



SCHOOL OF NURSING
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Post-MS DNP Programs: A Longitudinal Qualitative Evaluation of the Student Experience


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Bascom Hall with Wisconsin Idea Flag

1. Improve knowledge of the expected educational outcomes in a newly developed DNP program
2. Identify curricular strengths that promote doctoral level education in nursing
3. Inform how DNP students are influencing doctoral nursing education

Objectives



To improve our understand of the experiences of doctoral students as they complete a two-year post-Masters DNP program

Research Purpose

- DNP origins at UW-Madison-SON
- Hybrid program
- Additional nurse educator courses
- Cohort model
- Opportunity to develop formative evaluation

DNP Program-UW Madison

- First interview: Fourteen DNP students agreed to participate in either a focus group (n=4) or an individual interview (n=10)
- Second interview: Ten DNP students completed phone interviews

Sample

- Naturalistic inquiry
- Qualitative descriptive approach
- Content analysis used to identify and categorize
- Themes developed among research group

Method

- Originally planned for focus groups
- Questions incorporated AACN Essentials—questioning whether the program fulfills the purpose of DNP education
- Students very responsive to feedback requests—active participants in their educational goals

Student Interviews

First Interview: Conducted Oct./Nov. 2010

- **What influenced your decision to return for a DNP?**
- **How did you decide which school to attend for your DNP?**
- **How do you believe a DNP degree will impact your long and short-term goals?**
- **What concerns do you have about returning to school?**

Interview Questions

Second Interview: Conducted Sept./Oct. 2011

- **How have your ideas about the program changed since we last spoke?**
- **How has the curriculum influenced your ideas about nursing leadership?**
- **How have your teachers influenced your learning?**
- **How has the curriculum influenced your ideas about evidence-based practice or the science of nursing?**
- **Suggestions for changes to the program?**

Interview Questions

- **Sample were all women**
- **Ages ranged between 30-59**
- **Most had worked as NPs and CNSs for greater than 5 years**
- **Interests ranged from nursing education to global health initiatives**

Demographics

- **Being a Student Again: A Balancing Act**
- **Being in the Program: A Supportive Environment**
- **Being DNP Prepared: A New View of Nursing**

Results

“I’ve always wanted to reach my highest nursing degree and originally I was in a PhD program. However, I decided I really was looking for a practice focus. And the education minor was another aspect that I was interested in”.

Overarching Theme

“It was a little harder getting into school mode this time around than it was for my masters...but I think that just has to do with life, I’m married and have 2 small kids and work full time. It’s different this time around, but I like it. I love being back in the academic world, it’s just making time and balancing work, life, and school. That has been the biggest challenge, but overall I have been really happy”. (Interview 1)

A Balancing Act

*““When I was in the Master’s program, my life centered around the Master’s. I had work that revolved around school for two and a half years, so my main focus was the full-time Masters. You know, that was then. Now I don’t have the ability to do that. I’ve got a professional role, I need to keep working and have a balance. I would never have considered returning to the DNP program from a practical standpoint if it weren’t online to some extent”
(Interview 1)*

A Balancing Act

“We’ve been working as a group and discussing how the experience is going, encouraging each other. All of us have jobs. We have, or many of us have children. So it’s been very, very challenging to add the DNP program. So I think without us actually going as a group I think we would have seen a lot of us drop out. We talk to each other and say, we’re all in the same boat. And then everybody says, okay, we can do this”. (Interview 2)

A Balancing Act

“I think we’re beginning to get tired. At the end of the summer we were, thank God, we will have a little bit of a break. But when you have the meaty classes like ethics it takes a toll, you know, and so now it’s a matter of refocusing. And we’ve got the time management and the juggling of the work, personal and school down. Now it’s just a matter of doing it. You keep hoping your family is going to be as supportive as they have been ”. (Interview 2)

A Balancing Act

“Most people got the impression that you could make it (complete the program) and work full time. I think that’s an unrealistic expectation. The workload is much heavier than it looks to maintain a personal life, work full-time as an NP, and go to school. So I think moving forward, it would be valuable when students ask to tell them that it’s really a challenge to do that”. (Interview 2)

A Balancing Act

“ I think professors were very respectful of the fact that all of us worked and also the reality of a female dominated profession and that we have young children. People have lives and and I felt there was a strong acknowledgment of that. Professors gave a quick turnaround in assignments and it really felt like our professors understood what our lives looked like”. (Interview 1)

