, and a sense of relief for

himself and his four children. The career counselor was able to console Joe and to assist

him in locating safe shelter and provisions, allowing Joe to re-focus on nursing academics

and to eventually complete the program.

If it had not been for her, I probably would have found somewhere else,
but it may not have been as appropriate. It was available. She was actually
able to help me with some of my difficulties. She helped put me in
contact with many resources.

Comfort for November was perceived as encouragement and reassurance received

from the career counselor as she struggled with multirole stress, along with the fear of

failing out of the program a second time. The career counselor helped her organize her

school work and family responsibilities within her personal calendar, while also

reassuring her she could be successful.

> The career counselor is an amazing resource. It just really helped to have
> an outlet, somebody strong to put things into perspective because when
> you're stressed you do not see things rationally sometimes.

October perceived comfort from the career counselor as ease and reassurance, felt

when the career counselor helped him with his interpersonal situations. The career

counselor provided him with the reassurance and encouragement he needed in order to

successfully complete the program.

> If the career counselor were not here I probably would not be looking at
> graduation in December. Having her...to be able to pick up where the
> instructors leave off with support... it has been very beneficial.

The career counselor was able to bolster April's self-confidence by providing her

new study skills and encouragement to keep moving forward. April was comforted by

this early in the program at a time when she was feeling particularly insecure in her

ability to be a successful nursing student.

> She reassured me I can do this. Having her here, a professional counselor,
> I found she was a valuable asset. You just need somebody who understands what
> we are going through as opposed to just like a, a generic counselor, I guess.

Relationship between Participation and Progression

The relationship between students' participation in career counselor interventions

and their academic progression in the nursing program was examined using logistic

regression. Means and standard deviations, and/or totals and percentages for independent

and dependent variables are shown in Table 4. Many of the independent variables were

represented by most of the sample. In particular, the convenience sample ranged closely

in age, representative of a nontraditional student, according to the definition (see Table 2).

Distance traveled to campus, calculated using zip codes, is another variable shared by most of the sample and representative of nontraditional nursing students. The table also confirms that most of the sample had had some interaction with the career counselor while a student, conforming to the research design.

Logistic regression analysis was completed using progression through the first year of nursing school as the dependent variable. Independent variables included age, gender, race (not including Hispanic/non-Hispanic), travel distance to school, admission test score, employment status (full time or part time), other college degree, on financial aid of any type, and frequency of contacts with career counselor.

Because it was not possible to determine the variable of "caring for children" pertaining to every member of the cohort, it was decided not to include that variable as an independent variable for the logistic regression. Table 5 shows the results of the prediction analysis. None of the independent variables proved to be statistically significant for predicting student progression.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for independent and dependent variables

Independent variable	M	SD	n	%
Age	0.04	0.06		
24 and older			107	84.9
Younger than 24			19	15.1
Gender	-1.31	1.48		
Female			110	87.3
Male			16	12.7
Race/ethnicity	0.55	9.91		
White			93	73.8
Minority			33	26.2
Travel distance	0.09	0.08		
Less than 10 miles			67	53.2
More than 10 miles			59	46.8
Employed	0.27	0.23		
Working FT or PT			92	73.0
Not working			34	27.0
Other degree	-0.60	1.01		
No other degree			90	71.4
4-year or more degree			29	23.0
2-year degree			7	5.6
Financial aid	1.18	1.00		
Yes			85	67.5
No			41	32.5
Admission test score	0.98	.080		
Counselor contact	0.04	0.12	126	100.0
Dependent variable				
Progression to third semester			119	94.4

Table 5: Model predicting progression for all students (n = 126)

Variable	M	SD	Z stat	*p*-value	OR	LL95% CI	UL95% CI
Intercept	-8.11	7.05	-0.16	0.25			
Age	0.04	0.06	0.72	0.47	1.04	0.93	1.17
Gender	-1.31	1.48	-0.89	0.38	0.27	0.01	4.89
Race	0.55	0.91	0.60	0.55	1.73	0.29	10.28
Travel	0.09	0.08	1.08	0.28	1.10	0.93	1.29
Employment	0.27	0.23	1.19	0.23	1.31	0.84	2.05
Degree	-0.60	1.01	-0.59	0.56	0.55	0.08	4.00
Fin. aid	1.18	1.00	1.18	0.24	3.26	0.46	23.32
Counselor	-0.04	0.12	-0.37	0.72	0.96	0.76	1.21
Admission test	0.98	0.80	1.23	0.22	2.66	0.56	12.75

