Institutional support of on-campus and off-campus nursing students
by Kathleen Karen Wankel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Nursing
Montana State University
© Copyright by Kathleen Karen Wankel (1995)

Abstract:
The purpose of institutional support is to assist students in achieving personal and academic success. However, owing to the physical distance that separates off-campus students from the main campus, distance learners may not receive the same level of support as on-campus students. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to determine and compare on-campus and off-campus students' perceptions of institutional support.

The study had a comparative descriptive design. A questionnaire was developed using Garrison and Baynton's theory of control for distance education and Baynton's factor analysis of support as a guide. Questions were divided into four subscales: in-class teacher support, out-of-class teacher support, in-class resource support and out-of-class resource support. A six-point Likert scale was used to score the students' perceptions of support.

A convenience sample was obtained from 85 registered nursing students who were currently enrolled in a community college distance education nursing program. Of the 85 students, 27 attended classes at distance sites. Of the total population of 85 students, 80 were present and participated in the completion of the questionnaire on the day of the survey. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. A t-test was used to compare the means of the on-campus and off-campus groups.

At the .05 significance level, the off-campus groups' scores were significantly lower in all four subscales and on all but eight of thirty questions. The results of the study indicate that both teacher support and resource support are important considerations for distance education programs.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT OF ON-CAMPUS AND

OFF-CAMPUS NURSING STUDENTS

by

Kathleen Karen Wankel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Nursing

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

May 1995

ii

APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Kathleen Karen Wankel

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

April 18, 1995
Date

Chair, Graduate Committee

Approved for the Major Department

April 18, 1995
Date

Marty Rhea, PhD, RN, CS
Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

_5/15/95_
Date

Graduate Dean

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Montana State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

If I have indicated my intention to copyright this thesis by including a copyright notice page, copying is allowable only for scholarly purposes, consistent with "fair use" as prescribed in the U.S. Copyright Law. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this thesis in whole or in parts may be granted only by the copyright holder.

Signature _Kathleen K. Wankel_

Date _May 12, 1995_

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation to several people who helped make this thesis a reality. First, I wish to acknowledge my husband, Tom, and our three children, Lee, Rock and Whitney for their unwavering patience and support. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my parents and my husband's parents for their encouragement and assistance. A special thanks goes to Betsy Becker, typist. Finally, I would like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Therese Sullivan and my thesis committee members, Jean Ballantyne and Karen Tkach, for sharing their knowledge, expertise, and support. I dedicate this work to all of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter   Page

viii

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

The purpose of institutional support is to assist students in achieving personal and academic success. However, owing to the physical distance that separates off-campus students from the main campus, distance learners may not receive the same level of support as on-campus students. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to determine and compare on-campus and off-campus students' perceptions of institutional support.

The study had a comparative descriptive design. A questionnaire was developed using Garrison and Baynton's theory of control for distance education and Baynton's factor analysis of support as a guide. Questions were divided into four subscales: in-class teacher support, out-of-class teacher support, in-class resource support and out-of-class resource support. A six-point Likert scale was used to score the students' perceptions of support.

A convenience sample was obtained from 85 registered nursing students who were currently enrolled in a community college distance education nursing program. Of the 85 students, 27 attended classes at distance sites. Of the total population of 85 students, 80 were present and participated in the completion of the questionnaire on the day of the survey. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. A t-test was used to compare the means of the on-campus and off-campus groups.

At the .05 significance level, the off-campus groups' scores were significantly lower in all four subscales and on all but eight of thirty questions. The results of the study indicate that both teacher support and resource support are important considerations for distance education programs.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The on-campus college student has access to a wide variety of institutional support services which serve to enhance the total educational experience. The purpose of such services is to provide support for the student in achieving personal and academic success. Examples of support services typically offered by institutions of higher learning are financial aid, counseling and advising services, a wide variety of courses, library facilities, computer labs, and access to instructors both in and out of class. While "support" is generally thought of as the material resources a student can access in order to carry out the learning process, the concept of support in a broader sense can also include emotional or psychological support (Garrison & Baynton, 1987). Institutional support positively impacts the educational environment of the student and can be the basis of school pride that promotes feelings of belonging, identity, and community.

For the college student who is enrolled in a distance education program, access to institutional support may be difficult. Owing to the very nature of distance education in which the student and "parent" institution are physically separated, the institutional support of the distance learner is not likely the same as the support of the on-campus student. The differing levels of institutional

support between the on-campus and off-campus students could be problematic for the distance learners.

Background and Significance

The importance of knowledge about the institutional support of distance learners is apparent when considering the growing popularity of distance education. Riccobono (1986) reported that 44% of public colleges and universities offer video telecourses. The International Council for Distance Education estimates the number of distance learners worldwide to be about 10 million (Verduin & Clark, 1991). Advancing technologies and decreasing costs continue to make the provision of distance education a viable option for many institutions of higher learning.

For nursing, distance education is an increasingly attractive way to reach prospective students who are "place bound" in terms of jobs and families. Distance learning is especially attractive for rural areas like Montana where the need for qualified nurses is coupled with long distances and inclement winter weather. Owing to the potential positive impact on rural nursing education and rural health care, distance education has been designated a rural nursing research priority (Bushy, 1992).

Gibson (1989) maintained that while distance education programs have given students "physical" access to education, educators must also be concerned with the student's "psychological" access. Furthermore, by

increasing knowledge of the institutional support for the distance learner, educators can move from mere "access to" towards "success in" and from "physical access" to "psychological access".

"Psychological access" may be of particular importance for nursing. As a profession, it is desirable that new members take on the values of nursing through professional socialization. The values of nursing include altruism, equality, esthetics, freedom, human dignity, justice and truth (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 1986). However, there is little documentation in the nursing literature on the effects of distance education on professional socialization. It may be that institutional support and "psychological access" play an important part in the socialization process.

Schools of nursing offering distance education programs may have a particular interest in institutional support and the distance learners' personal and academic success. In order to maintain approval and accreditation, schools of nursing are accountable for successful student outcomes to both the state board of nursing (Montana State Board of Nursing, 1992) and the National League for Nursing (NLN, 1991). An example of a successful outcome is the new graduates' pass rate on the National Council Licensing Examination (NCLEX).

Although institutional support is an important consideration for the distance learner in terms of the student's personal success, support is also an important consideration for the institution in terms of student recruitment and