

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC-RELATED VARIATIONS IN SATISFACTION WITH
THE NURSING PROGRAM: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Health Administration

University of Phoenix

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THE NURSING PROGRAM: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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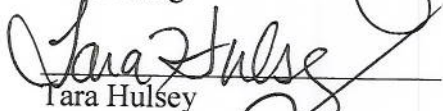
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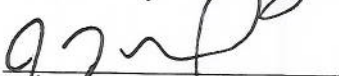
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ABSTRACT

In nursing education, addressing issues affecting students' satisfaction with the educational programs may be an effective way to improve their didactic experiences, increase retention, and reduce attrition rates. Evidence from published studies has indicated a strong relationship between students' dissatisfaction with the educational program and their retention and attrition rates, and that the students most affected are minorities. The current comparative descriptive study examined the differences in various domains of satisfaction between 2 groups of students, female European Americans and all others, by using the SERVQUAL instrument, which was the foundation in identifying the areas of discord. The comparative study employed a *t* test and analysis of variance to analyze the data collected from 119 students with a web-based survey. The results of the study indicated that, at Charleston Southern University in Charleston, South Carolina, minority students are significantly less satisfied with the nursing program than female European American students are. Considering SERVQUAL's 5 domains of satisfaction and overall satisfaction as dependent variables and minority and female European American students as independent variables, significant differences were noted in general satisfaction with the program, organizational dependability, records keeping, course scheduling, willingness to help, prompt responsiveness, and coursework arrangements. Recommendations include the administration of an initial assessment of students' expectations to set the basis of a proactive approach towards retention and success. The development of similar investigations that will use a probability sample will increase the applicability of results to a broader student population.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Monica, and my amazing kids, Andra, Daniel Jr, and Catalina, to acknowledge their unbending support during this challenging period.

PREVIEW

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and most importantly, I acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as I felt His support throughout this challenging endeavor.

I acknowledge the faculty members, the ancillary staff, and their amazing leader at Charleston Southern University in North Charleston, South Carolina, for their dedication to students' success and the integration of faith in learning. I also want to express my deepest thanks and gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Don Bronsard, as he offered me continuous support and encouragement throughout my doctoral journey.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the nursing students at Charleston Southern University, the subject of my interest and research, for their sacrifice and dedication to become nurses not for self-gain but to serve and help others.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Page
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xiii
Chapter 1	1
Introduction	1
Background of the Problem	4
Statement of the Problem	8
Purpose of the Study	11
Significance of the Problem	14
Nature of the Study	16
Research method and design appropriateness.	16
Target populations and sampling.	17
Overview of the research instrument.	19
Overview of data collection and employed statistical analysis.	21
Research Questions	22
Hypotheses	23
Theoretical Framework	26
Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations of the Study	30

Definitions of Terms	33
Assumptions.....	39
Summary	41
Chapter 2	43
Review of Literature	43
Nursing Education and Historical Overview	45
Current Trends and Findings	48
Domains and Determinants of Quality of Service	54
Tangibles and students' satisfaction.	55
Reliability and responsiveness, a positive influence on students' satisfaction..	
.....	56
The Relationship Between Satisfaction and Attrition.....	59
Students' Perceived Role of Learning and Education	61
The Sense of Entitlement in Higher Education.....	62
Sense of entitlement and related causes.....	64
Students' expectations and the new cultural standards.....	65
The effect of the mass media on the sense of entitlement.	65
Gender differences in academic entitlement.....	66
Socioeconomic Status, a Determinant of Low Academic Attainment and Attrition	68
Race, discrimination, and low attainment.....	71
Faculty Incivility and Student Dissatisfaction	73
Summary	76
Chapter 3	78

Method	78
Research Method	80
Appropriateness of Design.....	86
Research Questions and Hypotheses	89
Research questions.....	89
Hypotheses.....	90
Target Population.....	92
Sampling Frame	95
Sample Size.....	97
Informed consent.	98
Confidentiality.	99
Geographical location.....	100
Data Collection	101
Instrumentation	103
Validity and Reliability.....	104
Validity.....	104
Reliability.....	106
Data Analysis	107
Summary.....	109
Chapter 4.....	111
Data Analysis and Presentation	111
Purpose of the Study	111
Data Collection Process	112