Summary

The purpose of this mixed method study was to evaluate selected aspects of a nursing career counseling program in a community college in order to better understand the student-counselor experience and the potential influence the counselor intervention may have on a student's ability to remain in nursing school and to progress to completion. Data analysis served to answer each of three research questions, as well as to validated previous findings concerning nontraditional nursing students.

Student needs addressed by the program-dedicated career counselor at this

large community college ranged from developing basic academic study strategies to solving personal crises. The most common needs addressed by the program-dedicated career counselor were dealing with Stress/Anxiety and the causes of stress and anxiety, followed by Work/School/Life Balance.

The career counselor spent 39% of her time proactively delivering beneficial information to new and returning students via Student Success Sessions. In addition, communicating with students, or faculty concerned about a student, through e-mails, phone calls and/or individual meetings, was also time-consuming for the career counselor.

Nontraditional nursing students perceive a program-dedicated career counselor as a source of comfort, as revealed by the qualitative data collected in individual interviews. Their feelings of being overwhelmed, of uncertainty, and of stress caused them to reach out to the counselor for an element of comfort. Some perceived comfort as security and wellbeing; others perceived comfort as encouragement and reassurance. The relationship between the frequency of counseling interventions and academic progression of nontraditional nursing students was not statistically significant, based on this research design.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

For nontraditional nursing students, balancing the daily demands of academics with adult responsibilities can seem overwhelming. Community college nursing students typically fit the description of nontraditional: at least 24 years old; caring for children in the home; financial struggles; commute to campus; and, working full time or part time while attending school (Burns, 2010). Although these students have high potential for succeeding, they sometimes make the decision on their own to drop out of college (Scott et al., 1996). Nursing education can be particularly challenging for male students. Increasing the availability and use of counselors for discussing problems unique to men can be a good progression strategy (Boughn, 1994).

Providing counseling services, individually or in a group, can significantly improve student progression (Lee et al., 2009). Counselor-led activities for nontraditional female students with children provide support and assistance (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). A counselor intervention program designed for nontraditional nursing students in a community college could positively affect progression, thus help to minimize the growing shortage of nurses.

Nontraditional students may be at many different midlife transitional points in their lives as a result of situations such as divorce, loss of employment, or an empty nest. Each of these situations was evident in the interviews conducted in this study.

Joe was a divorced, single father of four young children. He was overwhelmed, at this transition point in his life, with his many responsibilities concerning his children's well-being, and as a nursing student. October had returned to college to become a nurse after being displaced as a result of economic changes. Transitioning from being employed full time to being a nursing student able to work only a few hours each month, created interpersonal conflict in his life and made him feel overwhelmed. November was married with adult children who would soon be leaving home. Making the transition to nursing student was proving stressful for her. She needed help organizing her full schedule, and getting focused on academics. By providing each of them the resources needed to deal with some of the stressors they balance along with the demands of nursing school, the hope is these students will feel supported and be encouraged to remain in school until graduation.

Missing from the literature was research identifying the common counseling needs of nontraditional nursing students, and whether a program-dedicated career counselor intervention, specifically designed to address the nonacademic reasons that often force nontraditional nursing students to leave their programs, and as recommended by the Task Force on the North Carolina Nursing Workforce, is associated with improved student progression. Researching the value placed on such an intervention by nontraditional nursing students could prove beneficial to community college nursing programs. Improving student progression in associate's degree nursing programs could ultimately increase enrollments in the RN-to-MSN pathway, enhancing the development of needed nurse faculty.

The purpose of this mixed method investigation was to identify the common counseling needs of nontraditional nursing students; to learn the extent to which nontraditional nursing students valued the availability of a counseling resource; and, to examine the relationship between such an intervention and the progression of nontraditional nursing students.

This study was conducted in a large urban community college located in a metropolitan city in Southeastern United States. The multicampus institution has offered an associate's degree nursing program for nearly 50 years and is regionally accredited. A convenience sample of nontraditional nursing students at the community college participated in the study.

