INTERVENTIONS TO BOLSTER SUCCESS: THE EXPERIENCES OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

INTERVENTIONS TO BOLSTER SUCCESS: THE EXPERIENCES OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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This intervention focused on nontraditional students at McDowell Technical Community College and Gardner-Webb University and the importance of bolstering their educational success. Community colleges and private institutions of higher learning enroll a significant number of nontraditional students. It is often difficult for these students to earn a credential or achieve their educational goals due to their defining characteristics. With an extensive population of nontraditional students, it is imperative that these institutions provide deliberate support services that identify, address, and reduce probable barriers these adult learners may encounter. Like other state and private agencies, educational institutions are held to a high standard. Accountability is in the forefront of every public and private institution. All colleges and universities are closely monitored and held accountable for the outcomes of their students. As a result, a portion of monetary resources may be contingent on program performance. While any reduction in

funding can have a negative impact on the institution, one must not overlook the economic impact on the earning potential of nontraditional students. Through the implementation of a proactive advising model, nontraditional students at McDowell Technical Community College and Gardner-Webb University increased their ability to achieve their educational goals. The intent of the interventions was to foster deep change by capitalizing on existing human relationships formed during new student orientation, proactive advising and student mentoring. The disquisition team defined the problem, shared interventions, and analyzed the results of the collaborative improvement process.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

In a global competitive environment, advanced educational attainment is vital for individuals to secure sustainable employment. For nontraditional students to achieve educational advancement, career pathways must be clearly articulated. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), nontraditional students have a number of common characteristics that may produce barriers limiting their ability to complete educational programs (Choy, 2002). The NCES reports that 73% of all undergraduates in 1999–2000 were classified as nontraditional students (Choy, 2002). With this substantial student population, it is apparent that new research initiatives that target student retention and program completion are critical topics for both stakeholders and scholar practitioners. While the definition of nontraditional learners continues to evolve, there are a number of key indicators or commonalities researchers often share in their discoveries. Herein, we define nontraditional learners as students who are:

- seeking a credential, diploma or degree—part-time or full-time
- working part-time or full-time
- balancing family responsibilities
- seeking alternative scheduling opportunities: distance education, online or evening programs

Understanding the unique characteristics of nontraditional students in higher education has become increasingly important in fostering and supporting student success. Nontraditional learners must balance the daily responsibilities of family, employment, and work if they are to achieve their educational goals. Institutions, administrators, and

staff work with nontraditional students to address potential barriers, so students can successfully complete an educational pathway or program. Educational practitioners require relevant and evidence-based data to inform and guide decisions regarding policies and best practices that impact nontraditional students.

In this disquisition we describe the development, implementation, and evaluation of our interventions aimed at positively impacting the educational success of nontraditional students in three educational programs located in North Carolina. Amy Cooke focused on nontraditional students enrolled in the College and Career Readiness program at McDowell Technical Community College (MTCC). Penny Cross targeted nontraditional nursing students enrolled in the Practical Nursing program at MTCC and Sara Newcomb examined nontraditional nursing students in the Degree Completion program (DCP) at Gardner-Webb University (GWU). To facilitate rapid cycle improvement, our disquisition team implemented the *plan, do, study, act* model to address these problems of practice (Langley, Nolan, K., Nolan, T., Norman, & Provost 2009).

SECTION 2: CURRENT STATE AND PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

The majority of community college students are nontraditional students. Moreover, in 2002, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that nearly three-quarters of all undergraduates were classified as nontraditional students (Choy). The 2006 report generated by the U.S. Department of Education, NCES, indicates that students ages 25 and over increased by 17% between 1990 and 2004. Also, NCES's longitudinal analysis in 2005 states that 1.3 million students age 30 to 34 were enrolled nationally in higher education institutions. The researchers projected that by 2015 the number of students aged 30 to 34 would increase to 1.7 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). According to Aslanian, as noted by Spitzer (2000), by 1995 only about 20% of U.S. college students were full-time, in residence, and under 22 years of age. The traditional student of the 1970's just out of high school, relying on mom and dad for financial support and working only part-time or not at all is now the exception rather than the rule in many college programs (Brock, 2010).

The majority of community college students are first-generation college students. First-generation college students face multiple barriers that limit their ability to complete a college program. Most of these students have full or part-time jobs and drop out of college at a higher rate than younger students. They have more difficulty with social integration into college life and may be underprepared academically due to being out of school for an extended period (Morest, 2013). The characteristics of the nontraditional student are well documented. According to Kenner and Weinerman (2011), "students older than 25 have at least four nontraditional factors: financial independence, full-time

employment, dependents, and part-time enrollment" (p. 88). In a report written for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) by Horn and Carroll (1996) non-traditional students were defined as those who have experienced:

- delayed enrollment from high school completion to postsecondary education
- being the head of household or single parents
- juggling full or part-time employment
- having dependent children or being caregivers for elderly parents
- not having a high school credential or General Educational Development (GED®)
- seeking further education to secure better paying jobs or new career opportunities

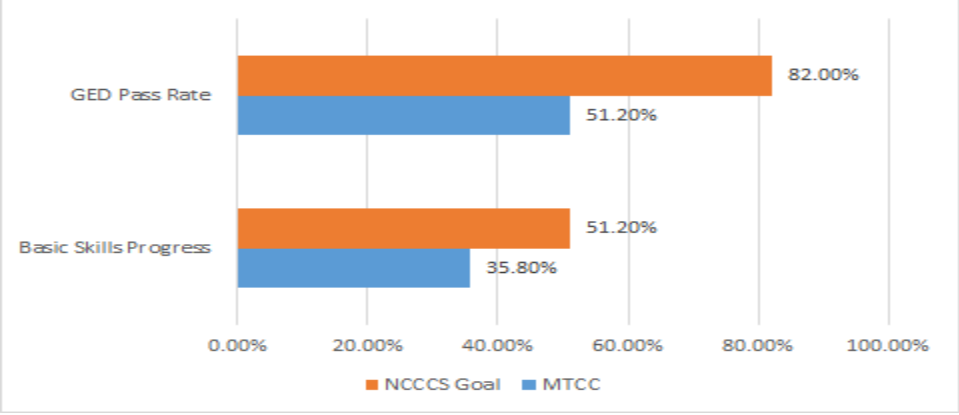
As collaborative scholar practitioners, we researched nontraditional student data in the following areas: population growth, existing barriers to program or degree completion, and evaluation of the advising protocol at their educational institutions. This research supported the development of an advising intervention and improvement strategy that was implemented on two separate college campuses. According to Langley et al., collaboratively sharing ideas, working together, and motivating change is a critical aspect of the improvement process (2009). Through collaborative engagement, we operated as a Networked Improvement Community (NIC). Bryk, Gomez and Grunow (2010) define a NIC as "a network that enables individuals from many different contexts to participate according to their interests and expertise while sustaining collective attention on progress toward common goals" (p. 6). Further, Bryk, Gomez and Gurnow (2010) offer that a diverse mix of skills is needed to solve complex problems of practice. The scholar practitioners formed a disquisition team to utilize their diversity to effectively address the problem.

To further frame the problem, each scholar practitioner provides an overview of the unique culture and characteristics of their institution and students. Specific data and evidence that clarifies the problem of practice for each educational program is articulated in the following segments.

McDowell Technical Community College: College and Career Readiness – Amy Cooke

During the 2013-2014 reporting year, MTCC enrolled approximately 490 students in their College and Career Readiness (CCR) program. Like other state agencies, community colleges are constantly being held to a higher standard. This is apparent in the area of adult literacy. In North Carolina each of the CCR 58 community college programs are evaluated by two performance measures. The outcomes of these measures are directly impacted by federal and state performance funding. According to the 2013-2014 North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) Performance Summary, MTCC did not meet the NCCCS target goal of 51.2% for Basic Skills progress or the 82.0% General Educational Development pass rate (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. McDowell Technical Community College: Performance Measures 2013-2014



Source: NC Community College Performance Summary, 2014

Why are both student retention and program completion significant issues in Career and College Readiness programs? The answer is two-fold. The distribution of federal funding to local programs is reduced if these two performance measures fall below the goal, and individual students are less likely to achieve financial independence without a high school credential. With the disparity of adult literacy being an enduring issue in the United States, one's ability to read, write, and speak English is a necessity to transition to higher education or secure employment.

The MTCC College and Career Readiness program utilizes a multi-faceted approach to ensure students at all educational functional levels receive appropriate instruction. The majority of CCR students seek enrollment in the community college as a result of "stopping out" of a traditional secondary school. Without a high school credential, it is extremely difficult for adults to secure employment (Strawn, 2007). Basic literacy is essential for adults who strive to return to the classroom and continue their education. While the presence of measurable accountability is a focus for all programs in North Carolina, there is an emphasis of urgency for all CCR administrators to improve outcomes. Directors and coordinators must make data-informed decisions, so that student success is notable, achieved, and documented.

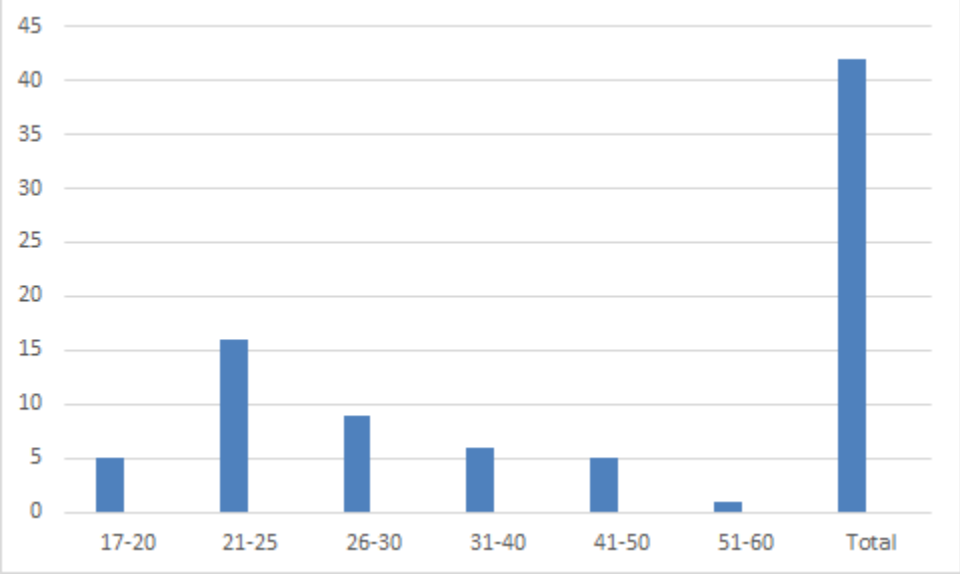
The Performance Measures for Student Success Report is the NCCCS's primary accountability document. This annual performance report is based on data compiled from the previous program year and serves to inform colleges and the public on the performance of all North Carolina community colleges. McDowell Technical Community College is dedicated to the validity of this system and uses outcomes to

continuously monitor, evaluate, and improve the quality of programs offered at the College.

McDowell Technical Community College: Nursing Program – Penny Cross

On average, today's nursing student (1) is older, (2) is a caregiver for children and/or parents, (3) is enrolled in a nursing program while working, and (4) has been out of high school for several years (Jeffreys, 2007a). The nontraditional nursing student in the community college setting possesses their own unique history, abilities, challenges, and needs (Rudel, 2006). Following the national trend, the majority of the MTCC Practical Nurse Education students are nontraditional students. The practical nursing class of 2014-2015 was comprised of 42 students ranging in age from 19 to 51. The majority of the students were in the age categories of 21 to 25 and 26 to 30. Most were employed full or part-time and have children (see Figure 2).

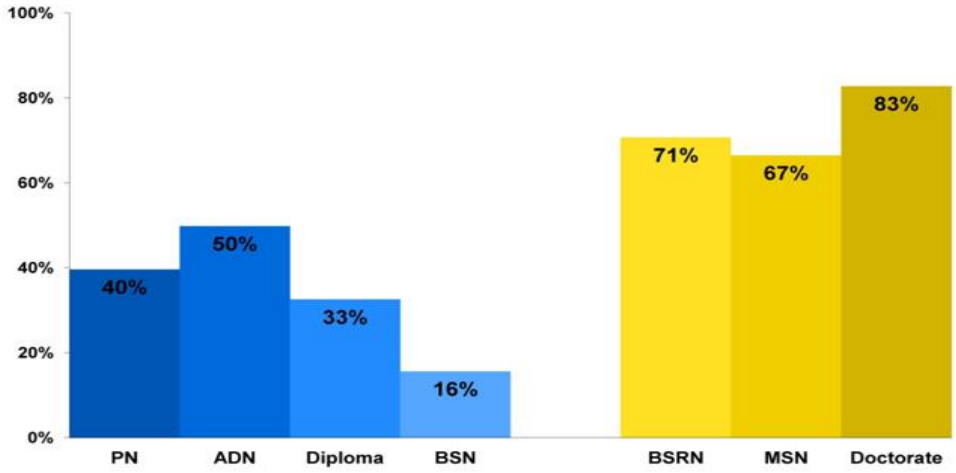
Figure 2. MTCC PNE Student Age Range



Source: MTCC, 2014

Many MTCC nursing students pursue a career in nursing in search of a more lucrative career. These individuals are now entering the educational arena to start a new life-changing career while raising a family (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of Students Over Age 30 by Program Type, 2012



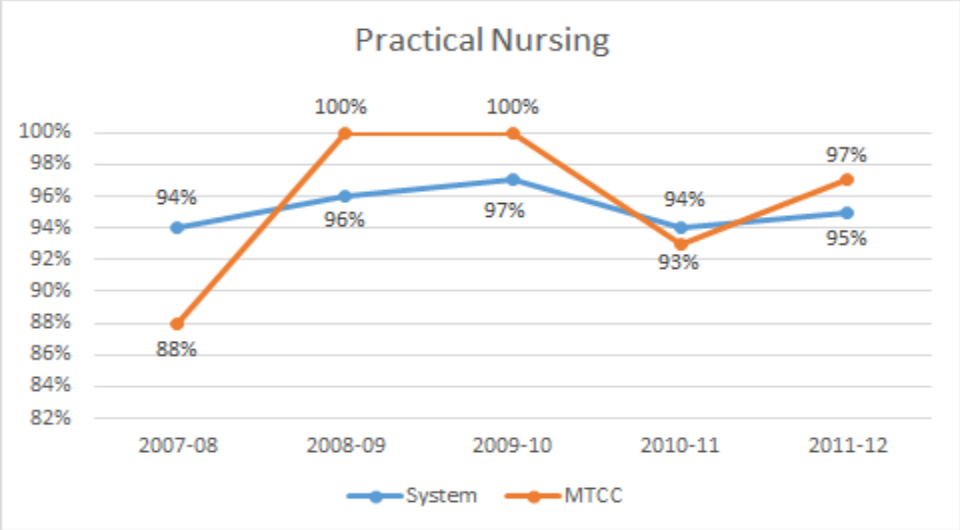
Source: National League of Nursing, 2013

The Practical Nursing Program is a rigorous, one-year, diploma program that requires steadfast student commitment to see it through to completion. Successful completion of the nursing program is the first step to a nursing career. Low retention rates for nursing schools are nationwide and global phenomena (Last, 2003; National League of Nursing, 2007). Not all students admitted to nursing programs complete the program. The North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON, 2012) reports the three-year (2010-2012) aggregate retention rate for the MTCC PNE program is 78% and the average retention rate for all North Carolina diploma practical nursing programs is 63% for the same time period.

After program completion, the graduate must take the National Council Licensure Exam-Practical Nursing (NCLEX-PN) to be a licensed practitioner. Nursing program

quality is predicated on the pass rate of the first-time test taker. Additionally, the licensure pass rate is a part of the NCCCS performance measures and performance funding model. As Jeffreys (2007b) indicates, the nursing school model of "Ideal Success as Entry-Progression Retention-Graduation-Nurse Licensure Exam- pass on the first attempt" is an optimal model and all nursing programs strive to have a high retention rate and a 100% pass rate on the NCLEX-PN. The MTCC NCLEX-PN pass rate has ranged from 88% to 100% over the last six years with a three-year average of 94% (NCBON, 2013) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Licensure/Certification Exams Practical Nursing



Source: MTCC, 2013 Fact Book

The NCLEX-PN pass rate is the primary evaluation of a nursing school's quality. The licensure pass rates are utilized by the NCCCS as part of the community college's performance measures. The NCCCS is investigating the possibility of school funding based on the performance measure outcomes and not the number of students enrolled. As mentioned previously, the evidence to support this problem of practice is the PNE

programs' current retention rate of 78% and a three-year average NCLEX-PN pass rate of 94%.

