Online Orientation for Graduate Students: Break-Out Sessions for Nurse Practitioner Specialties

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Introduction & Purpose

- The University of South Alabama College of Nursing (CON) on-line graduate and doctoral programs have grown exponentially. The on-campus orientation presented multiple challenges for the nurse practitioner students and the specialty coordinators. The CON transitioned from a four day on-site orientation to an online format.
- Students with varying computer skills benefit from tutorials outside of coursework. [1] Sakai, the University's learning platform, was used to develop an orientation project site to introduce materials and lectures four weeks prior to the online orientation. The orientation site opened four weeks ahead of the start of the semester and new information was released weekly. The fourth week culminated in an online synchronous webinar with a scheduled agenda posted on the orientation site. Students received email invitations and registered for the webinar.
- Break-out sessions for each nurse practitioner specialty option were included on the agenda. Students were able to interact with faculty and have questions answered in real time.
- Students who develop a sense of social connectedness increased retention rates. [2] The student feedback from the online orientations has far exceeded on-campus experiences and students are better prepared for the nurse practitioner specialty option coursework and to complete assignments in the online environment.

Purpose: The purpose is to provide students enrolled in a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program or Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program an opportunity for multiple break-out sessions with the nurse practitioner specialty option coordinator for additional information prior to a virtual online orientation.

Gap Statement & Objective

Gap Statements: On-campus orientation was costly for students and presented logistical issues for the College of Nursing.
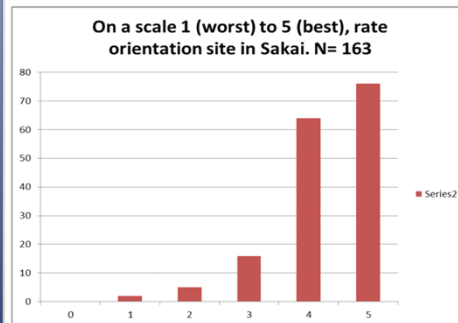
Objective: Apply technological advances to communicate with nurse practitioner students prior to and during the virtual online orientation to enhance the students' knowledge prior to beginning the specialty coursework.

Materials & Methods

Materials and Methods: Several materials were used to accomplish breakout sessions in an online virtual orientation. The following is a list of technologies and how they were employed in the virtual orientation and breakout sessions:

- Sakai®, the University of South Alabama's learning management system. A feature of Sakai® that was beneficial in online orientation and breakout sessions was the ability for faculty to create a project site and manually enroll students regardless of registration status. [3]

- Camtasia Relay® is a desktop capture software. Content displayed on the desktop (presentations, web sites, documents, etc.) is captured along with narration and video if desired. Many presentations normally delivered on campus were transferred to the virtual orientation site in Sakai using this desktop capture software. [4]

- GoToWebinar® is a webinar tool that allows multiple users (up to 1,000 attendees depending on purchased plan) to log-in and attend a synchronous meeting or training event. The University of South Alabama contracted with this company for the webinar service. This technology was originally used for the culminating webinar experience for students enrolled in online virtual orientation. [5]

- BigBlueButton® is a meeting tool integrated in Sakai. Initially, breakout sessions were hosted via BigBlueButton® which was accessed through Sakai. Students left the GoToWebinar® session, logged into the orientation site in Sakai, and navigated to their designated meetings/breakout sessions. Faculty pre-assigned students by groups into these sessions. [3,6]

- WebEx, a Cisco® product ultimately replaced GoToWebinar® as the University of South Alabama's online meeting and webinar tool. This product has allowed the college of nursing to set up training sessions with hundreds of students simultaneously. The host of the training session can assign students into groups and send the groups into a breakout session. [5,7]

Spring 2014 MSN Student Survey Results

On a scale 1 (worst) to 5 (best), rate orientation site in Sakai. N= 163

On a scale 1 (worst) to 5(best) how would you rate overall Webinar experience? N=162

Conclusions

- Nurse practitioner students were given the opportunity to attend live breakout sessions with their specialty option coordinator during the synchronous webinar.
- Technology was tested and processes improved once the college of nursing moved to a single platform that accommodated both the webinar and breakout sessions.
- Students and faculty expressed increased satisfaction regarding breakout sessions after moving to a single platform.
- Appropriate information was disseminated and students were given an interactive forum with faculty.
- Students report feeling more prepared for specialty option work due to participation in breakout sessions.

References

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