

Stronger Together: Impact of Online Course Sharing Between Doctoral Nursing Programs

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Background/Introduction

Nursing schools are experiencing decreasing enrollments and shortages of faculty.

There are less than 150 nursing PhD programs across the U.S and between 2013-2023 enrollment in PhD nursing programs decreased 17.5%, from 5,145 to 4,244 students.

In 2022-2023, faculty vacancies, especially those requiring a PhD, were the highest recorded. It is projected that by 2025, one third of faculty will have retired.

Purpose

The purpose of the Nursing Education Xchange (NEXus) consortium is threefold. It allows participating universities to offer their online doctoral courses to a wider audience creating the potential to increase a course's enrollment. It provides access to courses that students wish to take but that an institution may not have the bandwidth or expertise to offer, and it provides students at participating universities access to a wider array of course offerings than might be available at their own institution. This presentation focuses on the benefits to universities through one instance of course sharing.

Processes/Procedures

NEXus is a consortium of 15 universities from Hawaii to Virginia that collaborate to increase doctoral-level course offerings online. Students from these universities may enroll in courses at partnering universities and pay a fixed tuition across institutions. Currently, 250 courses are offered annually through the consortium and are clustered in six broad areas: advanced nursing practice, specific populations, nursing education, research methodology, leadership, and special topics.

Results

Outcomes are evaluated each semester using faculty and student satisfaction surveys, enrollment reports, course offerings, and financial data.

Since the program's inception through the summer of 2024, NEXus has enrolled 1,278 students in 309 courses. Students have come from public and private universities from more than 40 states and several countries. Seventy-five percent of the students were from PhD programs and 96% indicated that NEXus facilitated their on-time graduation;

more than 550 enrollees have graduated with doctoral degrees. Eighty-five percent of students took a course through NEXus because it was not offered at their institution. Students were very satisfied (4.12/5.0 effectiveness) with courses meeting their learning needs.

In just one example of course sharing, the University of Northern Colorado has enrolled 30 visiting students from nine partner universities in their course, *Advanced Concepts of Vulnerable Underserved, and Marginalized Populations*. Enrollees were from 14 states as well as one international student. The university realized \$56,000 in tuition revenue from visiting students. The cost savings for each university who sent students was estimated to be \$17,600: \$5,300 resulting from one-time reduced course development costs and \$12,300 in faculty salary savings.

Limitations

Evaluation of satisfaction data is limited to survey responders, not all enrollees or faculty. While revenue generated is actual, cost savings are estimates, based on national salaries.

Conclusions/Implications

Partnering helps institutions navigate challenges associated with decreasing enrollments and faculty shortages. NEXus helps students by providing them access to additional course offerings taught by experts to support timely degree progression. NEXus helps institutions by reducing course development costs and salary expenses. Course sharing helps schools of nursing meet enrollment minimums, maintain rigor, and gain additional tuition income, all while helping doctoral students excel.

References: New AACN Data Points to Enrollment Challenges Facing U.S. Schools of Nursing, April 15, 2024 <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/article/new-aacn-data-points-to-enrollment-challenges-facing-us-schools-of-nursing>

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AACN Data Spotlight: Trends in Nursing PhD Programs, July 6, 2022 <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/article/data-spotlight-trends-in-nursing-phd-programs>

Special Survey on Vacant Faculty Positions by AACN in October 2022 <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Data/Vacancy22.pdf>

AACN Data Spotlight: Nurse Faculty Vacancies October 26, 2022 <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/article/data-spotlight-nurse-faculty-vacancies>