The intervention was a professionally licensed and experienced career counselor, employed by the college to be available to the nursing students for the purpose of providing information on topics such as managing stress, dealing with test anxiety, balancing life, work, and school, and, time management. In addition, the career counselor was available for private counseling sessions in response to crisis events happening in students' personal lives.

This mixed-method study of nontraditional nursing students in a community college investigated one program designed to assist student progression. Findings for the first research question, "What student needs are addressed by a program-dedicated career counselor for a community college nursing program?" confirmed that meeting the definition of nontraditional student, balancing adult responsibilities with academic expectations, presents logistical and emotional challenges for nursing students. The daily

stress resulting from the demands placed on nontraditional students threatens the students' will to continue in school.

<div align="center">Common Student Needs</div>

The career counselor proactively provided information to students in group sessions, covering multiple topics such as time management, dealing with test anxiety and balancing school with life and work. In addition, the counselor conducted sessions on specific topics, such as managing stress.

The results of this study revealed that information on this particular topic was sought out by students most often, either by attending announced group sessions about dealing with stress and anxiety, or by meeting individually with the counselor to discuss their own personal stress and anxiety. Review of literature indicates that the stress associated with academic rigor is frequently a barrier to the success of nontraditional nursing students (Last & Fulbrook, 2003; Russler, 1991).

Balancing the demands of nursing school with work and life was revealed as the next most frequent reason for seeking counseling intervention. We know from the literature that nontraditional nursing students frequently have family and work responsibilities to balance with the academic demands of nursing school, often resulting in multiple role stress (Brandenburg, 1974; Gigliotti, 1999; Johnson et al., 2000). The remaining three interaction categories of frequency can be grouped as all pertaining to academic performance: study/test strategies, school performance (grades), and organization/time management.

Perceived Value

Interviews conducted with a sample of the student population validated the personal life crises and concerns of nontraditional students suggested in the literature (Auerbach et al., 2007). Two of the four interviewed respondents were male nursing students, although males comprised only 12.7% of the total student cohort in this study. Male nursing students may experience difficulties unique to them while in school (Kelly et al., 1996). Nursing education can be particularly challenging for male students. Increasing the availability and use of counselors is one progression strategy (Boughn, 1994).

Nontraditional nursing students may experience extreme hardship, as was the situation with Joe and his children; or, a simpler need of some helpful guidance and reassurance, as was April's need. The personal life crisis situations of a few students consumed 8.1% of the career counselor's time.

The axial code Overwhelmed is supported in the literature. Nontraditional nursing students frequently become overwhelmed soon after beginning nursing school, jeopardizing their potential success (Jeffreys, 1998, 2007; Wells, 2003). The lack of self-confidence, interpreted as axial code, *Uncertainty,* is a common issue for nontraditional college students (Durodoye et al., 2000). Nontraditional female college students' own lack of confidence in their ability to succeed has been identified as a reason for leaving college (Scott et al., 1996). Nontraditional female students are more prone to underestimate their abilities and to lack self-confidence in their potential to succeed as a student, leading to psychological distress and risk of attrition (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006).

High levels of stress have been associated with low self-esteem in nursing students (Peterson-Graziose et al., 2013).

The third axial code, Stress, was supported multiple times in the literature. Many adults who return to college decide to leave school because they feel inadequate to deal with the multiple role stress caused by family, job, children, finances and school. The fear of academic failure can cause the greatest stress (Johnson et al., 2000).

The core category of Comfort which emerged from the qualitative analysis, validated findings in the literature on facilitators of success for nontraditional nursing students; specifically, the benefits of providing counseling services to students (Lee et al., 2009; Pence, 2011; Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). Students in this study benefitted from group sessions and individual sessions with the career counselor. Counseling services, including individual counseling and group counseling, have been shown to be significantly associated with student success (Lee et al., 2009).

The findings from the first and second research questions were similar in that they both showed the needs of nontraditional nursing students are often nonacademic. Often, the nontraditional student has emotional needs which can potentially threaten their progression in the nursing program. Meeting the definition of nontraditional student and balancing the demands of academic rigor along with the responsibilities of adulthood, can seem overwhelming to them at times. Intensive, proactive interventions provided by nursing programs that support nonacademic student concerns can prove effective for student success (Jeffreys, 2006).