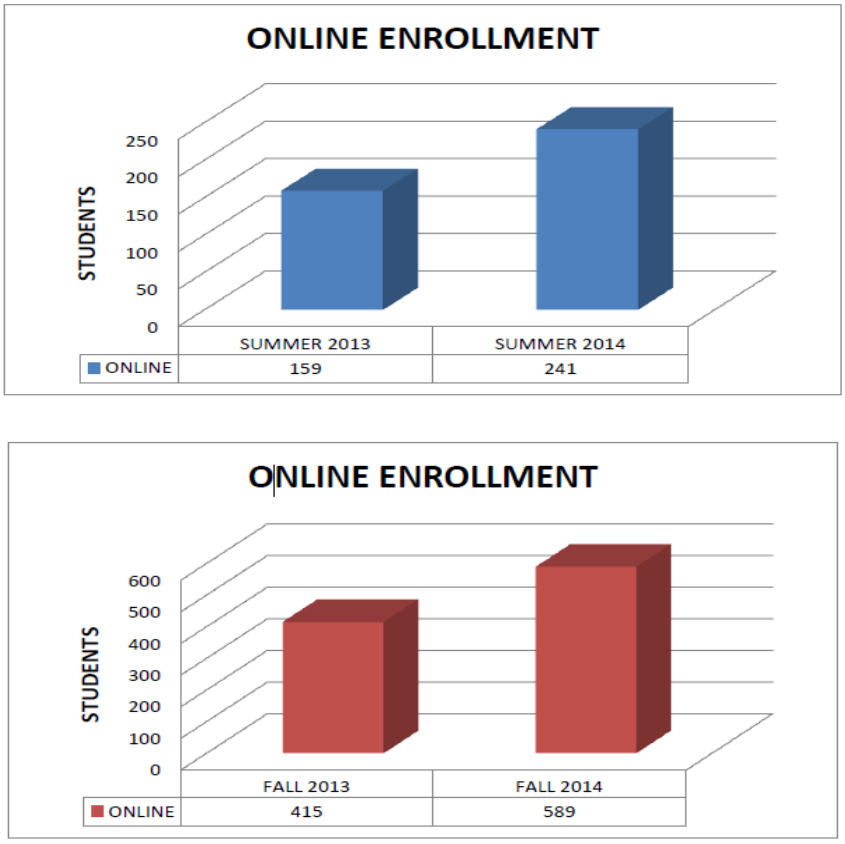
The Practical Nurse Education program utilizes many strategies to support student success. The initial strategy for success is the admission criteria. The admission criteria ensure that admitted students are able to function at an acceptable academic level for a diploma program. The second success strategy includes mandatory program and course orientations for all required nursing courses. The third success strategy includes requiring the students to utilize a Comprehensive Assessment and Remediation Program (CARP) from Assessment Technologies Institute, Inc. (ATI). ATI is utilized by students in the first semester and throughout the program. The CARP offers comprehensive testing and remediation to evaluate student learning as they progress through the three semesters. A comprehensive predictor is given in the last semester to evaluate the probability of the student passing the NCLEX-PN. McDowell Technical Community College's PNE program is utilizing proven strategies to aid in student success and retention. Improvement is needed in the following areas: comprehensive program orientation, proactive faculty advising and mentoring.

Gardner-Webb University: Degree Completion Program – Sara Newcomb

As a result of rapid growth of online enrollment and recent organizational changes within the Degree Completion Program at GWU, a departmental analysis was needed to assess internal processes to support the high standard of personalized educational services for online students. From Summer 2013 to Summer 2014, and Fall 2013 to Fall 2014, growth in the number of online students enrolled in the DCP has been significant. Comparing Summer 2013 (159 students) and Fall 2014 (241 students), 85 additional

students were enrolled in online programs. In Fall 2014, 589 students were enrolled in online programs, compared to 415 students in Fall 2013. This was an increase of 174 students (see Figure 5).

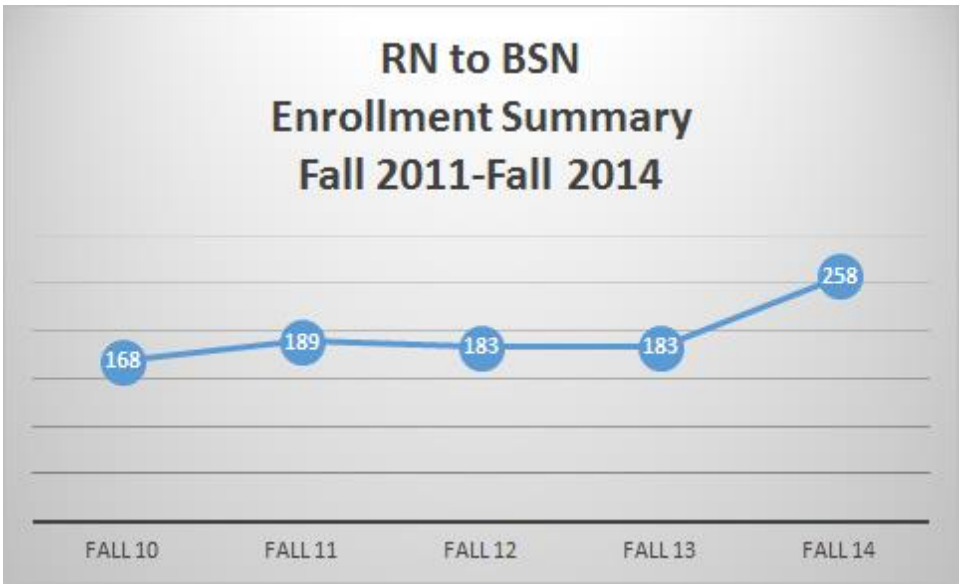
Figure 5. Online Enrollment



Source: Schenk, 2014

The academic area that experienced the most substantial growth in DCP over the last academic year has been the School of Nursing at GWU. The DCP offers registered nurses an online option to complete a Bachelor of Science in Nursing Degree (BSN). In one academic year, Fall 2013 to Fall 2014, enrollment in the BSN Program increased 41% (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. RN to BSN Enrollment Summary: Fall 2011-Fall 2014



Source: Schenk, 2014

The BSN program experienced an increase of 75 students in the Fall 2014 term from the previous fall.

At the start of the Fall 2014 term, three additional BSN course sections were added to accommodate the projected increase in student enrollment. After registration for the fall term, all BSN courses were at capacity, and the need to open additional sections could not be accommodated due to a faculty shortage. As a result, GWU had several overloaded courses that exceeded the set maximum number of students.

The increased enrollment may be attributed to three notable initiatives implemented at GWU. First, GWU has begun a new marketing campaign that emphasizes "Gardner-Webb University Online." This has brought about the use of Google AdWords, social media marketing and other marketing campaigns to increase enrollment in online programs. The BSN program Google AdWords has experienced the most success. This is evidenced by the September 2014 marketing campaign report for

Google AdWords performance. The RN to BSN online advertising campaign had the most success with 133 clicks and 48,013 impressions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Google AdWords

Google AdWords

Campaign type	Clicks	Impressions	Cost per click	Click through rate
RN to BSN	133	48,013	$13.05	0.28%
Human services	41	47,064	$7.67	0.09%
Business admin	30	14,295	$42.30	0.30%
Criminal justice	21	16,608	$12.97	0.13%
General DCP keywords	15	2,951	$15.27	0.51%
Accounting	5	4,258	$9.36	0.12%
Religious studies	2	282	$8.02	0.71%
CIS	1	150	$11.82	0.67%
Healthcare management	1	757	$8.64	0.13%
Elementary education	0	62	-	0.00%

Source: VisionPoint, 2014

With this new marketing campaign, Google advertisements and social media have contributed significantly to the enrollment increase in the BSN program.

Also, many incoming BSN students are self-reporting that they are being forced by employers to complete their BSN degree. This has been an issue of contention since 2010, and in 2011-2012 health care systems in the states of North Carolina and South Carolina moved toward this requirement for their licensed nurses. Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System in South Carolina is requiring all RNs to obtain their Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing by 2017 or risk losing their jobs. According to Dustin Wyatt (2013), "This policy will affect 45 percent of the 1200 registered nurses currently on staff" (p.1). Also, Greenville Health System (GHS) announced in June, 2014 that they will require a number of their nursing staff to obtain a BSN. A 2014 news release from

GHS states, “This decision is part of a national movement to prepare nurses to meet the increased demand for care created by healthcare reform and to position them to help make improvements to the nation’s increasingly complex healthcare system” (Greenville Health System, 2014).

The DCP is actively seeking partnerships and signing official Pathway agreements with selected NC community colleges. The Pathway agreement emphasizes two-year degree completion at the community college and completing a bachelor’s degree online at GWU. The BSN program offers a unique opportunity for students to obtain their bachelor's degree by completing three years of coursework at the community college and one year at GWU. The strategic Pathway allows for an additional year of coursework at the community college with a lower expense to the student. This also builds a solid partnership with NC community colleges and the DCP BSN program. This partnership allows for seamless admission and completion through GWU.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, responding to the growth within the BSN program was critical in order to maintain high customer service standards and individualized student support, with limited resources. Current and anticipated growth in the BSN program produced the need to address the issue of internal processes and procedures to better support enrolled students. This study resulted in a plan developed to address rapid enrollment growth in regard to organizational structure and additional positions, as well as the introduction of short-term interventions to target the enrollment growth in the School of Nursing at GWU.

SECTION 3: HISTORY AND REVIEW OF PROBLEM

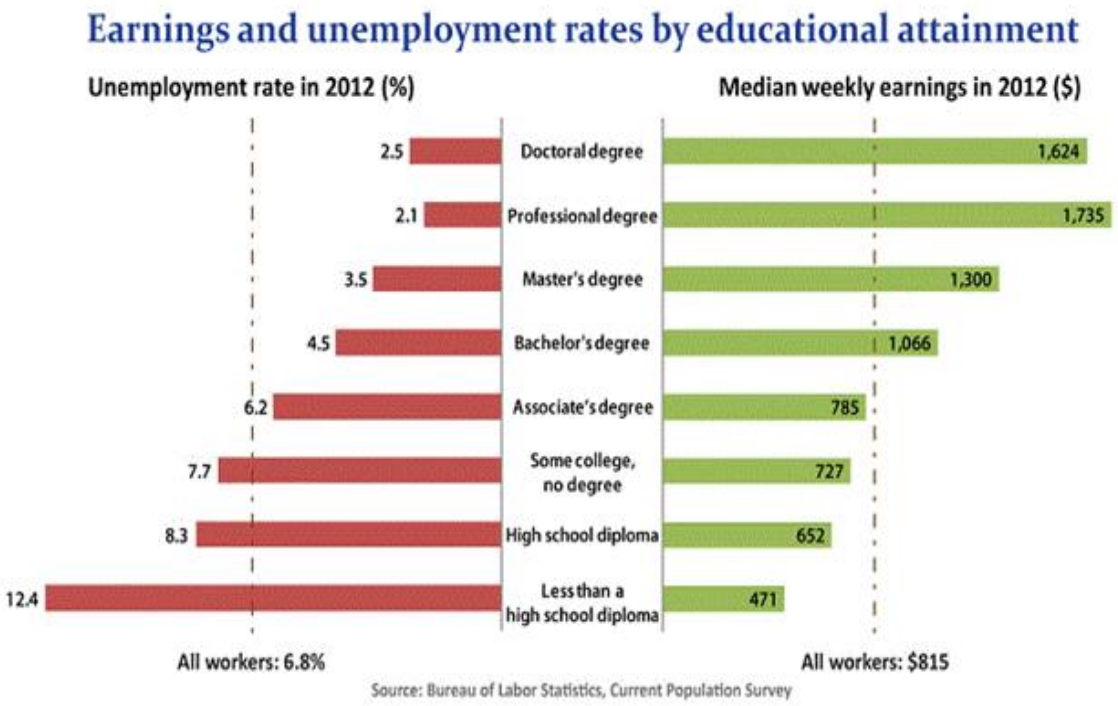
Nontraditional student retention and success is important in higher education. Community colleges, like other state agencies, are being held to a higher standard than in the past. Each college is now monitored by a set of performance measures wherein the results may have economic repercussions if benchmarks are not obtained. As a result, a portion of funding will be contingent on program performance. While a reduction in funding will have a negative impact on the NCCCS educational institutions, one must not overlook the economic impact on the individual student.

The Degree Completion Program at GWU was designed to serve students who are unable to attend a day program because of work schedules, family responsibilities, or geographic locations. The primary mission and vision of DCP is to assist nontraditional students in the pursuit of their educational goals. Understanding the importance of student success through degree completion at four-year universities can be significant in regard to the full-time lifetime earnings by education level. The Chronicle Almanac 2014 reported a study from 2011 indicating that individuals with a bachelor's degree will earn two-thirds more than a high school graduate over a 40-year working life (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2014).

According to the Complete College America 2014 report, it is projected that by the year 2020, 63% of all jobs in North Carolina will require a career certificate or college degree. This is significant when one considers that presently only 36% of the workforce has earned one of these credentials. The 27% skills gap must be closed for North Carolina to have a strong and competitive economy. In today's global market, it is

difficult for adults to find sustainable employment if they lack a degree or credential (Endel, Anderson, & Kelley, 2011). An increase in education and training can yield higher earnings over the course of one's lifetime; this correlation is clearly represented by the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2012). One's educational attainment has a direct impact on his or her median weekly income (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment



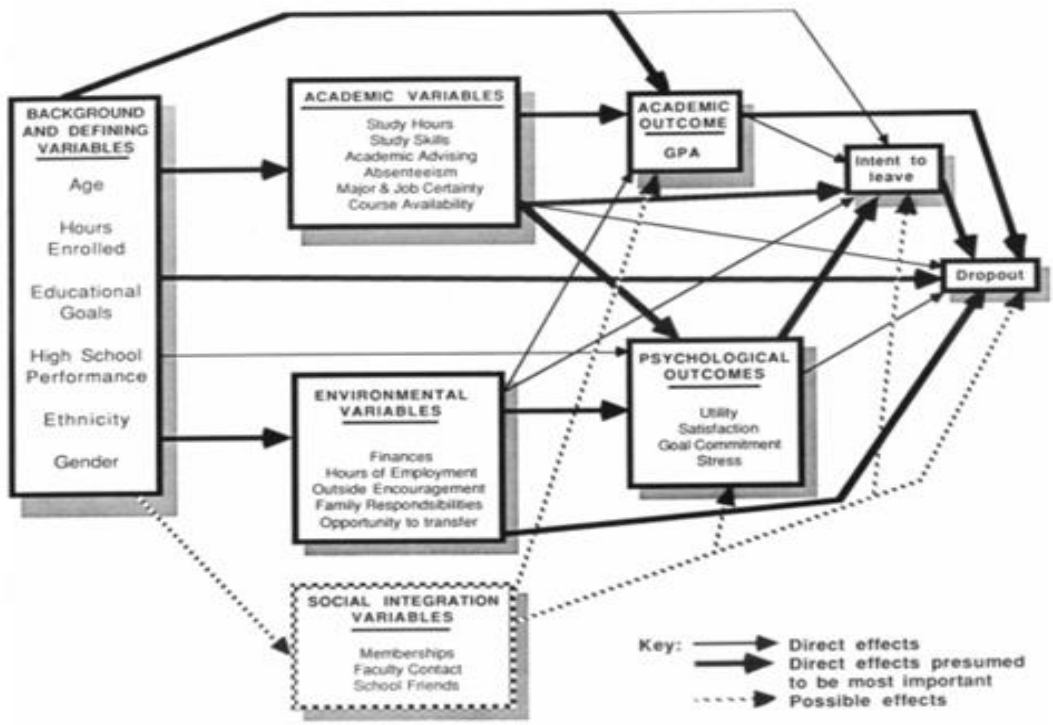
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2012

Conceptual Framework

In 1987 Metzner and Bean published a study with an updated theoretical model describing nontraditional undergraduate attrition building upon their original model developed in 1985. The authors suggest that because of the lack of social integration into the institutions, nontraditional students need to be examined differently from traditional

undergraduate students. As a result they developed a model to describe and examine dropouts among nontraditional students (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition



Source: Metzner & Bean, 1987

This model identifies several contributing factors that influence nontraditional dropouts. Metzner and Bean state that nontraditional students who dropout often have issues with "GPA and credit hours enrolled, as well as the utility of education for future employment, satisfaction with the student role, opportunity to transfer, and age affecting dropout through intent to leave" (1987, p.15). Also, absence from class, age, high school performance, and ethnicity had indirect effects on dropout through GPA. These results suggest that nontraditional students dropped out of college for academic reasons or because they were not committed to attending. This framework is one example that

scholar practitioners may reference to assist in decision making and in implementing interventions that directly impact the nontraditional student.

