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The Grade Experience of Online Nurse Practitioner Students

Jennifer Stone, DNP, Phyllis D. Morgan, PhD, Mahaman Moussa, DNP, Linda Steele, PhD, and Joshua Fogel, PhD

Abstract

The **rapid growth** and demand for nurse practitioners (NPs) is expected to increase through 2020. The growing national shortage of physicians in primary care has fueled the demand for NPs. The expansion of health insurance coverage means that more people will be insured and will need health care. Online NP programs are of interest to working students. NP students often want to **expedite degree completion** by taking more than one clinical course per quarter (OCCPQ). This study examined **grade experience** differences for online NP students who took more than OCCPQ, compared to those who did not take more than OCCPQ. The study found that students who took more than OCCPQ had increased odds of failing a course.

Problem

The **demand for NPs** is expected to increase through 2020 (Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2013).

NP programs are required to **meet national standards for quality educational programs** that are accessible, innovative, and well-established (American Association for Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2012).

Online NP programs have become popular due to the flexibility for nurses who work and have families.

NP students often want to expedite completion of their degree by **taking more than one clinical course per quarter (OCCPQ)**.

Online NP students frequently request to **take more than one clinical course per quarter** to expedite program completion.

Little is known about the grade experience of NP students who take more than OCCPQ.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine **grade experience differences** for online NP students who took more than OCCPQ as compared to those who did not take more than OCCPQ for an online NP program.

Relevant Literature

Aging and population growth have accounted for 81% of the **increased demand for NPs** from 2010 to 2020 (HRSA, 2013).

The growing **national shortage of physicians** in primary care has fueled the demand for NPs (Furlow, 2011; Stanik-Hutt et al., 2013).

Online NP education has become increasingly popular in order to meet the demands (Cameron, 2013; Smith, Passmore, & Faught, 2009).

Online education is **more flexible** for nurses who work and have families, and want to **complete their education in a timely manner** (Mee, 2014; Parker & Wassef, 2010; Reinckens, Philipsen, & Murray, 2014).

Various factors can impact the success of NP students in their program such as **work experience and/or academic experience** (Morgenthaler, 2009).

Grade point average (**GPA**) is a common indicator to measure NP student success (Cameron, 2013).

No differences were found in GPA for NP students who completed their **NP program online versus face-to-face** (Cameron, 2013).



Research Questions

- 1) Is there a difference in number of failure grades for the first attempt of a clinical course between NP students who took more than OCCPQ and those who did not take more than OCCPQ?
- 2) Is there an overall first-attempt clinical course GPA difference between NP students who took more than OCCPQ and those who did not take more than OCCPQ?
- 3) Is there an overall all-course GPA difference between NP students who took more than OCCPQ and those who did not take more than OCCPQ?

Procedures

A **retrospective correlational predictive design**.

All **NP graduates** from **Walden University** from Fall 2013 – Spring 2016.

Academic records for graduates of an **online NP** program from **fall 2013 – spring 2016** were examined:

- 1) 2013 - criteria to approve more than OCCPQ initiated; first graduates of the NP program
- 2) 2015 - fast track option for NP students approved

3,760 academic records reviewed

- **2,284** one clinical course per quarter
- **1,476** more than one clinical course per quarter

Data Analysis

Data analysis strategies included:

- Descriptive statistics
- ANOVA
- Mann Whitney
- Pearson chi square
- Logistic regression

Findings

- 1) Those who **took more than OCCPQ at least one time** had a statistically significantly ($p < 0.001$) **greater percentage (2.1%, n = 31) for failed clinical course on first attempt** than those who did not take more (0.8%, n=18) than OCCPQ.
- 2) However, those who **took more than OCCPQ two or more times** were **not associated with increased odds of failing** a clinical course at first attempt.
- 3) There were **no statistically significant differences** in GPA for either **GPA of all clinical courses** at first attempt or GPA of all courses between those who took or did not take more than OCCPQ.

Limitations

Setting

- ✓ Use of **one** site (setting)
- ✓ **No comparison** with traditional **face-to-face** program

Economic and **psychosocial** variables not investigated

Conclusions

NP students taking **more than OCCPQ** had increased odds for **failing a clinical course**. This study can offer some **evidence** for developing **policies** for students in NP programs.

Criteria should be established by NP programs to determine which students will most likely be successful in taking more than OCCPQ

Future research to study potential relevant factors that negatively impact NP student success in an online program when taking more than OCCPQ is needed.



Social Change Implications

- Our online NP program is well equipped to develop innovative curricula and a quality education to produce safe and competent NPs to make global impact in health care.
- This project has implications to **impact** how NP programs govern policies related to students who request to take more than OCCPQ.

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