

Introduction

The attrition rates for Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs have been a concern for nursing faculty at the University of Michigan-Flint. Retention rates lower than 80% are an accreditation concern (CCNE website).

The purpose of the research was the discovery of the views of students as to why they did not complete a DNP program. The goal for this study was to provide insight to faculty for the design of strategies to improve retention.

Over the course of three years, 26 students left the DNP program prior to graduation. Of this number, 17 were BSN to DNP and 9 were MSN to DNP students. All students were called via phone and 9 students agreed to participate for a 35% response rate.

Ethnicity:

White = 15

American Indian = 2

African American = 6

Hispanic = 2

Multiracial = 1

Gender: female = 24, male = 2

Average age = 40 years old (range 26-68)

Jeffreys' NURS model for undergraduate retention (2004) was adapted as an organizing framework for this study.

Summary

Multidimensional factors affected student retention. Academic, professional integration, and environmental factors all contributed to attrition in an online DNP program.

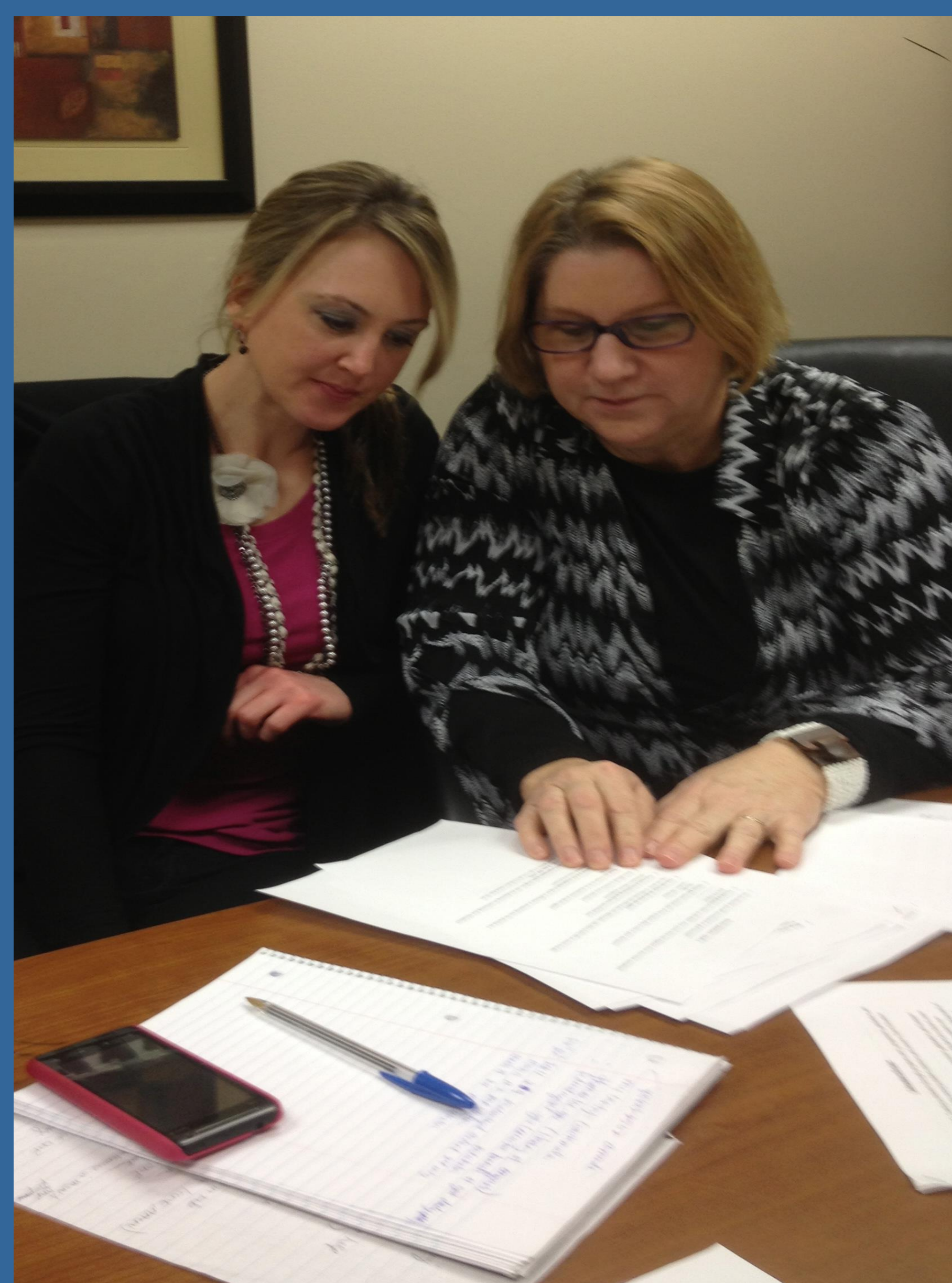
A larger percentage of minority students left the program than white students.

Students recommended part-time options and strategies to increase their connection to the program, faculty, and other students.

Future studies will focus on why students stay in an online DNP program.

Methodology

Semi-structured open-ended questions conducted via phone were used to collect data for this qualitative study.



References

CCNE website, retrieved 3/14/13

Jeffreys, M. R. (2012). Nursing student retention. Springer Publishing Company, New York, NY.

Results

Results (9 students participated) from students were grouped into three thematic categories related to why they left the program prior to graduation: academic, professional integration, and environmental factors.

Academic Factors:

- Heavy workload of program (6 of 9 reported)
- Online format (6 of 9 reported)
- Part-time option for longer program length (6 of 9 reported)

Professional Integration Factors:

- Increased connectedness to the program/faculty/peers (6 of 9 reported)

Environmental Factors:

- Childcare/eldercare/family issues (4 of 9 reported)
- Financial issues (5 of 9 reported)



Themes

Why students left the program

Academic Factors:

- Heavy workload of program
"I knew it was going to be quite a bit more demanding, but I don't think I had a realistic idea of how much more demanding."
- Online format
"I don't think the online format is necessarily the best way for me to learn. I think I'm one of those people that needs to be in the classroom setting more."

Environmental Factors:

- Childcare/eldercare/family issues
"You have to understand that we're working and also taking care of family members, whether it is children or elderly parents ..."
- Financial issues
"Financially it was very hard for me to continue and starting a new job where I wasn't getting pay yet to cover my expenses for schooling."

What was needed to prevent students from leaving the program

Academic Factors:

- Part-time option for longer program length
"If UM-Flint were to think about stretching out their program a little bit longer so that students had the opportunity to take it a little bit slower, then I think that you would have a larger success rate."

Professional Integration Factors:

- Increased connectedness to the program/faculty/peers
"I wish we met with more classroom time. I wish we got together more often ... I think that would have made the program even stronger."