Data findings from both questions also revealed that physical and emotional stress is often experienced by many nontraditional nursing students. The career counselor was

perceived as a valued resource; someone who understood their challenges and who was available to assist and reassure them. Student nurses experience significant stress during school. This high level of stress may contribute to sickness, absence, and even the decision to leave nursing school (Galbraith & Brown, 2011).

Relationship between Participation and Progression

No significant relationship between counselor intervention and student progression was identified through the quantitative analysis in this study. At the time of this study, the nursing program had a 3-year, on-time completion rate higher than most community college associate's degree nursing programs in the state, but not as high as the 4-year degree nursing programs, located in the same city.

Recommendations for Practice

Adult students with adult responsibilities, often including children and employment, struggle to balance these demands with those of academic nursing studies. Nontraditional nursing students may benefit from an available career counselor, dedicated to assisting them with the support and encouragement needed to remain in school.

Common Student Needs

The common needs of nontraditional nursing students are resultant of their strong desires to succeed in nursing school while continuing their family and work responsibilities and obligations. Based on the results of this investigation, the stress and anxiety commonly experienced by these students may be relieved somewhat by the availability of a career counselor who can validate their feelings, reaffirm their capability, and provide them ways of coping.

Perceived Value

Life crisis assistance is sometimes needed by nontraditional nursing students, as evidenced by this investigation. Critical, yet basic needs such as childcare, food sources and finances can halt a student's academic progress, affecting their future and that of their family. When a nursing student's family is in crisis, having a professional counselor and/or therapist readily available to assist in identifying community resources and solutions, can help alleviate some of the burdens on nontraditional students.

Relationship between Participation and Progression

While no significant relationship between counselor intervention and student progression was identified in this study, a smaller community college nursing program, with a lower aggregate 3-year, on-time completion rate, may benefit from such an intervention program. Many adults who return to college later in life eventually decide to leave school before completing because they feel inadequate to deal with the multiple role stress caused by family, job, children, finances and school; the fear of academic failure can cause the greatest stress (Johnson et al., 2000). Despite their determination, and their proven abilities, adult women students often underestimate the demands on their personal time and resources needed to be successful in a nursing program (Johnson et al., 2000).

This investigation provides some evidence of the need to make available to nontraditional nursing students a dedicated resource of support. These students were representative of typical nontraditional students enrolled in associate's degree nursing programs in community colleges nationwide. Historically, counseling services typically

provided to the general college student population are unable to respond as quickly, nor provide the devoted time necessary to meet these unique needs.

Based on the qualitative findings of this study indicating the value of a counselor intervention, a school of nursing contemplating providing a program-dedicated counselor for students should consider licensure as minimum qualification. A licensed therapist is educated to recognize and respond quickly to any scale of individual student need or personal crisis. Wherever a nursing program may begin a new program-dedicated career counseling program, this researcher recommends initiating a concise data collection procedure, to enhance tracking of counseling services and any correlation to student outcomes.

Where such a resource is provided, the nontraditional nursing students should be made aware, upon entry into a nursing program, that the resource is available to them and provided information about the counselor and examples of the types of concerns and issues she/he is able to assist with. Students should be reminded often of the resource, and encouraged to take advantage of it whenever they feel it helpful.

Recommendations for Future Research

Evidence of a relationship between the frequency of participation in counseling interventions and nontraditional nursing student progression in the community college could be enhanced by a study, which included a control group. Because the literature points to caring for children at home as a major barrier to student success, a future study able to quantify that independent variable would be beneficial. Future longitudinal studies, designed with graduation rates in mind, would also be beneficial. Such studies to

include these variables is needed, as it would contribute to the broader body of knowledge about the progression of nontraditional nursing students.

Although the present study did not find statistically significant findings based on the analysis of progression, it is possible that nontraditional students' academic talent and motivation helped carry them through to the second year (Wyatt, 2011). In addition, a smaller community college nursing program, with a lower average completion rate, may benefit from such an intervention program.