Data Collection Procedures.....	115
Data Analysis, Method, and Procedures	119
Descriptive Analysis of the Sample	123
Ethnicity, Race, Gender, and Placement in Nursing Program	124
Compare means results and <i>t</i> -test calculations.	128
Hypotheses test results.....	130
Hypotheses 1.....	131
Hypotheses 2.....	134
Hypotheses 3.....	138
Hypotheses 4.....	144
Hypotheses 5.....	148
Hypotheses 6.....	152
Hypotheses 7.....	156
Hypotheses 8.....	158
Summary.....	162
Chapter 5.....	167
Summary and Recommendations	167
Conclusions.....	173
Research Question 1.	174
Research Question 2.	175
Research Question 2 Hypotheses 2.....	176
Research Question 2 Hypotheses 3.....	176
Research Question 2 Hypotheses 4.....	177

Research Question 2 Hypotheses 5.....	179
Research Question 2 Hypotheses 6.....	180
Research Question 2 Hypotheses 7.....	181
Research Question 3.	182
Research Question 3 Hypotheses 8.....	182
Scope and Limitations.....	183
Recommendations and Implications	186
Suggestions for Future Research	195
Summary	196
References.....	200
Appendix A: Socio-Demographic Profile and Overall Satisfaction	224
Appendix B: SERVQUAL Instrument	225
Appendix C: Five Domains of SERVQUAL.....	229
Appendix D: Informed Consent University of Phoenix	230
Appendix E: Number and Percentage Change in Degrees by Race and Ethnicity	233
Appendix F: CSU Demographic Composition of the Undergraduate Enrollment.	234
Appendix G: Permission to Use Premises, Name, and/or Subjects.....	235
Appendix H: Charleston Southern University Fall 2011, Enrollment by Gender and Race .	236
Appendix I: Charleston Southern University Fall 2012, Nursing Student's Demographics .	237

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Rating Scale for Quality of Service	113
Table 2: Dimensions of SERVQUAL Scale and Number of Items	114
Table 3: Nonresponse Bias Test Involving Early and Late Responders to Survey	119
Table 4: Instrument Reliability Test	122
Table 5: Race, Gender, Ethnicity, and Majority/Minority Attributes of Participants	123
Table 6: Participant Demographic Distribution by Years in Nursing Program Cross-Tabulation	125
Table 7: Participant Self-Reported Race and Ethnicity Cross-Tabulation	127
Table 8: Compare Means Analysis for Five Domains of Quality and SERVQUAL	130
Table 9: Descriptive Statistics for Variable Satisfaction	133
Table 10: <i>T</i> Test for Dependent Variable Satisfaction	133
Table 11: Descriptive Statistics for Tangibles Component Statements	135
Table 12: Independent Samples <i>T</i> Test for Dependent Variable Tangibles	136
Table 13: Descriptive Analysis for Five Paired Questions Composing Reliability Domain	139
Table 14: Independent Samples <i>T</i> Test for Dependent Variable Reliability and Five Components	141
Table 15: Descriptive Statistics for Reliability Domain Component Gaps	143
Table 16: Descriptive Statistics for Responsiveness Domain Component Gaps	145
Table 17: Independent Samples <i>T</i> Test for Dependent Variable Responsiveness and Related Components	147
Table 18: Descriptive Statistics for Assurance Domain and Related Components	150

Table 19: Independent Samples <i>T</i> Test for Dependent Variable Assurance and Related Components	151
Table 20: Descriptive Statistics for Empathy Domain and Related Gaps	154
Table 21: Independent Samples <i>T</i> Test for Dependent Variable Empathy Domain and Related Components	155
Table 22: Group Statistics	157
Table 23: Independent Samples Test for SERVQUAL	158
Table 24: Correlations Between Dependent and Independent Variables	161

PREVIEW

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Number of minority and majority students by year in nursing program.....	126
Figure 2: Side-by-side comparison of number of minority and majority students by year in nursing program.....	160