Michalowski (2010) proposes a critical junctures model comprised of the student's academic preparedness, external constraints, administrative issues, academic challenges, and work responsibilities combine to form critical junctures in the student's academic career. Michalowski proposes interventions that may be effective in reaching the nontraditional student: (1) systematic outreach via surveys, polls or other feedback mechanisms by the advisor for the identification of issues that are either avoidable or can be mitigated by the school and (2) intrusive counseling to match students with majors appropriate to their skill level. It is more desirable to assist students in adjusting their career aspirations than it is to wait until they are on academic probation or suspension or have dropped out.

Generally, a transfer student is anyone who transfers to an institution with previous coursework from other institutions of higher education. When discussing transfer students, a common term among higher education professionals is transfer shock. J.R. Hills (1965) was a prominent scholar in the development of the theory and understanding of transfer shock among community college transfer students. Hills provides an analysis of early studies and findings regarding transfer students' academic performance when entering into a four-year institution. Transfer shock occurs when a community college transfer student enters into a four-year institution and experiences a dip in his or her grade point average. Hills offers an in-depth analysis of early scholars and examines and reviews research to better understand the theory of transfer shock across institutions and students. Hills analyzes several scholars, and one in particular is

Medsker. Medsker's study, as referenced in Hills (1965), notes that 12 out of 16 schools reported a drop in their first semester transfer students' grade point averages. Hills begins to develop this theory of transfer shock in terms of a drop period, recovery period, and even possible dropout among transfer students. Hills states:

> First, the counselor must point out that the bulk of the data from many years of research indicates [*sic*] that if he enters junior college and transfers, he can expect to have an appreciable drop in his college grades when he transfers. Probably his grades will recover at least to some extent. Second, after he transfers his grades will, more likely than not, be lower than those of the native students at the college to which he transfers. Third, as a transfer, he will be less likely to survive to graduate from the four year college than if he were a native, and it will probably take him longer than if he were a native (p. 209).

Each member of the disquisition team will further examine the history of her institutional problem of practice.

McDowell Technical Community College: College and Career Readiness – Amy Cooke

A high attrition rate is one common obstacle of adult literacy programs. In rural areas similar to the community of McDowell County, adult educational programs encounter more persistence challenges. Many of these nontraditional students stop attending class or drop out of educational programs for a variety of reasons. When students exit a literacy program, their departure can often be attributed to changes in their lives, insufficient support services, or lack of satisfaction with the adult literacy program they are attending (Comings, Cuban, Bos, Porter, & Doolittle, 2004). While the literacy

program at MTCC cannot control all changes or obstacles in a student's life, they can strive to provide effective support services. The aim of this intervention is to identify and increase the support services required for MTCC's nontraditional students to be successful.

Student achievement data are collected from College and Career Readiness programs in all North Carolina Community Colleges annually. All program data are retrieved for the specific time period of July 1 to June 30. Table 2 displays the most recent data from the colleges 2014 Desktop Monitoring Report and the projected goal for the 2015 program year.

Table 2. McDowell Technical Community College: Educational Functioning Level 3-year Outcomes and Projected Goal

McDowell Technical Community College 3-yr. Outcomes & 2015 Projected					**Goal**
Educational	**Achieved %**			**3 Year**	**2015**
Functioning Levels	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**Change**	**Goal**
ABE Beg. Literacy	3%	13%	20%	**+17%**	**+23%**
ABE Beg. Basic Ed.	41%	17%	45%	**+5%**	**+48%**
ABE Inter. Low	35%	38%	32%	-3%	**+35%**
ABE Inter. High	31%	25%	25%	-7%	**+28%**
ASE Low	8%	12%	10%	**+2%**	**+13%**
ESL Beginning Lit.	33%	0%	0%	-33%	**0%**
ESL Beg. Low	25%	100%	67%	**+42%**	**+70%**
ESL Beg. High	36%	55%	53%	**+18%**	**+56%**
ESL Inter. Low	35%	48%	45%	**+10%**	**+48%**

ESL Inter. High	41%	15%	60%	**+19%**	**+63%**
ESL Advanced	30%	11%	0%	-30%	**0%**

Source: NCCCS, 2014

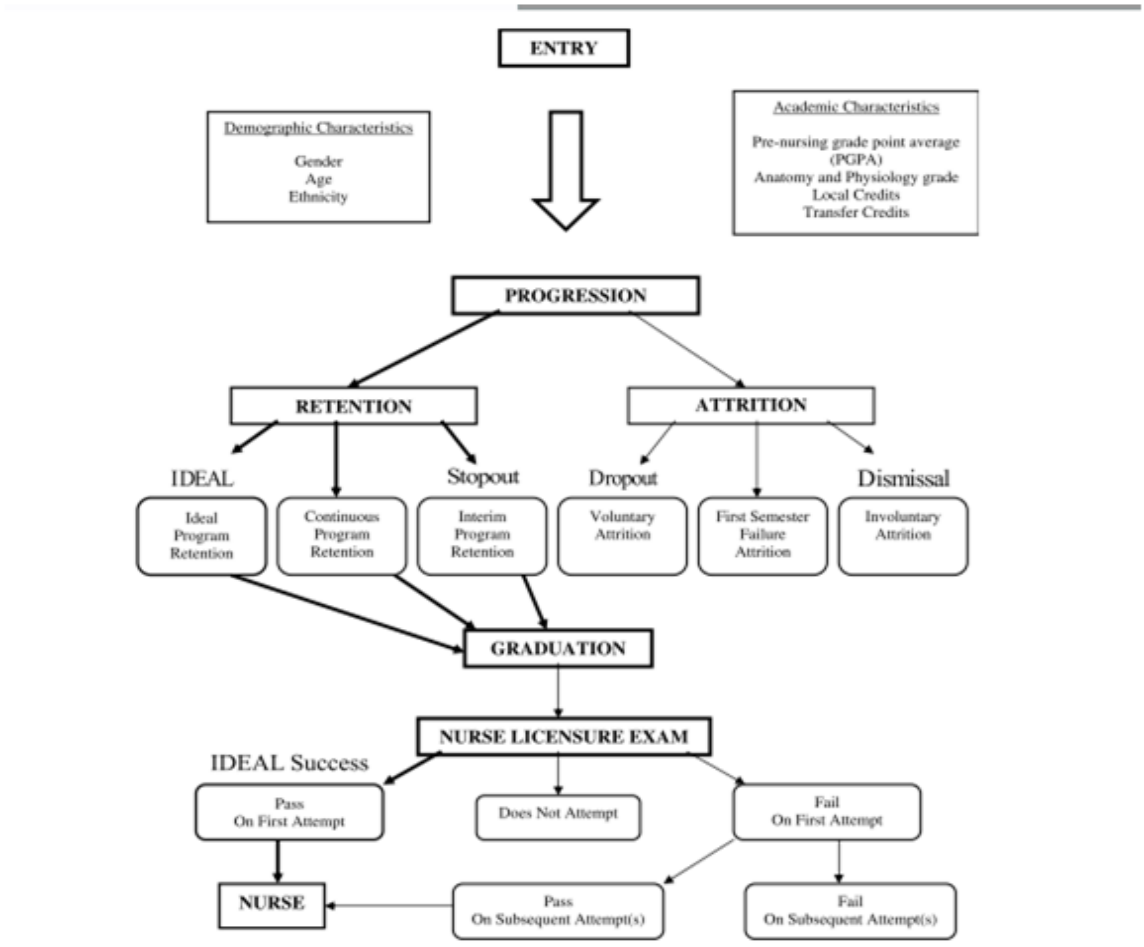
Table 2 provides clear evidence of the EFL movement at MTCC for the past three years in addition to the 2015 projected goal. While these data provide evidence that MTCC is making notable progress in some areas, there is still room for significant improvement for students who place at the ABE and ESL level. To address this issue and strive for positive growth, the institution must build a communal rapport with new and returning students during student orientation.

McDowell Technical Community College: Nursing Program – Penny Cross

Jeffreys (2007b) describes a nursing school model of Ideal Success as Entry-Progression Retention-Graduation-Nurse Licensure Exam-pass on the first attempt. This student trajectory progression pathway reveals three different retention pathways (ideal, continuous, and interim/stopout), three attrition pathways (first semester failure, voluntary, and involuntary), and three licensure pathways (pass on first attempt, fail on first attempt and pass at a later date, or never pass NCLEX) is an approach aimed at documenting and understanding the pathways of nursing students today. Jeffreys' (2007b) model recognizes factors that may affect the Ideal Success pathway such as pre-nursing GPA, anatomy and physiology grades, transfer credit and current grades. Jeffreys notes that progression may lead to graduation or may result in a dropout, stop out, or dismissal. If the student progresses to graduation and the nurse licensure exam, the graduate may (1) pass on the first attempt, (2) fail on the first attempt and pass at a later date or (3) never pass NCLEX. Ideally, the nursing school student progresses and

graduates from the nursing program and passes NCLEX as a first-time test taker (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. The Student Trajectory Progression Pathway



Source: Jeffreys, 2007b

Nursing schools must face the dual duty of admitting qualified students and retaining those students through program completion. Giddens (2009) asks "Is there really anything to celebrate when a nursing program with only 50% persistence to graduation rate boasts of a 100% first-time NCLEX-RN pass rate?" (p.124). Students must be given every chance for achievement, and the nursing program has a duty to offer them the tools to be successful. Giddens (2009) spotlights the issue of balancing student

retention with the all-important NCLEX. Batts (2014) reports a key issue affecting the healthcare workforce as attrition in nursing and allied health education programs. Attrition impacts the number of available graduates in these fields and is also costly to the educational entities and the students. Furthermore, Batts (2014) states "Because community colleges play a key role in the education of healthcare providers, reducing attrition in this setting would have a positive impact on students, community colleges, and the state's healthcare workforce" (p. 62).

The MTCC Practical Nurse Education Program was established in 1975. It is a one-year, diploma program that admits up to 44 nursing students per year. Eighty to 100 students apply per year, and the top 44 students meeting program admission criteria are offered admission into the day or evening section. The PNE program consists of both day and evening sections; 24 students are admitted to the day section and 20 students are admitted to the evening section. Students typically spend a minimum of two to three semesters preparing to enter the PNE program. Not every student who applies is accepted; it is a selective admission program. The majority of students are aged mid-20's to 40's. A large number of the students are working full or part-time and have children or other outside obligations, in addition to being full-time students. Essentially all of the practical nurse students are nontraditional students. They face multiple barriers to success in completing the nursing program as a result of the many roles they play: parent, employee, student, and caregiver. The Practical Nurse Education Program added the evening section in 2006 to accommodate students who work during the day. For the reporting year 2012-2013, the MTCC PNE program graduated approximately 19% of all practical nurses who graduated from NCCCS PNE programs (NCCCS, 2013). The

MTCC (2014) PNE North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) annual report for the same year indicated that 60% of the PNE students fall in the age range of 21 to 30.

The MTCC PNE program mirrors the age categories across all PNE programs in North Carolina. The NCBON (2014) reports 1,412 students enrolled in practical nurse education programs as of October 1, 2013. The age categories of these practical nurse students revealed 103 students in the 17 to 20 range; 385 students in the 21 to 25 range; 320 students in the 26 to 30 range; 367 students in the 31 to 40 range; 177 students in the 41 to 50 range; 54 students in the 51 to 60 range; and 6 students in the 60+ range. These data clearly demonstrate that the large majority of practical nursing students are nontraditional students.

The PNE program consists of three core courses. The introductory nursing course, NUR 101 Practical Nursing I, is an 11 credit 19 contact hour per week course. The course consists of seven class hours, six lab hours and six clinical hours, and each portion of the course requires a separate preparation. Ultimately, in the first semester of the nursing program a student may be enrolled in a total of 19 credit hours and 29 hours of contact time. The subsequent semesters are similar with the second semester consisting of NUR 102, Practical Nursing II, made up of 10 credit and 16 contact hours. The third and final semester consists of the last nursing course, NUR 103 Practical Nursing III. This course contains 9 credit hours and 15 contact hours.

Once students graduate from the practical nursing program they are eligible to sit for the National Council Licensure Exam-Practical Nurse (NCLEX-PN). The nursing school graduate must pass the exam in order to be a licensed practical nurse. A nursing school's NCLEX pass rate is a quality indicator. All nursing schools strive to have a

100% pass rate. The North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) is the entity that approves nursing programs. The NCBON sets the North Carolina nursing pass rate as 95% of the national average. The national average typically ranges from 86% to 88%. If a nursing school's pass rate is below average three years in succession then the program has to conduct a self-study to determine how the pass rate will be increased. The MTCC PNE three-year (2011-2013) average pass rate is 94%. The average pass rate of all North Carolina PNE programs is also 94% (NCBON, 2013).

Once the students are offered admission, they are required to attend a four-hour nursing program orientation. The program orientation consists of a welcome from the director and the faculty, a general overview of the program, collection of documentation such as immunization records and proof of cardiopulmonary resuscitation certification, and uniform fittings. Student advising takes place at class registration times and as needed. The faculty act in the capacity of academic advisors.

Gardner-Webb University: Degree Completion Program – Sara Newcomb

During this period of substantial growth, Gardner-Webb must continue to support the nontraditional transfer student in an online learning environment and encourage persistence. This improvement effort examines major issues associated with transfer students, and the characteristics of nontraditional BSN students at GWU. At GWU incoming BSN students must have (1) their RN license, (2) previously attended an accredited institution, and (3) a transfer GPA of 2.5.

Gilmore and Lyons (2012) describe the challenges nurses face while enrolled in an online RN to BSN program. Registered nurses often face challenges due to their unconventional work schedule and need flexible learning environments to accommodate

their needs. Also, navigating and utilizing the needed technology can provide a challenge as well. The findings reported were from a study conducted at a university that transitioned to a complete online program from a face-to-face evening environment. Retention was directly impacted by the interventions implemented by the university. The authors offer that effectively developed orientation programs, well-designed curricula and student support services impact student retention and success in online programs.

The three programs highlighted are primarily populated by nontraditional students. Despite the many breakthroughs in education, adult learners still find it difficult to navigate programs and attain their educational goals. To further clarify the problem of practice, each member of the NIC will provide a detailed description of the educational setting and the implementation of the intervention.

SECTION 4: DESIRED STATES

The nontraditional student faces multiple barriers when entering higher education. Whether students are (1) in a community college College and Career Readiness program, (2) in a practical nursing program, or (3) seeking degree completion at a university, many are categorized as nontraditional and face many common challenges as they strive to achieve their educational goals.

North Carolina has attempted to address inequities in higher education through the adoption of *The Community College Act* of 1957. *The Community College Act* of 1957 provides for the development and funding for a community college system. The North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) was established in 1979. The SBCC mandates the following policy in North Carolina: "1D SBCC Code 400.2 Each college shall maintain an open door admission policy to all applicants who are legal residents of the United States and who are high school graduates and are at least 18 years of age" (NC SBCC Code, 2012).

The NCCCS website states the following: The mission of the North Carolina Community College System is to open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to postsecondary education, maximize student success, develop a global and multicultural competent workforce, and improve the lives and wellbeing of N.C. citizens (NCCCS Get the Facts, n.d.). Community colleges have open door policies and enroll large numbers of academically underprepared students and, therefore, must be prepared for the majority of first-time students to be enrolled in one or more developmental classes.

Institutions of higher learning were designed for the traditional student. Traditional students typically have fewer outside responsibilities. They are available to manage a full-time student load. As scholar practitioners who work daily with nontraditional students, it is our experience that this student population is not equipped to successfully navigate traditional methods of higher education. The nontraditional student must balance work, school, and family while navigating the unfamiliar territory of higher education. In the academic year 2010-2011, over half of the North Carolina community college student population was classified as nontraditional (NCCCS, 2012). NCCCS statistics for the year 2010-2011 revealed that nontraditional students (ages 23 and over) comprised 60.5% of the total student population and the average age of the nontraditional student was 29.73 (NCCCS, 2012). It is incumbent upon North Carolina community colleges to design and implement an effective support network designed specifically for the nontraditional student population. With the open door policy of the North Carolina Community College System and the steady growth in the number of nontraditional students, research and interventions are needed to bolster student success in higher education.