Although males made up only 12.7% of the cohort in this study, two of the four respondents to the interview were males. Anecdotally, this might suggest a high percentage of male students' use of career counselor services. Male students typically represent small numbers in nursing programs. Future research on the unique needs of male nontraditional nursing students could prove beneficial to schools of nursing concerned with the progression of male students.

Much insight into the personal needs of nontraditional students was revealed through the qualitative portion of this study. A more extensive qualitative study, involving a larger sample of nontraditional nursing students, with longer interviews and questions designed to elicit richer data about specific personal challenges influencing academic progression, could prove beneficial to schools of nursing of similar size and location.

A similar investigation conducted with nursing students and the general student population, with a comparison of the results would be beneficial. A similar investigation, conducted in community colleges representing different sizes and geographical settings

(i.e., using Carnegie Basic Classifications), and in university settings with undergraduate nursing students meeting the definition of nontraditional student, could also be beneficial.

A comparison of results between the two academic settings would benefit a greater understanding of the nontraditional nursing student in each institution type; how their respective needs and common threats to their academic success may be the same or may differ. This knowledge could better guide each institution type on the provision of effective counseling resources, and could aid in bringing progression rates of both institution types into alignment.

Limitations

Research design of this investigation was limited somewhat because the career counselor was already in place at the college and had interacted with all students through group session or individual meetings when the study began. Thus, it was not possible to identify a control group.

While it would have been ideal to analyze data that included progression and graduation rates, the time of intervention implementation did not allow for a graduation analysis on the identified cohorts.

Despite the limitations of this particular study, data were able to document some findings of nontraditional students. Prior to entering nursing school, nearly 25% of nursing students in community colleges held academic degrees in another field (Fulcher & Mullin, 2011). Family responsibilities and family crises often severely or modestly restrict academic success and progression of nontraditional nursing students (Jeffreys, 1998).

Characteristics of the nontraditional student include age, parental status, ethnicity, and gender (Marlow, 1989). Interactions with other students outside the classroom can deter a nontraditional student's decision to drop out of college (Tinto, 1982). Group counseling sessions, conducted by the career counselor, can provide a forum for students to engage other students and to discuss common concerns. Such activities could also serve "to increase a student's intellectual and social integration" into the program (Tinto, 1982, p. 697).

Although these findings were unable to confirm Tinto's theory through analysis, the data did indicate that the nontraditional students in the study actively sought out group sessions for opportunities to hear about, and to discuss with each other, their common concerns and issues. The issues discussed included academic challenges, like study skills and time management; as well as personal life issues, such as work/life/school balance and stress management.

Conclusions

Although a statistically significant relationship between career counselor interactions and student progression was not found, this investigation did find that a dedicated professional career counselor can help nontraditional nursing students in a community college, based on qualitative student interviews. Findings in this study provided insight into nontraditional nursing students' unique needs, and the personal and societal factors which often threaten their academic success and program progression.

Nurse faculty should be educated of and reminded about early signs and symptoms of a student in crisis, beyond their academic performance, and encouraged to confer with and/or make referral to the counselor when early signs present.

A dedicated career counselor, available to help nontraditional nursing students cope with the feelings of overwhelmed, uncertainty and stress in their life challenges and academics, is highly valued by the nontraditional nursing student, based on these qualitative results. While these students have strong potential for success, they feel pressure to drop out of college because of life stresses.

Summary

Progression of nontraditional students in community college nursing programs is of significant concern as it relates to the growing shortage of registered nurses. The nonacademic reasons which force nontraditional nursing students to leave school can be as unique and diverse as the student population, itself.

This study investigated one model of intervention program designed to assist nontraditional nursing students. A program-dedicated career counselor can prove beneficial to students by assisting them with finding a balance between the demands of nursing academics and typical adult responsibilities; and, with learning to better cope with the stresses that accompany nursing academics.

By providing nontraditional nursing students the resources for dealing with some of the feelings of overwhelmed experienced while balancing adult responsibilities, the hope is that the students will remain in school until graduation. Colleges of nursing, committed to the success of its nontraditional nursing students, might consider implementing a program-dedicated career counselor intervention program.