PREVIEW

Chapter 1

Introduction

Students' attrition in competitive programs, such as nursing, has become a popular topic of recent research (Severiens & Wolff, 2008; Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010). Under increased scrutiny are students from cultural minorities, as their attrition rates are significantly higher (Severiens & Wolff, 2008). The recruitment, retention, and graduation gap between minority and non-minority students on college campuses continue to grow (Oguntoyinbo, 2009). Hispanic men represent 8% of the U.S. population but only 4% of the nation's university and college enrollees (Oguntoyinbo, 2009). The African American college student population suffers from similar trends, as their enrollment, retention, and graduation rates are subpar when compared with non-minority students (Dodson, 2009). The tendency does not stop here as growing disparities in academic performance continue to escalate thus resulting in higher attrition of non-European American students (Severiens & Wolff, 2008). Facts evidencing this trend are disproportionately higher rates of academic failure noted in the African American and Latino student populations as compared with European American or Asian American students (Dodson, 2009).

Competitive educational curricula, such as nursing programs, have prerequisite with tough entry examinations and high grade point averages that ensure selection of potentially successful candidates; however, students other than female European Americans who met admission criteria and passed the entry examinations are disproportionately less successful

thereafter (Ruddock & Turner, 2007). In the United States, population demographics are changing rapidly with the projection that minorities will become a majority; consequently, colleges and universities should have student populations reflecting similar distribution trends. Leaders in education have a vested interest in reversing this propensity and understanding the factors determining minorities' attrition. Student satisfaction with the academic program is a main determinant of attrition (Stickney, 2008).

Several factors seem to contribute to this growing problem. Researchers examined students' lifestyles, social environment, peer influence, financial challenges, cultural/ethnic biases, course selection, living arrangements, and racial experiences and concluded that minority students are experiencing higher risks than majority group (Hooghe, Stolle, Matheo, & Vissers, 2010). These students are exposed to a higher degree of normal challenges computed with racial specific factors such as racism, stigma, and fear of stereotyping (Dodson, 2009). These factors are all valid determinants; however, the issue is more complex and demands research and discovery of other causes of failure and attrition. This work uses an alternative perspective, analyzing if individuals' race and ethnicity have an influence on student satisfaction with the educational program. The study intends to demonstrate that specific minority inherent factors are causing dissatisfaction and consequently attrition.

Students' dissatisfaction with the educational programs influences the rates of retention and success by increasing attrition (Prymachuk, Easton, & Littlewood, 2009). Minority students are also under an increased level of stress (Oguntoyinbo, 2009).

Historically, a discrepantly higher number of nursing students who are minorities are facing the undesirable trend of attrition (Aghamolaei & Zare, 2008). The present research study will quantify the satisfaction perceived by the two demographic groups of students enrolled at Charleston Southern University (CSU) in North Charleston, South Carolina, and determine if a discrepancy exist between the students' socio-demographic affiliation and their level of satisfaction with the nursing program.

Satisfaction is a factor recognized for having significant influence on people's performance, dedication, and motivation to services or programs (Aghamolaei & Zare, 2008). Assessing the students' satisfaction with the nursing program may hold the key for constructive change. The identification of the problem and the determinants of satisfaction are of utmost importance for leaders in education interested in halting the negative trend affecting college students considered minorities. A survey measuring the gap between expectations and perceptions with the educational programs will provide valuable information on issues that trigger students' dissatisfaction, thus identifying race-, culture-, and ethnic-based determinants causing discontent with the nursing program demands, dynamics, and framework.

The structure of the service quality survey (SERVQUAL) allows researchers to identify specific areas of clients' dissatisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). This specificity allows educational leaders to redesign the program and curriculum to address the issues of disgruntlement. The format of the SERVQUAL questionnaire paired questions

allows the researcher to measure users' expectations and perceptions. The approach is effective as it points out accurately what consumers expect from an ideal organization and how this translates in the perception of services provided by the actual organization (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Chapter 1 provides a synopsis of the research study. The chapter reveals the scope of the study and the background of the problem of focus. The chapter defines the research method and the rationale for using a comparative descriptive design study to examine the issue along with an explanation of the variables and parameters concerning the study. Last, Chapter 1 includes a description of the framework for this research.