According to Morest (2013), "Community colleges bridge cultures and educational gaps by offering students a chance to become college students regardless of past academic performance and family background" (p. 319). Morest also recognizes that the overwhelming majority of students in community colleges are nontraditional students. Community colleges provide vital access for nontraditional students by offering an affordable education in a convenient environment. Community colleges face the

equally important task of assisting students in performing at a college level and helping them to complete a college level program (Morest, 2013).

Each scholar practitioner will provide more insight to the importance of increasing success for their nontraditional students. While the three educational programs are different, they each share recurrent challenges for both their students and educational institutions.

McDowell Technical Community College: College and Career Readiness – Amy Cooke

The majority of students seek enrollment in the College and Career Readiness program at MTCC because they previously "dropped out" of the traditional high school setting. Attaining basic literacy is essential for adults who are motivated to return to the classroom and continue their education. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), a division of the U. S. Department of Education, establishes clear goals for each state in the areas of student educational progress. Adult literacy programs operating in North Carolina have been striving since 2011 to increase their accountability scores, as reported by the National Reporting System (NRS). These scores or skills impact everyday life and are often taken for granted by those who do not struggle with college-ready mathematical and literacy competencies. Basic literacy is often described as a measure of one's comprehension, vocabulary, and the ability to communicate effectively across a wide variety of contexts (Rudd, Moeykens & Colton, 1999). The federal department of OVAE classifies these adult programs in one of three categories. These categories are organized by one's level or competency in reading and math. The three categories serve as descriptors of what a typical student functioning at that level should

be able to do. The NRS divides educational functioning levels (EFL) into three main categories. The three primary levels are as follows:

1. Adult Basic Education (ABE)-grade level range 0-8.9
2. Adult Secondary Education (ASE)-grade level range 9.0-12.0
3. English as a Second Language (ESL)-grade level range 0-12.0

Before new students have completed 12 hours of adult literacy instruction, they are required to be evaluated with a NRS approved assessment. This assessment establishes a placement score for each student. The assessment does not provide a comprehensive delineation of all the skills at that level, but it does provide a framework to guide further assessment and instruction. After 70 hours of appropriate instruction, students are assessed again to measure if EFL movement or an educational gain has been achieved.

The first measure in the North Carolina Community College Performance Summary is based on EFL movement for adult literacy students. McDowell Technical Community College's EFL benchmark in 2014 was 35.8%. This was a shortfall of 15.4% (North Carolina Performance Summary, 2014). The desired state or goal is to increase EFL movement that will have a positive impact on the nontraditional students who are pursuing a high school credential.

McDowell Technical Community College: Nursing Program – Penny Cross

Rudel (2006) states that nursing schools have an obligation to understand how to meet the challenges facing nontraditional nursing students and it should be a measure of quality assurance for the program. The MTCC PNE program faculty currently manage a full-time teaching load and advise 10 to 12 students each for the academic year. The faculty registers the current PNE students each semester and handles other advising on an

as needed basis. The students are enrolled in a cohort and take prescribed courses. There are occasions when faculty must meet with students concerning issues such as academic, clinical, or lab performance or personal behaviors. Currently, advising sessions are utilized to address areas of poor student performance**.** The existing advising model does not emphasize advising of a mentoring nature and faculty typically react to the student situation. A proactive advising and mentoring model that includes periodic sessions to evaluate the student's current and future needs may have a positive impact on student retention. The current program orientation method does not adequately welcome, engage or prepare incoming nursing students for the reality of nursing school. Students have family and work obligations that impact how much time they will have available to meet the demands of nursing school. An enhanced model of program orientation will emphasize the student and family commitment that will be required. Nursing school program orientation should be informative, thorough and reflective of all aspects and expectations of the students once they enter the nursing program. The program orientation should be welcoming and should set the tone for the expected behavior as students enter the program (Fontaine, 2014).

Gardner-Webb University: Degree Completion Program – Sara Newcomb

A central characteristic of the Degree Completion Program at GWU is the attention to student services and personalized advising that each student receives. Determining the impact on student satisfaction and retention will be the first assessment priority. With growing enrollment and limited resources, understanding the impact on the student is central for improvement at GWU. Two central concerns for BSN faculty are course loads and the number of students they advise, with no course break. In order

to manage the increased number of students and maintain high educational standards, the first assessment of the problem suggests the need to do the following:

- increase the overall retention and first semester retention in the BSN program
- reduce faculty overload and course overloads
- reduce the overtime worked by advisors and enrollment staff
- reduce the average time spent on new student processing in admission and academic advising

Adjusting and monitoring project goals and desired states during implementation will be imperative to direct and support the project design and initiatives to ensure improvement. This will be accomplished by keeping the student's needs as the primary focus.

Each of the scholar practitioners is invested in the success of their nontraditional students. While the two institutional settings are different, the desires to implement effective interventions that yield positive results are interchangeable. The following analysis of each educational setting adds clarity to the specific challenges at each institution.

SECTION 5: INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

Interventions to bolster nontraditional student success will be implemented at two separate educational settings and impact three unique programs of study. McDowell Technical Community College (MTCC) is a two-year institution located in the rural foothills of North Carolina. MTCC on average generates 1,500 full-time equivalent units that directly impact and determine state funding. In the 2011-2012 academic year, the demographics for MTCC's student population were comprised of the following: 58.9% female, 41.1% male, 88.8% Caucasian, 5.8% African American, 1.5% Asian, 2.3% Hispanic, 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.4% American Indian/Alaskan. The average age of MTCC curriculum students during the 2011-2012 academic year was 34. Students aged 19 and younger comprised approximately 27% of the student population (2013 Fact Book MTCC, p. 41). These age parameters coincide with the national characteristics of nontraditional students.

Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian university that offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees. GWU is located in Boiling Springs, NC and currently has 11 satellite locations in North Carolina offering Degree Completion Programs and graduate studies. The GWU student population is approximately 5,000 consisting of day program, graduate students, and Degree Completion students. GWU's overall student body is 63% female, 37% male and represents 37 states with international students from 21 countries (GWU, 2014). Within the Degree Completion Program, the average age of currently enrolled students as of Fall 2015 was 35.3 years of age, and for students in the RN to BSN program the average age was 36.1 years of age**.** In the 2014-

2015 academic year, 72% of Gardner-Webb's RN to BSN students resided in North Carolina and 25% resided in South Carolina.

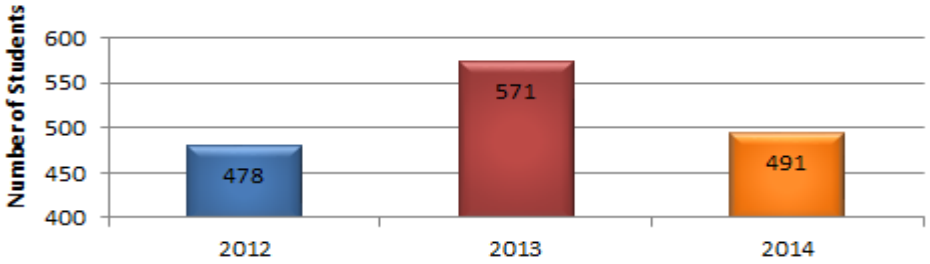
Each member of the disquisition team will provide a detailed application of the methodology utilized during the four stages of the *plan, do, study, act* improvement model as it relates to their individual problem of practice (Langley et al., 2009).

SECTION 6: IMPLMENTATION AND RESULTS – AMY COOKE

McDowell's College and Career Readiness program supports instruction for adult learners who need to attain a high school credential, transition to postsecondary education, prepare for employment, or learn the English language. While this encompasses a wide range of nontraditional learners, the majority of CCR students seek enrollment due to their previous decision to drop out of a traditional secondary educational setting.

The primary service area of MTCC, McDowell County, has a population of approximately 8,000 residents, 18 years or older, who do not have a high school credential (U.S. Census Bureau: Educational Attainment, 2012). State and federal mandates require each CCR program to collect annual data during the time parameters of July 1-June 30. According to the 2012-2014 enrollment trends graph provided by the state's system office, MTCC enrolled on average 513 students during the past three program years. While the CCR program at MTCC is commended for enrolling approximately 491 students during the 2013-2014 program year, the data reflect a decrease of 80 students from the 2012-2013 program year (see Figure 10). According to the U.S. Census report, there is a substantial pool of potential students that reside in the immediate service area of McDowell County that still need a high school credential.

Figure 10. Enrollment Trends 2012-2014



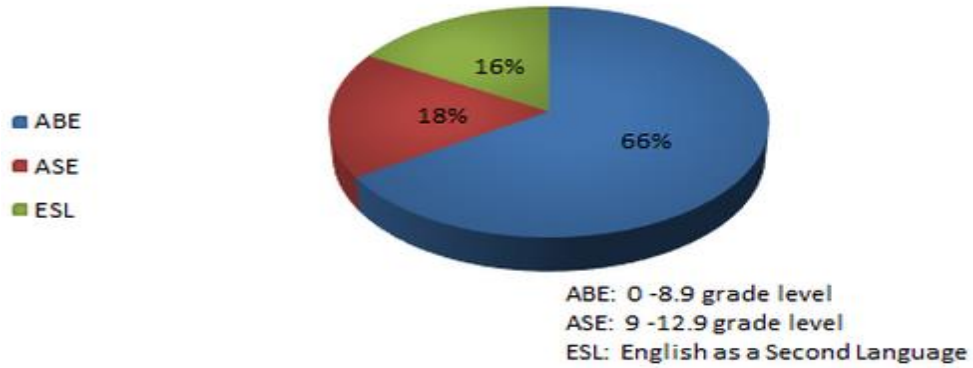
Source: NC Community College System, 2014

Current initiatives to attract new students and increase student achievement at MTCC have been sporadic. While there is not a new marketing campaign, the CCR program does advertise through brochures, social media, and by word of mouth. Before students can enroll in CCR classes, they must first attend student orientation. The orientation process is rather lengthy. Orientation includes two days of program information followed by student registration procedures.

Once enrolled, students are administered a standardized assessment that must be approved by the National Reporting System (NRS). This score establishes an educational functioning level (EFL) that classifies students by grade level in either reading or math. Program administrators and instructors then utilize this placement score to design and provide effective adult literacy instruction. College and Career Readiness instruction offers a blended approach to learning that includes: direct instruction, distance learning, or an open lab environment. By offering flexible course delivery options, nontraditional students are less likely to have attendance barriers. After 60 to 70 hours of focused instruction, 51.2% of CCR students in North Carolina are expected to demonstrate progress (North Carolina Performance Measures for Student Success, 2015). This

progression is captured and documented through a standardized NRS approved post-test assessment. The following pie chart represents the EFL placement for MTCC students enrolled during the 2013-2014 program year. The majority of students at MTCC place in the category of Adult Basic Education (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. 2014 Student EFL Placement



Source: NC Community Colleges, 2014

Educational gains are evaluated and published in the North Carolina Community College System's accountability document. This annual performance report is based on data compiled from the previous year and serves to inform colleges and the public on the performance of all 58 community colleges. In 1993, the State Board of Community Colleges began monitoring performance data on specific measures to ensure public accountability for programs and services. In 1998, the General Assembly directed the State Board to review past performance measures and define standards to ensure programs and services offered by community colleges in North Carolina were of sufficient quality (North Carolina Performance Measures for Student Success, 2015). An improvement initiative was implemented at MTCC to increase student success and their performance on state and federal outcomes.

Implementation

The aim of the improvement initiative was to increase the educational gains for new and returning CCR students at MTCC. The improvement initiative was conveyed through the implementation of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix A). This advising tool was refined by the three scholar practitioners to encourage student reflection, engagement, and buy-in through the identification of potential educational barriers.

The initiative was implemented by a team of MTCC staff, instructors, and Amy Cooke. The onsite members consisted of Terry Valentino, Ed King, Deborah Jacob and Dr. John Gossett. Terry Valentino is the Director of College and Career Readiness at McDowell Technical Community College. Ms. Valentino has been in this leadership role for three years and is an advocate for the success of her students and staff. Ed King, a veteran to adult literacy, serves as both the Admissions Coordinator and Literacy Education Information Specialist. Deborah Jacob is a full-time instructor who has daily interactions with nontraditional students in an instructional environment. Dr. John Gossett, Vice President of Learning and Student Services, oversees all aspects of the college's academic programs, continuing education, and student services. While he supports and was mindful of the improvement initiative, he did not have direct participation in the implementation.

Amy Cooke facilitated and delivered a face-to-face training during a staff development session on December 18, 2014 at MTCC. This session provided the practitioner an opportunity to train and provide guidance on how to best implement the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix A). The MTCC team members in

attendance were Ms. Valentino, Mr. King, and Ms. Jacob. Each received targeted guidance on how to implement and utilize the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. This training session also provided Amy Cooke an opportunity to share, clarify, and answer questions about the process while forming a deeper relationship with the implementation team. We discussed the importance of asking the discovery questions in a kind tone, so that the students receiving the intervention would not feel intimidated or uncomfortable. Other key stakeholders that would contribute to the implementation were the cohort of 19 nontraditional CCR students who would receive the intervention.

Implementation of the improvement initiative occurred on June 15, 2015 during student orientation. Student orientation is an admissions requirement for all new and returning CCR students and is held bi-monthly. During this time, all incoming students are also required to take a National Reporting System approved assessment. The College and Career Readiness program administers the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to meet this federal data reporting requirement. The Proactive Advising Lifewheel was implemented on the second day of student orientation. The aim of the intervention was to build rapport between student and advisor, and mentor students as they identified and discussed potential barriers that may restrict them from achieving their educational goals. The Proactive Advising Lifewheel was facilitated by two members of MTCC's intervention team. The cohort receiving the improvement initiative consisted of 19 students. Each student was asked to draw a picture that symbolized eight aspects of his or her life. Using these responses, students were also asked to rate each aspect in terms of satisfaction by using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest. Once completed,

students then shared their results privately with their advisor who was also a member of the implementation team.

It was important for the advisor to follow the five prompts provided in the second section of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix A). These questions were designed to jumpstart authentic conversations and gather information from the CCR students in a safe nonthreatening environment. With this pertinent informal information, the advisor could suggest strategies or support services that may address any educational barriers.

Results

One hundred percent of the 19 incoming College and Career Readiness students completed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel during new student orientation. For clarity, a summary of their individual responses is documented in chart form (see Appendix B). The majority of CCR students were satisfied with their family, health, and hobbies. Documented areas in their life that received low ratings were satisfaction with their jobs, money, and education. The advisors individually debriefed each student prior to his or her enrolling in the College and Career Readiness program at MTCC. According to both advisors, completing the Proactive Advising Lifewheel encouraged active collaboration between the students and themselves. These early conversations established an opportunity before actual enrollment for advisors to identify, and recommend campus or community resources that might assist these nontraditional students to attend class and complete their educational goals. After these initial conversations, a second advising session was scheduled as a follow-up. This second session was important to further nurture the student and advisor relationship, and determine if further assistance or support

was needed. This also provided an opportunity for advisors to check the status of their recommendations and gauge if there were additional barriers that were not previously identified.

At the end of the 90-day cycle, a descriptive statistical scan was performed to measure the assessment of change. The data collection fields were placement and post-test scores, increase in EFL, GED® attainment, and current active student enrollment in a CCR class (see Appendix C). Of the 11 students who were placed in reading, four students or 36% made educational gains on the TABE approved NRS assessment. In addition, four of the eight students or 50% who placed in math demonstrated EFL level movement, five students or 26% earned their GED®, and four members of the cohort or 21% were still enrolled in a CCR class.

Limitations of the Intervention

Limitations of the intervention are largely directed at the uncontrollable factors that often accompany nontraditional students. Student attendance is usually sporadic in adult literacy programs that can make it difficult to provide effective advising sessions when students do not attend on a regular basis. Active student attendance is also central for follow-up sessions to occur. A number of CCR students who received the Proactive Advising Lifewheel intervention appeared to be hesitant when asked to rate certain aspects of their life. Without this transparency, it was difficult for advisors to suggest strategies that would help address potential educational barriers. Also, it was not a requirement for students to take advantage of the suggested resources that were shared during the advising sessions. In addition, three of the nontraditional students had confirmed learning disabilities that were identified years earlier while in the traditional

school setting. Adults with disabilities may perceive that their educational choices are limited and struggle with academic success (Rocco & Fornes, 2010).