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APPENDIX A: STUDENT PROGRESSION SERVICE LOG

Semester, Year

	Stress/Anxiety	Study/Test Strategies	Organization/Time Management	Work/Life/School Balance

Date

xx/xx/xx				
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Month Totals:

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear Nursing Student at XXXX Community College:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the overall experiences of nursing students' interaction with the Career Counselor assigned to the Associate Degree Nursing Program at XXXX. The study will take place during spring semester, 2014. Your participation in this project will entail **one face-to-face interview** between June 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014. This study is being conducted by Ruth Hedgpeth, Dean of Nursing, Health & Teacher Education at XXXX Community College and a Doctoral Candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop your participation at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. All student interview data will be managed by Ms. Hedgpeth. She will remove all identifiable information from each interview transcript during the transcription process and use pseudonyms (fictitious names) instead. Therefore, none of the nursing instructors or the Career Counselor will know the final list of student interviewees who actually participated in the study. You are one of approximately five students from the nursing students expected to participate in this study.

If you agree to take part in the research study, please contact Ms. Hedgpeth directly at (xxx-xxx-xxxx). She will contact you shortly to schedule an interview with you at your convenience.

Thank you very much for your consideration!

Peer Colleague
Dean

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title and Purpose

Investigation of a Nursing Career Counseling Program in a Community College
The purpose of this research study is to examine the overall experiences of nursing students as they interacted with the dedicated Career Counselor assigned to the Associate Degree Nursing Program, and the effect the interaction may have had on their personal experience as a nursing student. Interview data collection with nursing students who benefitted from the counselor resource may contribute to the knowledge of whether a dedicated counselor may assist with the personal challenges commonly faced by new nursing students, and may contribute to student progression. Having such knowledge can provide insight into preventing attrition of future nursing students.

Investigator(*s*)

This study is being conducted by Ruth Hedgpeth, Dean of Nursing, Health & Teacher Education at XXXX Community College, and a Doctoral Candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Eligibility

You may participate in this study if you are enrolled in the Nursing Program, and if you interacted with the Career Counselor assigned to the Associate Degree Nursing Program. You may not participate in the study if you are not enrolled in the Nursing Program, or if you did not interact with the Career Counselor assigned to the Associate Degree Nursing Program.

Overall Description of Participation

You will be asked to participate in one interview between June 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014. The interview will take about 45 minutes, and will be based on a loosely structured interview protocol listing several key questions about your experiences with the Career Counselor. Ms. Hedgpeth will schedule and conduct the interviews on campus at a convenient time and location. Your interview will be audio-recorded for verbatim transcription later. You will receive a copy of your interview transcript through e-mail and have an opportunity to ask for changes as necessary.

Length of Participation

The interview will be scheduled between June 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014, and will take about 45-60 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

There are no major risks for your participation in this study. However, the project may involve risks that are not currently known. There may be some uncomfortable feelings on the part of the interview participants because some questions will be about your campus or classroom experiences, including hardships. The interviewer will try to make the questions as open and tactful as possible to reduce or eliminate these feelings. Other than the possibility of minimal discomfort related to interview questions, there are no other psychological, academic, economic or legal risks associated with participating in this study.You may benefit from your participation in this study because you will have time to reflect on your experiences and feel good about your successes to date. You will also benefit as you will be given $10.00 gift card for your time.

Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

Confidentiality Statement

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality. All student data will be managed by Ms. Hedgpeth. She will remove all identifiable information from each interview transcript and use pseudonyms instead. None of the nursing faculty or the Career Counselor will know the list of student interviewees who participated in the research.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant.

Approval Date

This form was approved for use on _____for one year.

Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator of this research study.

_____ _____

Participant Name (PRINT)   DATE

_____

Participant Signature

_____   _____

Investigator Signature   DATE

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Nursing Students' Experiences Interacting with the Career Counselor
Interview Questions

Warming up question

1. Please tell me a little bit about why you want to become a nurse.

Family background

1. Tell me about your current family situation and your family responsibilities.

Decision about visiting with the Career Counselor

1. Tell me about your experience(s) with the Career Counselor.
2. What made you decide that meeting with the Counselor would benefit your situation?
3. What effect did your interaction with the Career Counselor have on your personal experience as a nursing student?

Suggestions for improvement

1. How could the counseling experience be improved for you or other students in the future?

Closing

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me today?