Background of the Problem

The underrepresentation of minorities in colleges and universities is a widely recognized problem (Evans, 2008). The importance of engaging students from minority groups to enter and succeed in academic programs is a priority for many U.S. universities (Sutherland, Hamilton, & Goodman, 2007). In the case of the nursing profession, research results attest that minority nurses are a key element in establishing cultural sensitivity and holistic approach to clients from diverse racial groups (Sutherland et al., 2007). Nursing programs across the United States are revising study curriculums and encouraging students representing minorities to enroll and pursue the nursing profession (Ruddock & Turner, 2007).

The attrition trend is significant for minorities enrolled in nursing programs; however, it is a common characteristic across all competitive college education coursework (Evans, 2008). A longitudinal study conducted by Bernold, Spurlin, and Anson (2007) focusing on student retention in engineering notes that despite the adoption and implementation of various programs intended to help minorities, the retention rate has not increased. Quantitative and qualitative studies focusing on minorities' retention and graduation rates demonstrate the existence of high discrepancy in the level of success when compared to European American students (Fischer, 2007).

The analysis of various factors considered determinants of students' attrition did not reach a conclusive result. The interaction between individual-based variables, such as race, socioeconomic status, prior academic performance, and learning behaviors, and institutional-based variables, particularly teaching methodologies, student support services, available accommodation, and organizational culture, carries a fragmented explanation of the issue of minorities' attrition (Bernold et al., 2007; Fischer, 2007). Nursing and other competitive college programs are requiring an entry examination, higher grade point average (GPA), and superior academic ability in an attempt to ensure academic success. Bernold et al. (2007) confirmed this view, stating, "It is also well documented that two obvious measures of success in college—grade-point-average (GPA) and academic ability—are not always predictive of retention or preparation" (p. 263). Knowing that GPA and a student's academic

ability are not accurate predictors of retention and graduation, the question remains “what individual- or organization-related factors are causing minority students to fail?”

Under government guidelines, organizational strategic planning, and integration initiatives, private and public educational institutions have developed and implemented programs to help at-risk student populations (Palermo et al., 2008). Educational programs designed to enhance enrollment, retention, and success of economically disadvantaged, underrepresented, disabled, and women have been functioning for many years without notable success in decreasing the attrition of students from racial/ethnic minority groups (Evans, 2008). It has been more than 20 years since Tinto (1987) demonstrated that the majority of students leaving their degrees prior to completion are withdrawing voluntarily; additionally, there is no difference between their academic ability and that of those who graduate (Bernold et al., 2007).

Imperative issues, such as worldwide nursing shortages and underrepresentation of minorities in the nursing profession, are exacerbated by high attrition of nursing students (Sutherland et al., 2007). Potentially successful students, some of which highly talented and with initially high grades, are lost during preliminary phases of academic programs; preponderantly, these students are the underrepresented ones (minorities; Bernold et al., 2007). In a time when minorities have a disproportionate presence in academia, this phenomenon is detrimental and divergent from inclusion policies. This issue is increasingly evident in medical education in general and nursing education in particular (Sutherland et al.,

2007; Valcarcel, Diaz, & Santiago-Borrero, 2006). Universities across the nation have spent substantial human and financial resources towards reversing this trend without achieving satisfactory results (Lew, 2006).

A longitudinal study conducted by McLaughlin, Muldoon, and Moutray (2010) indicates that not only racial/ethnic minorities are at risk for attrition in nursing programs but also men. The study indicates that men are more likely than women to leave the academic program (McLaughlin et al., 2010). The study acknowledges that nursing is a female dominated profession, and majority perceives the profession as being more appropriate for women (McLaughlin et al., 2010). Inherent gender bias and prevalent stereotypes in nursing education make this environment uncomfortable for men, thus explaining their high attrition rates (McLaughlin et al., 2010). This study inquires if non-European American students are experiencing similar challenges as male students; additionally, it examines any socio-demographic-related factors that may also contribute to high attrition rates in this particular population.