SECTION 7: IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS – PENNY CROSS

The PNE program currently incorporates strategies to promote successful completion for the PNE students. These strategies include (1) a cohort learning group, (2) a four-hour program orientation, (3) course orientations prior to each of the three semesters, (4) ATI, Inc. Comprehensive Assessment and Review Program (CARP) each semester, (5) ATI comprehensive predictor for NCLEX readiness, (6) a virtual ATI review for NCLEX preparation, and (7) faculty advising on an as-needed basis. The PNE program faculty strive to offer various types of support to the PNE students but additional support is needed as evidenced by the first semester retention rate of 85%, three-year average program retention rate of 78%, and the 94% three-year average NCLEX pass rate.

Implementation

Implementation consisted of a comprehensive practical nurse program orientation along with proactive student advising with a faculty mentor for practical nursing students admitted to the MTCC PNE program. The goal of the interventions was for students to gain a deep understanding of the commitment needed to be successful in the three semester practical nurse program. The students were given access to all the tools needed for successful program entry through program completion. Assigned practical nurse faculty mentors employed a proactive stance to guide students through the program.

In an attempt to bolster nontraditional nursing student success by decreasing student attrition and increasing student commitment, a comprehensive program orientation and application of a proactive advising model were utilized. The intervention

design expanded the current program orientation into a comprehensive program orientation prior to the beginning of the program and instituted proactive advising throughout the academic year. The comprehensive program orientation additionally included a one-on-one session with the assigned faculty mentor to discuss the student plan to accomplish all of the requirements of the practical nurse program and to administer the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix A). Each student who entered the PNE program on August 20, 2015 was assigned a faculty mentor.

The PNE program problems of practice impacted by the interventions are the first semester average retention rate of 85%, three-year average program retention rate of 78%, and a three-year average NCLEX-PN pass rate of 94%. These measures are nursing program quality indicators. Program retention rate and the NCLEX-PN pass rate for program graduates as first time test takers will not be measured until after August, 2016 upon program completion. The interventions of a comprehensive program orientation and the utilization of faculty mentor advisors were supported by a design and implementation team. These teams were intricately involved in the improvement effort for the PNE program. The design and implementation teams were selected and established. Three main steps in the selection and establishing of the teams were: 1) communication of intervention goals 2) cultivation of stakeholder buy-in from the practical nurse faculty and 3) training practical nurse faculty on the utilization of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. The design team members for the interventions included Judy Melton, Dr. John Gossett, and Penny Cross.

Judy Melton**,** MSN, RN**,** is the Assistant Director of the PNE program. Mrs. Melton functions as the Assistant Director, clinical coordinator, lecturer, and faculty

advisor. She has over 20 years of experience in nursing education; 12 of these years have been with the MTCC PNE Program. John Gossett, Ed.D, is the Vice President of Learning and Student Services as noted above, he oversees all aspects of academic programs, continuing education, and student services. He supervises all faculty and staff in these departments. Dr. Gossett has worked at MTCC since 2012. Penny Cross has worked at MTCC since 1991. She began a full-time faculty position with Practical Nurse Education in 1997. She remained a full time faculty member for five years and then assumed other duties within the College. In 2007, Penny Cross became the Dean of Health Science and Director of the Practical Nurse Education program.

The design team members, Dr. Gossett, Ms. Melton and Penny Cross, discussed the interventions most appropriate to be utilized at a comprehensive program orientation. As a team we determined that the following interventions would be beneficial to incorporate during the comprehensive program orientation: (1) using small group icebreakers and team building activities to build student relationships and to provide a basis for student and faculty relationships, (2) guiding the students through the Proactive Advising Lifewheel to assist them in time-management and balancing family, work and school, and then debriefing the activity within the small group, and (3) providing a faculty mentor throughout the entire 12-month Practical Nursing program.

The implementation team for the program's comprehensive orientation and faculty mentor interventions included some of the same members from the design team including Judy Melton and Penny Cross. Additional implementation team members included Lora Bartlett, Pam Sain, and Lindsey Michaels. Lora Bartlett**,** MSN, RN is a PNE faculty member. Mrs. Bartlett has been a faculty member since 2005. She is a

classroom, lab, and clinical instructor. Additionally she is the lab coordinator, simulation coordinator and faculty advisor. Pam Sain**,** MSN, RN, is a PNE faculty member. Mrs. Sain has been a faculty member since 2010. She came to MTCC with eight years of experience as a faculty member in an associate degree nursing program. She is a classroom, lab, and clinical instructor. Additionally, Mrs. Sain is a faculty advisor. The last member of the intervention team, Lindsey Michaels**,** MSN, RN is also a PNE faculty member. Mrs. Michaels has been a faculty member since April, 2014. She is a classroom, lab, and clinical instructor. She is also a faculty advisor.

To prepare for the interventions of comprehensive program orientation, proactive advising, and faculty mentors, training sessions were held during regularly scheduled faculty meetings. The implementation team was trained through the use of a training protocol to utilize the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix D). The training protocol consisted of deploying the Proactive Advising Lifewheel during a group advising session, allowing adequate time for students to respond to the different areas of the Lifewheel, followed by a session with the faculty mentors utilizing specific debriefing questions. Faculty members were asked to fill out the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. After filling out the Proactive Advising Lifewheel, debriefing took place as a group. The debriefing questions from the Proactive Advising Lifewheel were utilized. Faculty were given the opportunity to respond to the debriefing questions and to ask questions concerning the process.

McDowell Technical Community College staff also included in the intervention processes included Kim Ledbetter, Director of Financial Aid, Donna Short, Director of Student Enrichment, and Dr. Beverly Watts, Director of the Academic Resource Center.

Mrs. Ledbetter has been the Director of Financial Aid for nine years and oversees all of the financial aid activities including scholarship applications and disbursements. Mrs. Short has been the Director of Student Enrichment for 17 years**.** Mrs. Short supervises college placement testing, GED® testing, Veterans Services, and is the Disabilities Coordinator. Mrs. Short has been in her current position since 1998. Dr. Watts has been employed at MTCC since 1997. She was originally employed as a math instructor and has assumed other duties during the years to include Director of Quality Enhancement and Director of the Academic Resource Center.

The comprehensive program orientation for the Practical Nurse Education was held on June 11, 2015. Forty-one accepted and two waitlisted students attended (one accepted student was unable to attend program orientation). All students and family members met in the MTCC auditorium. Nursing faculty provided a program overview. Each nursing course, NUR 101, 102 and 103 was reviewed to inform students regarding class, clinical and lab hour requirements. Students and their families were given an opportunity to ask questions concerning program requirements. Mrs. Ledbetter shared financial aid and scholarship information, Mrs. Short provided information concerning Student Enrichment and disability services, and Dr. Watts reviewed the services of the Academic Resource Center (ARC) and the tutoring services available through the ARC. The group meeting in the auditorium lasted from 9:00 am -10:00 am. Family members and waitlisted students were able to leave after this part of the orientation. Next, the nursing director, assistant director and nursing faculty members provided detailed information concerning individual class schedules, uniform requirements, and the criminal background check and urine drug screen process. Physical exam,

immunizations and cardiopulmonary resuscitation requirements were discussed. Students had access to the nursing program director, assistant director, and all faculty members, including the department secretary to have questions and concerns addressed. The research study purpose was explained and informed consent was obtained to allow the principal investigator to use the student data gathered from the intervention. At the conclusion of this portion of the orientation session, students were given a one hour lunch break. They were offered lunch as part of the orientation session or they were able to leave campus for lunch on their own.

The afternoon portion of the orientation session consisted of faculty members meeting with their advisees. The 41 accepted students in attendance were divided among the four full time PNE faculty members. There were 10 to 11 students in each group. During this group session faculty members deployed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix A) and utilized an ice breaker activity, a team building activity (see Appendix E).

Additionally, faculty mentored their student advisees throughout the fall semester. The student and faculty mentor met at the beginning, middle, and end of the fall semester. Faculty mentors meeting with student advisees allowed the students time for self-evaluation and the opportunity for the faculty mentors to guide and advise the students prior to the development of severe academic deficiencies. Students received formative evaluations and remediation as needed from their faculty mentor. If a student advisee received less than 80% on a unit test, remediation on the material missed was required within two weeks of the test.

Faculty mentors met with their student advisees at the beginning of fall semester. As part of the proactive advising model, students were required to turn in a written plan showing a weekly schedule that included time for family, school attendance, work, and school homework. Documenting all of the competing demands for the students' time encouraged students to maintain a healthy balance of family, school, work, and self. Faculty mentors met with their advisees at mid-term and at the end of the semester. The faculty mentors approached these meetings as a "checking in". Grades were reviewed and questions or concerns were addressed.

Results and Evaluation

The interventions were monitored during the implementation phase. First semester student retention was tracked. Program retention and NCLEX-PN pass rate will be measured at the conclusion of the program, August 2016, and each graduate will sit for the NCLEX-PN exam post-graduation. The goals of the interventions were to enhance student retention, assist the student in successful program completion, and increase the program NCLEX-PN pass rate (see Table 3).

Table 3. Performance Measures and Goals

Measure	Current Performance	Goal
First Semester Student retention	85% first semester retention	90% first semester retention
Program Student retention	78% program retention	85% program retention
Program NCLEX-PN pass rate as a first time test taker	93%	100%

Note: Due to the restraints of the disquisition timeframe, Penny Cross decreased the PDSA cycle to measure student retention through the first semester. The ultimate goal or improvement plan is to have a positive change in program outcomes.

The evaluation of the comprehensive program orientation occurred on an ongoing basis from the time of the program orientation, June 11, 2015, until the first day of the semester, August 20, 2015. Three evaluation measures were examined: the number of students attending orientation who entered the program, students demonstrating college "know how" and a student satisfaction survey.

The success of the orientation was measured by the number of students entering the program equaling the number of students who attended the comprehensive program orientation. Forty-one of the 42 admitted students attended the comprehensive program orientation and 35 of those who participated in the comprehensive program orientation entered the PNE program on August 20, 2015. Six of the comprehensive program orientation attendees declined their seat prior to program entry. A total of 39 students entered the PNE program. Three waitlisted students were offered acceptance to the program after program orientation when six of the originally accepted students declined. The three waitlisted students and the accepted student unable to attend the comprehensive program orientation, attended a separate orientation session prior to entering the program. Each of the students had the opportunity to fill out the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. The percentage of students attending the comprehensive program orientation and entering the PNE program on the first day of class, August 20, 2015 was 85.4%. By midterm the 35 students who attended the comprehensive program orientation remained enrolled (100%). One waitlisted student who entered the program had withdrawn from the

program prior to midterm due for personal reasons. Thirty-three of the original 35 (94%) students who attended the comprehensive program orientation and entered the program, successfully completed the first semester of the practical nursing program. Thirty-five students out of the 39 students (90%) entering the PNE program on the first day of class on August 20, 2015 successfully completed the first semester of the practical nursing program (four of the 39 students did not attend the comprehensive program orientation).

Another evaluation measure of the comprehensive program orientation was students demonstrating college 'know how' as evidenced by correctly navigating the steps to enter the PNE program to gain final admittance: (1) turning in all required forms, e.g., immunization form, completed physical form and CPR card current for two years (2) completing onboarding for the clinical sites to include submission of the criminal background check information, submitting a urine drug screen sample at hospital lab and completion of the clinical site orientation modules (3) current transcript of completed transfer classes and (4) attendance at NUR 101 course orientation on August 18, 2015. Each of the 35 accepted students who attended the comprehensive program orientation turned in all required transcripts, health forms, and immunizations. Additionally, they completed the onboarding process for the clinical agencies, which includes submitting the criminal background check (CBC) information and a urine drug screen (UDS). The four students who either were unable to attend the comprehensive program orientation session or were waitlisted also turned in all required transcripts, health forms, and immunizations. They successfully completed the onboarding process for the clinical agencies to include the CBC and UDS.

A student satisfaction survey provided student feedback to determine if the comprehensive program orientation provided needed information and clear directions on the navigation of meeting the final admission criteria for program entry. Thirty-five students attended the Comprehensive Program Orientation on June 11, 2015, and entered the practical nursing program. These 35 students also answered the student satisfaction survey. Ninety-one percent of the students responded that they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the Comprehensive Program Orientation (see Appendix F).

The evaluation of the faculty mentoring proactive advising model included two measures: the percentage of students who successfully completed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel and the number of students who attended all required faculty mentoring sessions.

The first measure was the percentage of students who successfully completed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel at the comprehensive program orientation or prior to entering the program. Thirty-nine (100%) of the entering PNE students successfully completed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. The faculty mentors debriefed the exercise within a small group or individually prior to the student entering the PNE program. The debriefing exercise revealed that the majority of the students were satisfied with health, job, education, family, and spiritual life (80% satisfaction rate or higher). The categories in which students indicated less satisfaction were money, friendships, and hobbies (see Appendix G).

The second measure was the completion of three faculty mentor meetings in the first semester: (1) one at the beginning of the semester (2) one at mid-term and (3) a final meeting at the end of the semester. Faculty mentors met with each of their advisees at the

beginning of the semester. Students were required to turn in a weekly schedule demonstrating how they intended to balance life, work, family and nursing school. Faculty mentors were able to evaluate the student perception regarding the time allotted for family, work, school, study, sleep, rest, etc. Faculty mentors also met with each advisee at midterm and at the end of the first semester.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is time constraints. Due to the 90-day cycle of plan, do, study, act, Penny Cross was not able to report all of her findings as the program is a one-year program. Graduates are not eligible to take the NCLEX-PN until successful program completion. Some graduates sit for the NCLEX-PN one to two weeks after graduation. Other students wait months to sit for the exam due to limited finances, as the NCLEX-PN costs $313.00. Another limitation of the study may be the reluctance of students to share personal information. Students may not reveal all of their life situations affecting their ability to successfully complete an educational program and therefore the advisor may not be able to offer appropriate available resources.

Recommendations

For those students who are attempting to complete a full time nursing program with all of its inherent stressors and who work full or part time, while raising children, it becomes an even more stress-filled and difficult process. It is beyond the scope of the nursing program's resources to assist with all of the hurdles students face in their educational journey. However, the interventions of a comprehensive program orientation including team building activities, a proactive advising stance utilizing the Proactive

Advising Lifewheel, and faculty mentoring undergird the students as they attempt to complete an educational program.

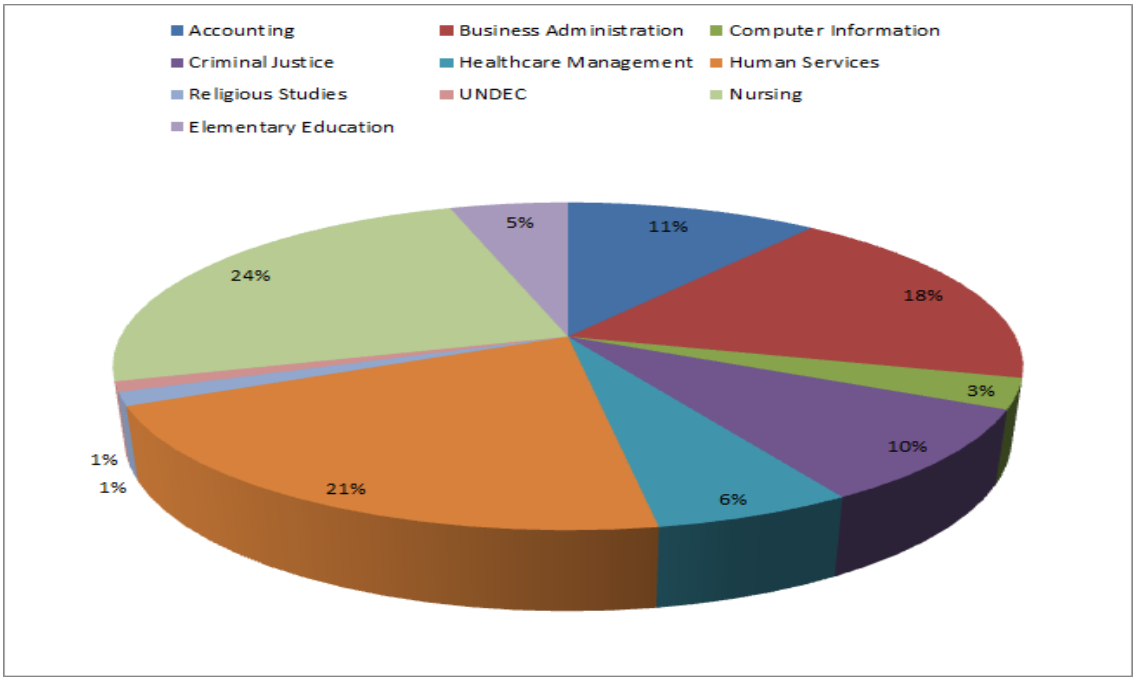
The interventions of an enhanced comprehensive program orientation that included icebreaker and team building activities, Proactive Advising Lifewheel, and faculty mentoring had a positive impact on the MTCC PNE program's first semester retention. The plan, do, study, act cycle was an effective model to use to implement and assess change (Langley et al., 2009). Complete evaluation results to include first semester retention, program completion and NCLEX-PN results will determine how successful the interventions were. These interventions will be utilized for the 2016-2017 MTCC PNE class.