A Supportive Environment

“They (faculty) were very clear that this was a doctoral program and you’re expected to perform at a certain level, which I appreciated although I was annoyed with it for awhile (laughs). They are being responsive, they’re saying OK, we recognize you guys are on a time crunch so we are going to be as responsive as we can”. (Interview 1)

A Supportive Environment

“The professors have been wonderful in responding to us when we’ve had things like deaths in the family, sickness of a child, or personal sickness. They’ve given us leeway, adjusted deadlines when it was appropriate. They’ve also let us know that we’re respected as nurse colleagues, that means a lot to us”.
(Interview 2)

A Supportive Environment

“The professors are some of the highest quality I have ever had. I mean, it’s been quite impressive. Not only are they very well versed in whatever field they are teaching and bring a great deal of expertise to it, but they have been very willing to work with us, and supportive. Every single (professor) has a different style, a different way of doing stuff, but there has not been one that hasn’t been timely in feedback and supportive”. (Interview 2)

A Supportive Environment

“I think one of the common things in our cohort is that we all have this passion for nursing and love of learning. And that comes through in everything we do. And so I couldn’t think of a better group of people in which to start off this kind of journey. It’s really exciting, yes, it’s a lot of work, but I know I’m in good company. That should be the message that gets out there. Yes, it’s a lot of work and it’s very hard. But at the end you are going to come out with so many collaborative relationships and a higher level of awareness than you ever thought possible”. (Interview 2)

A Supportive Environment

“I don’t think that nurses in general view themselves as leaders or as powerful people. We tend to spend a lot of time spinning our wheels and looking at each other and that kind of thing. So it’s been very empowering. To just, get together with a group of very dynamic individuals and look at what’s best. You feel you’re not alone with some of your viewpoints and your ideas. You want to place nursing more at the forefront as opposed to following in the shadow of internal medicine, or physicians. There’s this interconnectivity, it takes us out of our comfort zone and makes us think outside the box”.

(Interview 1)

A New View of Nursing

“I have to be very honest I’m fairly young in my career and so I don’t know exactly what I’m going to do with the DNP degree. But I think I knew I needed it because I have the capability to do great many things. But now that I am in the program I realize that, if there’s something you want to change, it’s not as easy as snapping your fingers and doing it. And you have to learn how to get people to buy into your idea, how you’re going to sell it and reach out to the right population”. (Interview 1)

A New View of Nursing

“I feel that there are some advanced roles that I would feel much more comfortable now taking on. Before, I really didn’t consider making any big career changes from being a nurse practitioner, but I think I would consider moving into new areas. This (education) has strengthened me, given me the confidence to look in new directions”.
(Interview 2)

A New View of Nursing

“I feel that I now have the foundation for carrying out a lot of ideas that went unspoken. I feel like I could actually change things, make things happen. So there’s a new sense of empowerment”.
(Interview 2)

A New View of Nursing

“The DNP focus on leadership and how we are looking with such a wider lens than we are used to in our scope of practice. I mean, we are talking about changing the face of nursing on a national level, you know, I don’t know that any of us considered this before, not to this degree”. (Interview 2)

A New View of Nursing

A Balancing Act

- Negotiation of competing demands
- Group support
- Professional acknowledgement

Discussion-Balance

A Supportive Environment

- Responsive to student needs
- Flexibility
- Future colleagues

Discussion-Support

A New View of Nursing

- Nurturing leadership skills and potential
- Education for a future health care environment
- Empowerment

Discussion-New View

Communication

- **Course planning complete as early as possible**
- **Increased guidance/communication to prepare for upcoming courses**
- **Topics for scholarly projects should be decided early**
- **Need for clear linkage between clinical hours and Scholarly Project**

Educational Implications

Curriculum

- **Increased information on quality improvement**
- **Increased focus on advance practice issues and professional development**
- **Summer courses lengthened-time frame too short for deep thinking**
- **Lengthen program to 3 years—mixed student views**

Educational Implications

- Rigor of the program viewed as a strength-students want to ensure DNP high educational standards
- Students require the ongoing support of both faculty as well as peers-may decrease program withdrawals
- Students viewed themselves as change agents-future leaders in health care

Educational Implications

- Last round of interviews with this cohort summer of 2012
- Evaluation of the post-bachelor's degree DNP students-different needs

Future Research

- This study was financially supported by UW-Madison Graduate School assessment funding
- Dr. Nadine Nehls
- Amanda Bohlig
- Our first class of DNP students

Acknowledgements



Questions?