Analysis and understanding of the reasons triggering high attrition in minority students enrolled in college courses is of utmost importance to educators, administrators, and other didactic leaders. Although numerous factors, determinants, and variables influencing students' retention and success were thoroughly examined, not enough effort was directed towards analyzing the consequences of students' dissatisfaction with an educational program. Other industries, especially healthcare and tourism, are constantly measuring employees' and

customers' satisfaction to make necessary changes and meet their expectations (Don, Iain, Adrian, & Phil, 2006). University leaders may adopt this instrumental approach towards increasing students' satisfaction thus increasing their retention and success.

Statement of the Problem

College students enrolled in competitive programs, particularly nursing programs, and considered minorities have higher attrition and lower retention/graduation rates (Bernold et al., 2007; Fischer, 2007; Webster & Showers, 2011; Weddle-West & Bingham, 2010). Although numerous programs focus on augmenting the success of minority students and controlling the factors impacting attrition exist, these students linger on the faulty trend and do not reach their educational and professional goals (Bernold et al., 2007; Evans, 2008; Fischer, 2007). Although numerous research studies focus on individuals, academic discipline, institutional-related determinants, and their effect on attrition and success (Hooghe et al., 2010; Waters, 2010), there is lack of research work examining the influence of students' satisfaction with an educational program as a significant cause of this problem.

The precise problem is that little is known if there is a socio-demographic-related variation in students' level of satisfaction in a nursing program and if this affects their attrition/completion rate. Pursued in the study will be underscoring that the variation in satisfaction may be a function of students' socio-demographic characteristics. The results obtained provide valuable information to leaders and educators on how and what to change in a program to increase students' satisfaction. The study identified socio-demographic linked

characteristics accountable for altered expectations and perceptions, thus determinants of lower satisfaction.

The assumption of the study is that nursing students self-identified as minorities are less satisfied with the nursing program, thus less successful, than female European Americans. Primarily, the variables in focus are students' socio-demographic characteristics as female European Americans (FEA) and other than female European Americans (OFEA) the two independent variables; next, students' overall satisfaction, and students' perceptions of services for each of the five domains of quality composing SERVQUAL questionnaire (dependent variables). Additionally, demonstrating that there is a directional relationship between students' socio-demographic characteristics and their satisfaction, such as being less satisfied with the educational program as compared with FEA students is the object of the statistical analysis. To decrease redundancy and increase readability, starting with the next paragraph, the acronyms *FEA* will replace the words *female European Americans* and *OFEA* will replace the use of *other than female European Americans*.

The study was a descriptive survey design that employed statistical analysis for accurate explanation and depiction of the relationship between variables. This approach fostered a confident consensus that degrees of satisfaction with an academic program varies by race/gender/ethnicity and may be a factor in students' attrition and success. Statistically significant results demonstrated that OFEA students are less satisfied with the nursing program and also revealed a relationship between attrition and satisfaction. In this

quantitative study, data was collected by using a survey questionnaire posted online on the website SurveyMonkey.com. The hyperlink granting access to the website was e-mailed to nursing students by using their student e-mail addresses. The usage of student university-generated e-mails for this purpose was preapproved by the dean of the school of nursing and acknowledged by the university's administration and vice president as allowed upon approval of the proposal and completion of the Institutional Review Board process.

A significant gain of this web-based approach is the insurance of anonymous participation and confidentiality. The built-in anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation of this method may warrant that participants are not pressured into the process and their opinions are truthful and unaltered. Participation in surveys of subjects from captured audience samples is higher than average consequently a 30% survey completion is a correct expectation (Creswell, 2005). Consequently, out of approximately 350 nursing enrollees, a minimum of a 100 nursing students were expected to participate, thus constituting a statistically significant sample. The sample is expected to be an accurate representation of the target population, students enrolled in similar bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) programs across the United States that are consistent with the CSU student population demographics. The analysis of Appendixes E and F containing demographic data released by the National Center for Education Statistics (2011) indicates that the demographic composition of CSU student population matches the national average. This