SECTION 8: IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS – SARA NEWCOMB

The academic area with the most substantial growth in Gardner-Webb University's Degree Completion Program over the last academic year has been the School of Nursing at GWU. The Degree Complete Program offers registered nurses an online option to complete their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). The BSN program experienced an increase of 75 students in Fall 2014 from Fall 2013. In the next academic year, responding to the growth within the BSN program was critical to maintain high customer service standards and individualized support.

The Degree Completion Program at GWU was established over 35 years ago. The program was developed to allow community college transfer students an opportunity to complete a degree online or in the evening at one of the 12 locations in NC. The program offers nontraditional students opportunities to fulfill their educational goals while working and balancing family responsibilities through flexible scheduling. In a recent demographic study of students entering the program in Fall 2014, 92% were NC residents and 7% were SC residents. Also, the Fall 2014 incoming students consisted of 75% female, 25% male and the average age of the incoming students was 32. The following age groups were represented: .7% teenage, 31.3% twenties, 34.7% thirties, 25.3% forties, 7.7% fifties, and .7% older than fifty (Schenk, 2014). In addition, the largest major represented by the incoming Fall 2014 students was Nursing, 24% (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Fall 2014 Demographics: Majors



Source: Schenk, 2014

Currently, the staff consists of four nursing faculty who serve on the program team for the RN to BSN program in DCP. With such a large enrollment, the four team members can not advise all 250 students; therefore, the advising load is dispersed between all 10 faculty in the School of Nursing. Overall, each faculty in the School of Nursing has 40-60 advisees and teaches an average of 15-16 hours each term (Schenk, 2014).

Design and Implementation Team

A design and implementation team was identified at Gardner-Webb University that played a vital role in directing and influencing deep change within the RN to BSN program. The intervention design team was Ms. Kaye Schenk, Dr. Nicole Waters, and Sara Newcomb.

Ms. Kaye Schenk is the Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management at Gardner-Webb. Ms. Schenk oversees the enrollment and recruitment of DCP. She has worked within DCP for over 20 years in academic advising, academics, marketing, and enrollment. Ms. Schenk is a key decision maker in enrollment management for the degree completion program regarding new student enrollment and first semester admission processes. She was a nontraditional student in the Degree Completion Program and graduate of the Godbold School of Business. Her experiences in the program as a student and administrator were a strength in the design of the interventions.

Dr. Waters is the program coordinator for the RN to BSN program in DCP. She is an assistant professor who accepted the position of program coordinator in June 2014. She is passionate about the opportunity to implement deep change and improve her program in regard to the experiences of nontraditional nursing students. She is a key decision maker regarding the RN to BSN program. Dr. Waters is the content knowledge expert regarding program, requirements, mission and vision of the GWU RN to BSN Program.

The implementation team consisted of Dr. Waters and Sara Newcomb. The intervention design and decision making took place within the intervention design team. Dr. Waters and Sara Newcomb worked together to implement, assess and report to the intervention design team. Additional participants included RN to BSN faculty and currently enrolled students.

Aim Statement

In order to manage the increased number of RN to BSN students GWU must:

- reduce the average time spent on new student processing in admission and academic advising by introducing mandatory online orientation and automated completion plans
- reduce the overtime worked by advisors and enrollment staff
- increase first semester student retention
- reduce faculty overload and course overload

Audience

The target audience for the information generated through the implementation plan was the RN to BSN and DCP administrative staffs. Nursing and DCP administration are the key stakeholders in the improvement processes and programming opportunities for the RN to BSN program. The RN to BSN and DCP administrators are the key decision makers regarding the program and process; it was imperative to collect and generate information that the target audience views as important when making decisions regarding the improvement effort.

Performance Measure

The focus of the implementation plan was to improve performance measures in the following areas: new student processing time, student retention, faculty workload, and course load. The goal of new student orientation was to reduce the average time that academic advisors spent processing and helping new students during the first semester. Advisors reported that during first semester registration, they were spending approximately 45 minutes per student, and the goal is to reduce the average by 20%. Student retention is an important measure for all institutions of higher education, for this intervention improving first semester retention of RN to BSN students from 78% to 85%

is a central performance measure. Also, reducing the number of course overloads and faculty overloads was important. That meant reducing the number of courses each faculty member was teaching and also reducing the number of students enrolled in each course was a priority for the upcoming Fall 2015 term.

Scan

An initial goal of this intervention was to assess the current satisfaction of enrolled students and their experience with first semester transition services and support. With this intervention, Sara Newcomb sought to determine the effect upon new RN to BSN students and their experience entering Gardner-Webb University's DCP program and the impact of the recent growth. Second, surveys were conducted to assess and gather data from new and currently enrolled students within the RN to BSN program regarding their first semester experience. The scan of the current environment regarding student experience and student satisfaction, faculty workload and morale was central in designing the innovation in the next phase of the improvement cycle. Recent literature and initial data gathered assisted in the administration of the improvement efforts.

Focus

Two interventions were developed as ways to address the excessive faculty workload regarding advising and enhancement of the student experience: development of a new student orientation and a proactive academic advising model. From the scan phase, the implementation team used data collected to guide the primary direction of the implementation team. Other activities that took place during the focus phase included:

- test initial intervention design on a small scale
- rapid short term test to readjust and improve interventions

- test in practice by review of other scholar practitioners
- refocus and produce final intervention product(s)

The evaluation and data collection exercises took place March 2015 to December 2015. The implementation plan included short and rapid assessments of change to adjust and deliver the best initiative possible. Continuous improvement efforts were used to assess and adjust to ensure positive change was occurring specifically during the delivery of personal academic advising in regards to degree planning.

Implementation

The first intervention initiated with new RN to BSN students enrolled in Fall 2015 was student orientation. Prior to the re-design and development of the student orientation, RN to BSN students received brief "getting started" materials during the admissions process in an email. The "getting started" content included only basic information regarding logging into various portals for email, online learning platforms, ordering textbooks, and financial aid. Online orientation was provided one week after the start date and was offered both during the day and evening.

Orientation

Incoming students for Fall 2015 had the opportunity to attend one of two online sessions: August 24th, 2015 at 2:00 PM and August 25, 2015 at 6:00PM. The implementation team sent e-mail blasts to all incoming students and made phone calls to students reminding them of the upcoming online orientation sessions. E-mail blasts were sent three times in the two weeks prior to the orientation dates.

Format

In the implementation, Sara Newcomb utilized online software that allowed students to access the orientation at their convenience. Students were able to log-on and access the materials in a variety of formats. Students with webcams were able to access the orientation and interact via webcam. Others without access to specific technology were encouraged to call in and participate through a toll free number. This format allowed for document and screen sharing, virtual face-to-face interaction, and session recordings. Those who were unable to participate were e-mailed a pre-recorded session.

Content

In determining the content, Dr. Nicole Water's and Sara Newcomb worked together to include the most pertinent information needed during the first semester. We intentionally limited information to approximately an hour and allowed for questions and answers from the students. Content covered included a focus on navigating and using learning management software, understanding program requirements, available student services, future registration procedures, and identifying individual academic advisors. After the orientation session, students were prompted to complete a satisfaction survey regarding their experience in orientation and usefulness of the content.

Results and Limitations

Orientation was not well attended. At the beginning of the Fall 2015 term, 54 new students enrolled in the RN to BSN program. Only 10 students (5.4%) participated in the orientation sessions offered. Of the 10 students, only three students provided feedback regarding their orientation experience. Overall, students viewed the orientation with favorable satisfaction and reported that the most critical piece of information provided was navigating the two learning management systems: WebbConnect and

Blackboard. A major limitation for this intervention was the lack of participation from the incoming Fall 2015 students. Historically, this program has not offered an orientation and students were not required to attend orientation for Fall 2015. With lack of participation, this improvement effort was difficult to assess and determine the impact on students and their first semester experience.

Proactive Advising

The second major initiative Sara Newcomb implemented at Gardner-Webb was a five-step approach for first semester academic advising. This approach to academic advising allowed students to interact with an advisor virtually and develop their own program completion plan. This five-step approach shifted the advising experience for students into an interactive model, rather than a responsive model. Currently, RN to BSN advisors provide little information to students unless the student initiates the conversation regarding his or her academic progress or asks questions about upcoming registration. The five-step approach implemented included a welcome email, introduction phone call, one-on-one academic advising, mid-term check, and final grade review.

The first step was to send incoming students a welcome e-mail. In this e-mail, Sara Newcomb introduced herself and explained that she would be working with them during their first semester. She also detailed the upcoming opportunity for one-on-one advising and provided them information needed to get started in their courses. The content included information on: ordering textbooks, accessing two learning management systems, financial aid services, and setting up their Gardner-Webb e-mail accounts. This e-mail was sent two weeks prior to start of term and was also sent to any students who enrolled late on the first day of classes for Fall 2015.

The second step was an introductory phone call to all new students. Sara Newcomb placed a phone call to all 54 new students for Fall 2015 during the first week of classes (August 17-22, 2015). All students were contacted and assisted with any issues or concerns they had with getting started during the first week of class. The most common questions regarded assistance with Gardner-Webb's online student portal, and the enrollment verification processes required of all students enrolled in online courses. At this time, students were also reminded about the upcoming opportunity to participate in virtual advising in October, in anticipation for the upcoming term's registration. Of the 54 new students for Fall 2015, Sara Newcomb spoke with 38 students (70%) individually during the first week of classes. These phone conversations allowed the students to address any critical issues that arose during the first week of classes.

The third step offered one-on-one advising sessions to teach educational planning and complete individualized completion plans. During the first two weeks of October 2015, students were invited to participate in virtual advising sessions that included: step-by-step instruction on generating and reading degree audits, developing a completion plan, interpreting and understanding transfer work and equivalencies and education of course rotations and expectations of prerequisites. Once this was completed, students were assisted in preparing for spring registration and provided direction on registration procedures for upcoming semesters. These sessions were offered in a virtual format that allowed for webcam interaction, and screen and file sharing. Students scheduled their own time to meet with an advisor through online scheduling software with day and evening times available. Sara Newcomb also offered Saturday and Sunday meeting times for those students who were working during traditional operating hours. This was a very

successful effort with 32 of the 54 students (60%) scheduling one-on-one virtual advising sessions.

The fourth step in the proactive advising model was to complete a mid-term check. Students were contacted to assess and discuss their progress at the midterm point. They were asked to participate and discuss the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix A) with their academic advisor if they reported issues with their course work and transition into the RN to BSN program. Of the 54 new students, 29 of the students (54%) engaged in the midterm review phone calls and 10 students discussed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel to help assess and refocus their efforts in their Fall 2015 courses.

Last, Sara Newcomb conducted a final grade check and adjusted course schedules as needed. This allowed her the opportunity to speak with any students who did not successfully complete courses or earned grades that did not meet the minimum requirements needed to fulfill graduation requirements. This also allowed the opportunity to encourage and work with students who were struggling academically in their first semester course work.

Results and Limitations

In order to assess the proactive academic advising model students were given the opportunity to complete a survey regarding their virtual advising experience and a survey regarding their overall satisfaction of first semester services in the RN to BSN program. The first survey was provided for students to complete following their one-on-one academic advising experience. Twenty-two of the 32 students (69%) who participated in academic advising completed a survey. Of the 22 respondents, 100% strongly agreed

that the advising session was informative and helpful. Seventy-seven percent of respondents reported that they strongly agreed and 22% agreed with the following statement, "I am confident in my ability to run and interpret my own Degree Evaluation". In addition, all respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were confident in interpreting their transfer work, had a clear understanding of registration procedures, and the advising session was a good use of their time (see Appendix H). Students were asked to offer their comments on the most important aspect of orientation, and their responses focuses on understanding their transfer work, learning how to run degree evaluations, and developing a completion plan.

First semester retention rate was an indicator of the interventions success. Forty-nine of the 54 students who participated in the intervention (90%) returned for the Spring 2016 term. This was an increase from the previous three semesters. In Fall 2014 only 85.5% of the new students enrolled returned Spring 2015. Also, 72.7% of new students in Spring 2015 continued and enrolled in Fall 2015. Historically, the average first semester student retention for the previous 10 semesters was 85%. An increase was documented after the implementation of the interventions for Fall 2015 to Spring 2016. Long term assessment and implementation is needed to continue examining the impact upon first semester retention and overall program retention for graduates.

Technology was one limitation identified. Currently, GWU does not require all online students to have personal access to computers or require students to have minimum technology requirements. Some online students still use public computer access to complete online class work. Some students were able to take advantage of virtual advising using webcams, file sharing, and screen sharing, while others were

limited. For students lacking access to technology, Sara Newcomb used phone conferencing to cover content. She followed up with completion plans via email to provide the same advising experience.

Recommendations

In response to the lack of participation in new student orientation, the implementation team decided to discontinue offering orientation in future terms and shift resources to the first semester advising approach. A key recommendation and strategic decision was to change the timeline of when virtual one-on-one advising occurs for new students. For the Fall 2015 term, virtual advising was offered during the first two weeks of registration, October 2015. This was eight to nine weeks into the student's first semester at GWU. In order to provide students with the needed information offered in orientation, the implementation team decided to offer the one-on-one advising sessions earlier in the first semester. This will allow students to receive the information provided in orientation, and also participate in the one-on-one advising experience. For the Spring 2016 term, students will be offered virtual advising appointments during weeks four or five in the first semester. With the discontinuation of orientation, the welcome e-mail and introductory phone call will address specific start of term issues previously addressed in the orientation. If the success of the advising effort continues, the implementation team anticipates the development and proposal of a full-time academic advisor position. This new positon would serve the RN to BSN student population. Assessing student satisfaction and long term student retention data will be used to justify a new position with the nursing department.

SECTION 9: COLLABORATIVE REFLECTION

Nontraditional students face many life challenges as they attempt to complete educational programs and increase their earning potential. Supportive interventions fostered by educational institutions are central to the success of these students. The shared interventions of a proactive advising model, comprehensive orientation, and faculty mentoring had a positive impact on the student success with all three programs. Our focus to bolster nontraditional student success was accomplished by facilitating active student engagement. These improvement efforts assisted students to better understand the requirements of each program and engage in a personalized and collaborative relationship with an advisor or mentor.

The comprehensive program orientation, proactive advising model and faculty mentoring were supported by the positive impact on student retention and success. These interventions provided the student with information and support to reduce barriers and be successful. By implementing the *plan, do, study, act* cycle, we were successful in facilitating incremental change (Langley et al., 2009). The PDSA cycle was a key component of each scholar practitioner's improvement efforts, and allowed for continuous improvement grounded in theory, evidenced-based research, and institutional data. This model allowed for a systematic way to assess and document the improvement efforts implemented in each educational setting. The results of each practitioner's improvement efforts allowed for clear recommendations and strategic ways to move forward in addressing the needs and defined problems of practice in their educational setting to bolster nontraditional student success.

Working as a Networked Improvement Community was a powerful and new experience for the disquisition team. The disquisition team members came from varied educational settings, bringing unique pedagogical knowledge and skills that were applicable to a common problem of practice. Collaboratively formulating improvement interventions, resulted in positive improvements in student learning and retention. These improvement interventions bolstered nontraditional student success within each team member's educational setting and will continue to impact students success in the future at McDowell Technical Community College and Gardner-Webb University.

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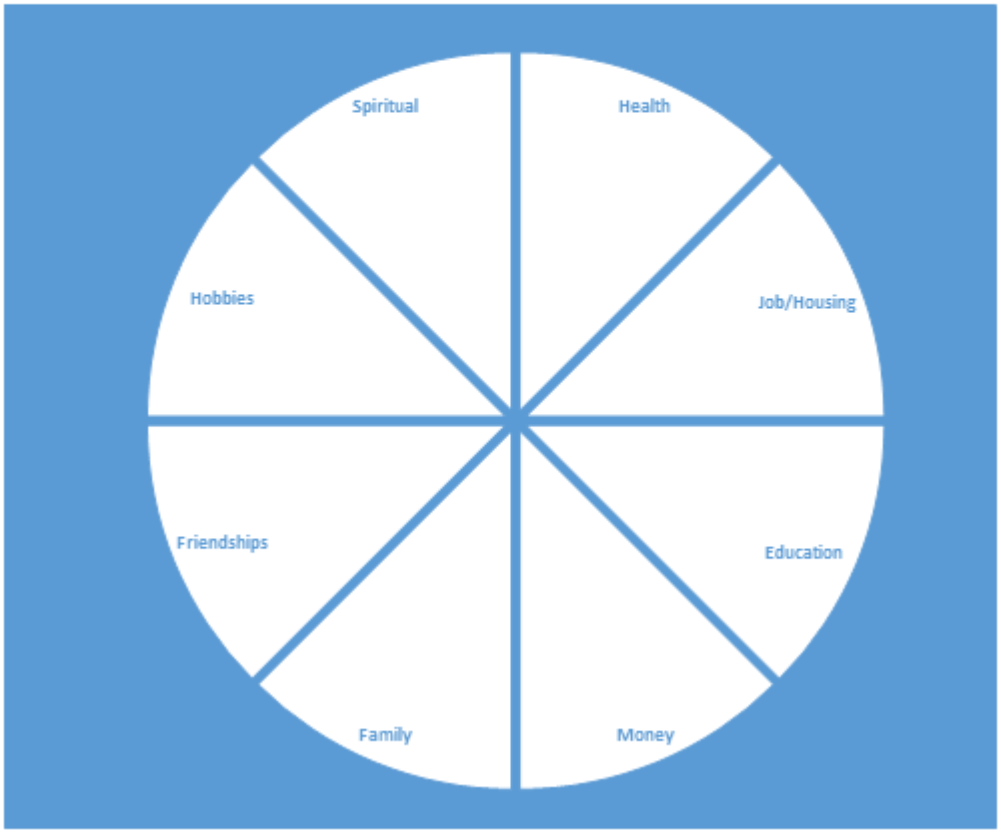
APPENDIX A

Proactive Advising Lifewheel

Student:_____ Initial Meeting Date:_____
Advisor:_____ Second Meeting Date:_____



In each section, draw a picture to symbolize the respective aspect of your life. Using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest, how would you rate each area in terms of satisfaction? Please place your ratings below.

Health____ **Family____**

Job____ **Friendships____**

Education____ **Hobbies____**

Money____ **Spiritual____**

Discovery/Advising Activity

Actively discuss the student's responses shared on the advising wheel. Use the following prompts and questions to guide your discussion.

1." Let's discuss the items that you rated a 6 or greater." "Why did you rate each of these areas as you did?"

2. "Let's discuss the items that you rated a 5 or lower." "Why did you rate each of these areas as you did?" "Let's discuss activities you could participate in to increase you score(s) in these areas."

3. "Are the items that you ranked 5 or lower creating educational barriers for you? If so, let's discuss strategies to help you raise these ratings." "Let's write some goals or strategies to improve these lower rated aspects." PROMPT: Share needed resources!

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

4. PROMPT: Facilitate proactive discussion to address the lower rated aspects. PROMPT: Share findings from your own advising wheel to help establish rapport and a supportive relationship with the student.

5. PROMPT: After strategies are discussed and documented, schedule follow-up advising session with student in two weeks to monitor progress.

Advisor's contact information: _____ Student's contact information: _____

Phone: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____ Email: _____

Next advising session: Date: _____ Time: _____

APPENDIX B

MTCC College and Career Readiness Student Responses to the Proactive Advising Lifewheel

Student	Health	Job	Education	Money	Family	Friendships	Hobbies	Spiritual
1	8	1	5	1	10	10	9	2
2	10	1	5	1	10	1	10	10
3	1	1	1	1	10	10	8	2
4	8	1	6	1	5	1	10	10
5	8	5	5	7	10	9	7	6
6	8	3	7	3	9	1	8	5
7	2	10	5	5	10	2	1	2
8	10	1	5	1	10	10	10	6
9	10	8	2	6	10	0	7	2
10	8	1	8	2	10	5	10	10
11	10	8	6	8	10	10	10	5
12	5	0	7	6	10	3	7	9
13	8	1	7	1	5	7	10	2
14	10	5	10	7	10	7	6	10
15	8	0	0	0	5	8	5	10
16	7	0	0	0	4	8	10	6
17	10	8	8	7	10	10	5	10
18	8	6	7	3	4	5	1	2
19	8	1	7	1	10	9	9	9

*Satisfied 6-10 ** Dissatisfied 0-5

Health	Job	Education	Money	Family	Friendships	Hobbies	Spiritual
*84% **16%	*26% *74%	*53% **47%	*32% **68%	*68% **32%	*58% **42%	*79% **21%	*58% **42%

APPENDIX C

MTCC College and Career Readiness: Descriptive Scan Analysis

Student Gender	Date Enrolled	Assessed Area	Placement Scale Score and EFL	Post-test Scale Score and EFL	Student Outcome Increase	GED Earned	Actively Enrolled
male	06/15/15	TABE 9A Reading	SS 621 EFL 12.9	No post-test needed	n/a	no	no
female	06/15/15	TABE 9D Math	SS 559 EFL 8.4	no	no	no	no
male	06/15/15	TABE 9A Math	SS 574 EFL 9.5	no	no	no	no
female	06/15/15	TABE 9D Math	SS 559 EFL 8.4	SS 650 EFL 12.9	yes	no	no
male	06/15/15	TABE 9M Math	SS 529 EFL 7.1	no	no	no	no
male	06/15/15	TABE 9A Reading	SS 586 EFL 11.0	SS 625 EFL 12.9	yes	yes	graduate
female	06/15/15	TABE 9M Math	SS 421 EFL 3.3	SS 489 EFL 5.5	yes	no	no
male	06/15/15	TABE 9M Reading	SS 458 EFL 2.9	no	no	no	no
female	06/15/15	TABE 9M Math	SS 471 EFL 4.9	SS 495 EFL 5.6	yes	No	yes
female	06/15/15	TABE 9M Math	SS 416 EFL 3.3	SS 511 EFL 6.1	yes	No	yes
Male	06/15/15	TABE 9A Reading	SS 495 EFL 4.2	no	no	No	no
Female	06/15/15	TABE 9D Math	SS 542 EFL 7.6	SS 559 EFL 8.4	yes	Yes	graduate
Male	06/15/15	TABE 9A Reading	SS 602 EFL 12.5	Not needed	n/a	No	no
Female	06/15/15	TABE 9D Reading	SS 542 EFL 7.4	SS 554 EFL 8.4	yes	Yes	graduate
Male	06/15/15	TABE 9A Reading	SS 621 EFL 12.9	not needed	n/a	Yes	graduate

Female	06/15/15	TABE 9A Reading	SS 533 EFL 6.5	SS 556 EFL 8.6	yes	Yes	graduate
Male	06/15/15	TABE 9A Reading	SS 558 EFL 10.0	SS 586 EFL 11.0	yes	no	yes
Male	06/15/15	TABE 9D Reading	SS 482 EFL 3.5	no	no	no	no
female	06/15/15	TABE 9D Reading	SS 518 EFL 5.6	no	no	no	no

APPENDIX D

Training Protocol - Proactive Advising Lifewheel

1) The facilitator meets with a small group (10-15) participants.
2) Each participant is given a copy of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel and asked to draw a picture that symbolizes the respective aspects of their life.
3) Using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest, participants are encouraged to rate each life aspect in terms of satisfaction.
4) The facilitator utilizes the debriefing questions to encourage the participants share their results with the facilitator.
5) Participants share their ratings of their life categories providing opportunities for the facilitator to share campus and community services that may assist the participant in attending class and completing their educational goals.

APPENDIX E

Icebreaker and Team Building Activities

Icebreaker Candy Game

Provide snack packs of M&Ms or Skittles. Have everyone in the group take one pack. For each piece of candy taken out of the pack the student will have to answer a question depending on the color of the candy.

Red-What are your favorite hobbies?
Green-What are your favorite foods
Yellow-What are your favorite books?
Orange-What are your favorite places to travel?
Brown-Share a memorable or embarrassing moment
Purple-Tells us about your family/friends
Blue-Wild Card, share anything you wish

Team Building-Drop the Ball

Drop the Ball Time: 10–12 minutes

Purpose: Cooperation and healthy competition

Participants: Small groups (5-6 in each group)

Materials needed: Golf balls, straws, tape Instructions:

• Each small group receives 12 straws and 18 inches of masking tape. The group has ten minutes to build a container that will catch a golf ball dropped from about ten feet.

• Each group selects a 'ball dropper' — that person stands on a chair, holds a golf ball at eye level. That group places its container on the floor under where it thinks the ball will land. Each group gets three attempts.

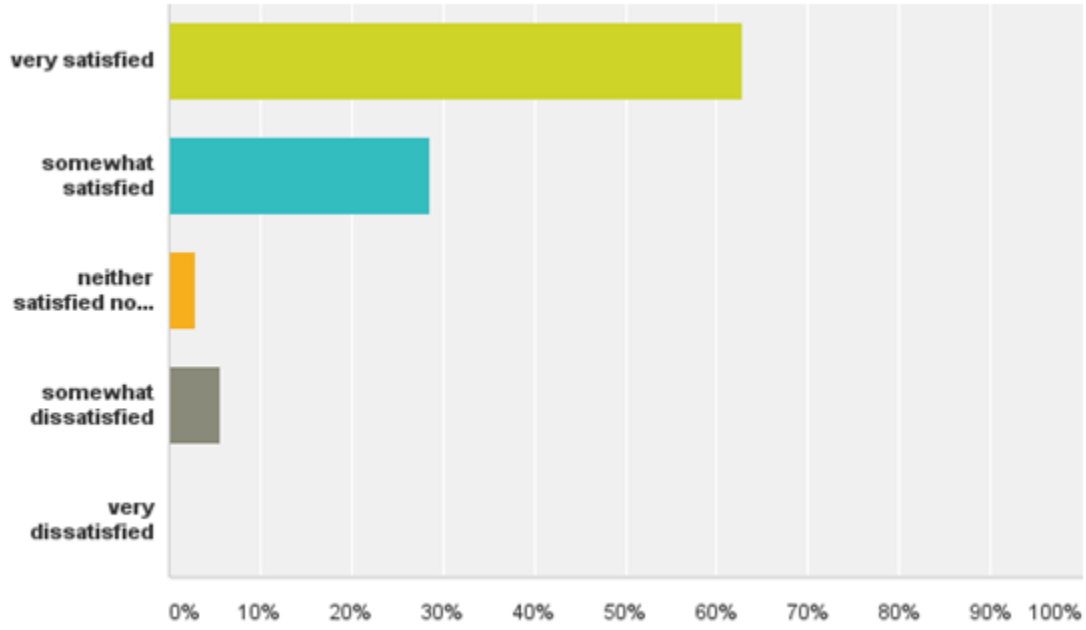
• The group that gets a ball to go in and stay in its container wins.

Desired outcome: Teams can use their experiences in the game to overcome work problems and relational issues.

APPENDIX F

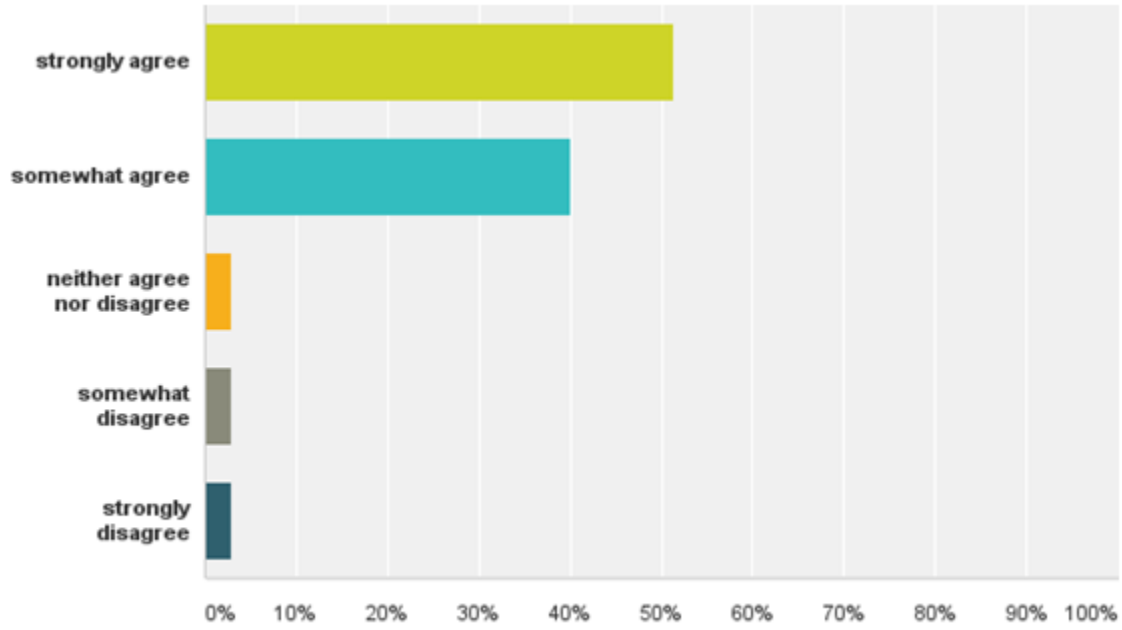
McDowell Technical Community College
Practical Nurse Student Orientation Survey via SurveyMonkey

Q1: How satisfied are you with the comprehensive program orientation session for the Practical Nurse program?



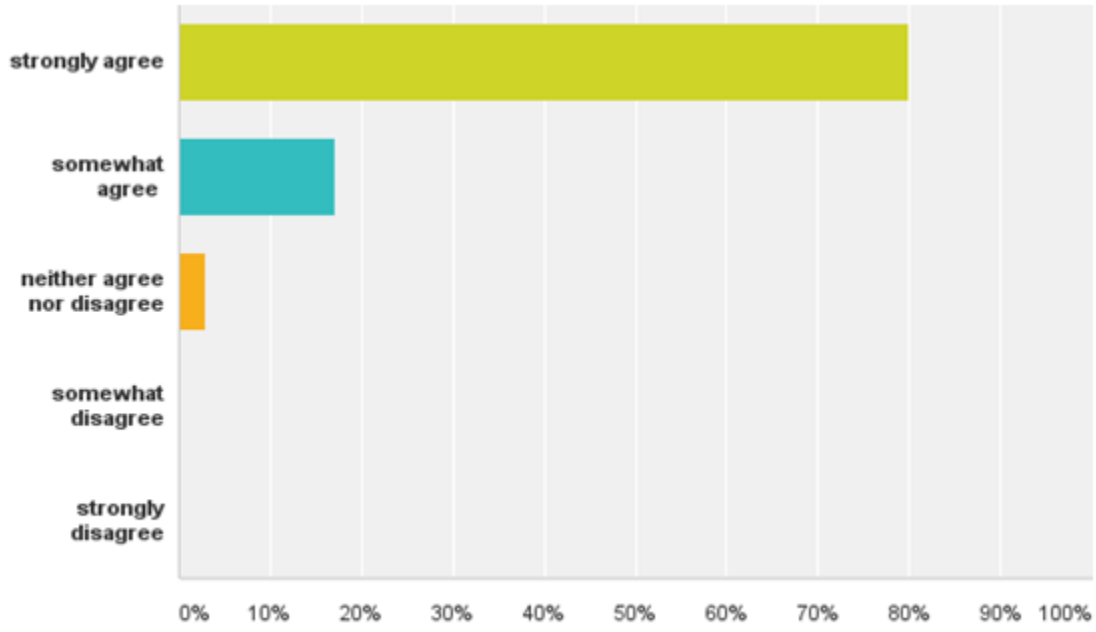
Answer Choices	Responses	
very satisfied	**62.86%**	22
somewhat satisfied	**28.57%**	10
neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	**2.86%**	1
somewhat dissatisfied	**5.71%**	2
very dissatisfied	**0.00%**	0
Total		**35**

Q2: The comprehensive program orientation prepared me for the expectations of the nursing program



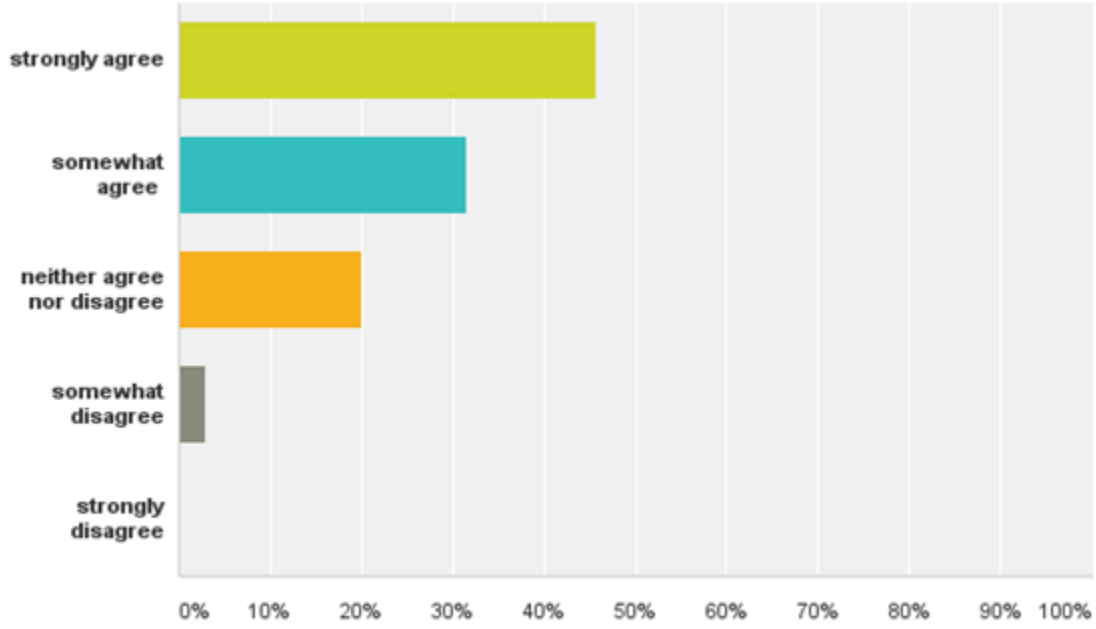
Answer Choices	Responses	
strongly agree	**51.43%**	18
somewhat agree	**40.00%**	14
neither agree nor disagree	**2.86%**	1
somewhat disagree	**2.86%**	1
strongly disagree	**2.86%**	1
Total		**35**

Q3: At the comprehensive program orientation I learned about campus resources that are available to me if I am having academic difficulty



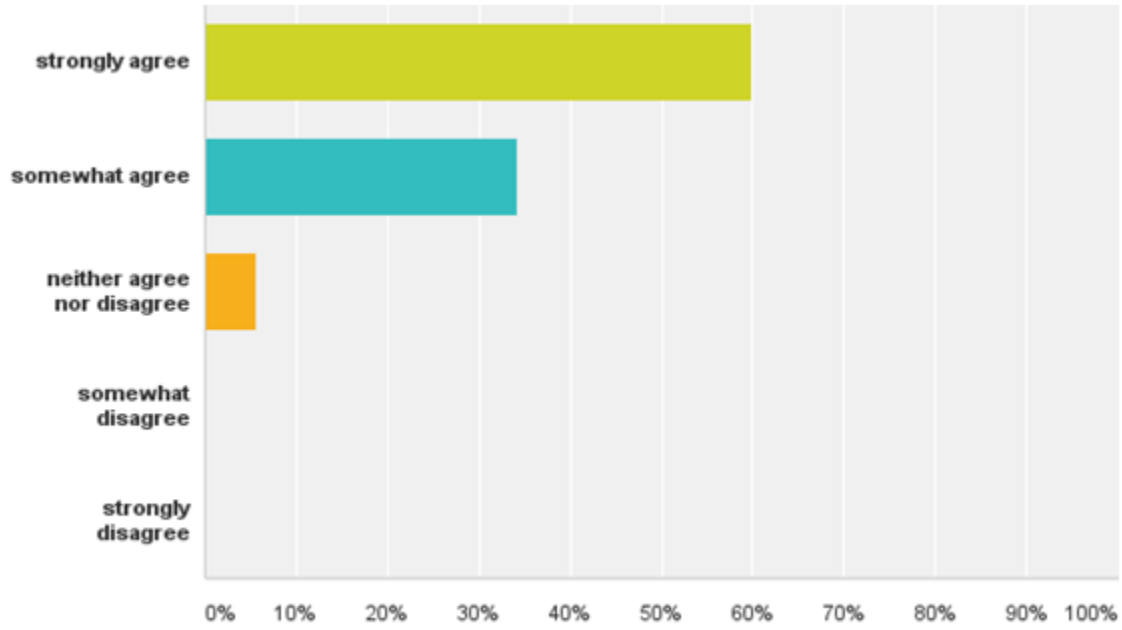
Answer Choices	Responses	
strongly agree	**80.00%**	28
somewhat agree	**17.14%**	6
neither agree nor disagree	**2.86%**	1
somewhat disagree	**0.00%**	0
strongly disagree	**0.00%**	0
Total		**35**

Q4: The comprehensive program orientation helped me feel connected to my classmates



Answer Choices	Responses	
strongly agree	**45.71%**	16
somewhat agree	**31.43%**	11
neither agree nor disagree	**20.00%**	7
somewhat disagree	**2.86%**	1
strongly disagree	**0.00%**	0
Total		**35**

Q5: All of my questions were answered during the comprehensive program orientation



Answer Choices	Responses	
strongly agree	**60.00%**	21
somewhat agree	**34.29%**	12
neither agree nor disagree	**5.71%**	2
somewhat disagree	**0.00%**	0
strongly disagree	**0.00%**	0
Total		**35**

Q6: Do you have any suggestions to improve the comprehensive program orientation for the Practical Nurse program?

everything has been great so far

none

none

no by far the best orientation to a program or class I have ever had

None significant

divide the orientation into day and night sections so that students can meet just there class and the group size is smaller less overwhelming

N/A

No. I felt it was very thorough and we were given all necessary information to prepare us.

None. Wonderful orientation. I was very satisfied.

No....the teachers and nursing staff are wonderful

APPENDIX G

MTCC Practical Nurse Student Responses to the Proactive Advising Lifewheel

Student	Health	Job	Education	Money	Family	Friendships	Hobbies	Spiritual
1	9	6	10	8	10	9	6	8
2	10	6	5	8	7	7	7	10
3	7	9	9	8	10	4	5	10
4	6	7	5	5	10	10	5	6
5	8	6	5	2	6	6	5	5
6	10	9	10	10	10	9	8	10
7	6	6	8	6	10	10	6	6
8	10	9	10	5	10	6	5	10
9	3	5	3	0	8	5	0	5
10	7	7	6	7	8	7	9	8
11	8	8	5	5	10	9	4	5
12	7	5	6	3	9	8	4	10
13	10	10	10	10	10	7	8	9
14	9	9	8	8	10	8	6	10
15	9	5	19	5	19	3	7	10
16	10	8	3	4	10	5	3	7
17	10	10	10	10	10	5	5	10
18	8	7	8	6	10	7	5	10
19	5	6	9	7	10	4	3	8
20	9	8	10	8	10	8	6	10
21	9	5	5	3	9	9	8	6
22	10	9	9	8	10	8	7	8
23	8	5	10	3	10	10	3	10

24	9	1	10	8	8	3	2	10
25	10	6	8	8	10	9	7	10
26	9	10	5	5	10	10	8	8
27	8	10	5	5	10	9	10	7
28	5	10	9	8	10	8	2	10
29	8	9	6	7	10	10	6	8
30	5	8	5	3	8	9	6	3
31	9	6	7	6	10	8	5	10
32	10	10	10	10	10	3	1	7
33	8	7	5	6	9	1	2	10
34	10	10	8	8	10	7	7	9
35	10	7	7	6	10	10	5	10
36	10	7	8	6	10	6	7	9
37	5	2	7	3	6	8	4	7
38	10	10	10	5	10	5	5	10
39	5	6	7	7	10	9	2	8
40	10	8	7	10	10	10	7	10
41	7	9	9	7	10	10	10	10
42	6	5	9	3	8	7	4	10
43	99	8	8	7	10	6	5	9
44	8	7	9	6	10	9	9	5
45	8	5	7	4	9	9	5	10

*Satisfied 6-10 ** Dissatisfied 0-5

Health	Job	Education	Money	Family	Friendships	Hobbies	Spiritual
39/45 *87% 6/45 **13%	6/45 *87% 6/45 **13%	34/45 * 75% 11/45 **25%	28/45 *62% 17/45 **38%	45/45 *100%	35/35 *78% 10/45 **22%	21/45 * 43% 24/45 **57%	40/45 * 89% 5/45 **11%

APPENDIX H

Gardner-Webb Advising Satisfaction Survey

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Weighted Average
Academic advising is important to me during my college career.	**90.48%** 19	**9.52%** 2	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	21	1.10
After the advising session, I have a better understanding of what courses I need to graduate from GWU.	**77.27%** 17	**22.73%** 5	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	22	1.23
I am confident in my ability to run and interpret my own Degree Evaluation.	**77.27%** 17	**22.73%** 5	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	22	1.23
I felt the content was well organized.	**90.91%** 20	**9.09%** 2	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	22	1.09
I got all of my questions answered during the Advising session.	**95.45%** 21	**4.55%** 1	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	22	1.05
I have a clear understanding of my transfer work.	**72.73%** 16	**27.27%** 6	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	22	1.27
It was easy to schedule an advising session time with Doodle.	**90.91%** 20	**9.09%** 2	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	22	1.09

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Weighted Average
The advising session helped me to know what to expect regarding Spring 2016 registration.	**90.91%** 20	**9.09%** 2	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	22	1.09
The advising session was a good use of my time.	**85.71%** 18	**14.29%** 3	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	**0.00%** 0	21	1.14

ARTIFACT: JOURNAL ARTICLE

INTERVENTIONS TO INCREASE SUCCESS OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Amy Cooke
Penelope Cross
Sara Allen Newcomb

February 2016

ABSTRACT

Historically, nontraditional students seek enrollment in a community college or university to earn a credential that may increase their earning potential. The purpose of this article is to share the three common interventions that were implemented at McDowell Technical Community College and Gardner-Webb University. The aim of each intervention was to bolster the success of nontraditional students involved in three specific cohorts. Community colleges and private institutions of higher learning enroll a significant number of nontraditional students. It is often difficult for these students to earn a credential or achieve their educational goals due to their defining characteristics. With an extensive population of nontraditional students, it is imperative that these institutions provide deliberate support services that identify, address, and reduce probable barriers these adult learners may encounter. Like other state and private agencies, educational institutions are held to a high standard. Accountability is in the forefront of every public and private institution. All colleges and universities are closely monitored and held accountable for the outcomes of their students. As a result, a portion of monetary resources may be contingent on program performance. While any reduction in funding can have a negative impact on the institution, one must not overlook the economic impact on the earning potential of nontraditional students. The intent of the interventions was to foster deep change by capitalizing on human relationships formed during new student orientation. This was accomplished through proactive advising and student mentoring. As collaborative practitioners we define the problem, share interventions, and analyze the results of this collaborative improvement journey.

Keywords: collaborative practitioners, educational success, nontraditional students, proactive advising

INTRODUCTION

In a global competitive environment, advanced educational attainment is vital for individuals to secure sustainable employment. For nontraditional students to achieve educational advancement, career pathways must be clearly articulated. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), nontraditional students have a number of common characteristics that may present barriers limiting their ability to complete educational programs (Choy, 2002). The NCES reports that 73% of all undergraduates in 1999–2000 were classified as nontraditional students (Choy, 2002). With this substantial student population, it is apparent that new research initiatives that target student retention and program completion are critical topics for both stakeholders and collaborative practitioners. While the definition of nontraditional learners continues to evolve, there are a number of key indicators or commonalities researchers often share in their discoveries. Herein, we define nontraditional learners as students who are:

- seeking a credential, diploma or degree—part-time or full-time
- working part-time or full-time
- balancing family responsibilities
- seeking alternative scheduling opportunities: distance education, online or evening programs

Understanding the unique characteristics of nontraditional students in higher education has become increasingly important in fostering and supporting student success. Nontraditional learners must balance the daily responsibilities of family, employment, and work if they are to achieve their educational goals. Institutions, administrators, and staff work with nontraditional students to address potential barriers, so students can

successfully complete an educational pathway or program. Educational practitioners require relevant and evidence-based data to inform and guide decisions regarding policies and best practices that impact nontraditional students.

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE OVERVIEW

Nontraditional students are the majority at community colleges, and in other degree completion programs in higher education. Moreover, in 2002, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that nearly three-quarters of all undergraduates were classified as nontraditional students (Choy). The 2006 report generated by the U.S. Department of Education, NCES, indicates that students ages 25 and over increased by 17% between 1990 and 2004. Also, NCES's longitudinal analysis in 2005 states that 1.3 million students aged 30 to 34 were enrolled nationally in higher education institutions. The researchers projected that by 2015 the number of students aged 30 to 34 would increase to 1.7 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). According to Aslanian, as noted by Spitzer (2000), by 1995 only about 20% of U.S. college students were full-time, in residence, and under 22 years of age. The traditional student of the 1970's just out of high school, relying on mom and dad for financial support and working only part-time or not at all is now the exception rather than the rule in many college programs (Brock, 2010).

The majority of community college students are first-generation college students. First generation college students face multiple barriers that limit their ability to complete a college program. Most of these students have full or part-time jobs and drop out of college at a higher rate than traditional college students. They have more difficulty with social integration into college life and may be underprepared academically due to being

out of school for an extended period (Morest, 2013). The characteristics of the nontraditional student are well documented. According to Kenner and Weinerman (2011), "students older than 25 have at least four nontraditional factors: financial independence, full-time employment, dependents, and part-time enrollment" (p. 88). In a report written for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) by Horn and Carroll (1996) non-traditional students were also defined as those who may lack a high school credential and are seeking further education to secure better paying jobs or new career opportunities.

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICIONERS

The purpose of this article is to describe the development, implementation, and evaluation of interventions aimed to positively impact the educational success of nontraditional students in three educational programs located in North Carolina (NC). This culminating improvement effort was the result of extensive research and collaboration that addressed an authentic problem of practice in the educational workplace. The collaborative process was different from a traditional research-based project by focusing on building organizational capacity for continuous evidence-based improvement. These culminating activities utilized inquiry processes to define, address, and solve complex problems of practice. As collaborative practitioners, we researched nontraditional student data in the following areas: population growth, existing barriers to program or degree completion, and evaluation of the advising protocol at their educational institutions. These investigations supported the development and implementation of a proactive advising model for each of their college programs. Amy Cooke focuses on nontraditional students enrolled in the College and Career Readiness

(CCR) program at McDowell Technical Community College (MTCC). Penny Cross targets nontraditional nursing students enrolled in the Practical Nursing program at MTCC and Sara Newcomb examines nontraditional nursing students in a Degree Completion Program (DCP) at Gardner-Webb University (GWU). According to Langley, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, and Provost (2009), collaboratively sharing ideas, working together, and motivating change is a critical aspect of the improvement process. Through collaborative engagement, we operate as a Networked Improvement Community (NIC). Bryk, Gomez and Grunow (2010) define a NIC as "a network that enables individuals from many different contexts to participate according to their interests and expertise while sustaining collective attention on progress toward common goals" (p. 6). Further, Bryk, Gomez and Grunow (2010) offer that a diverse mix of skills is needed to solve complex problems of practice. Each collaborative practitioner provides an overview of the unique culture of their program, the characteristics of their institution, and a summary of their improvement process.

MCDOWELL TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE – AMY COOKE

Program: College and Career Readiness

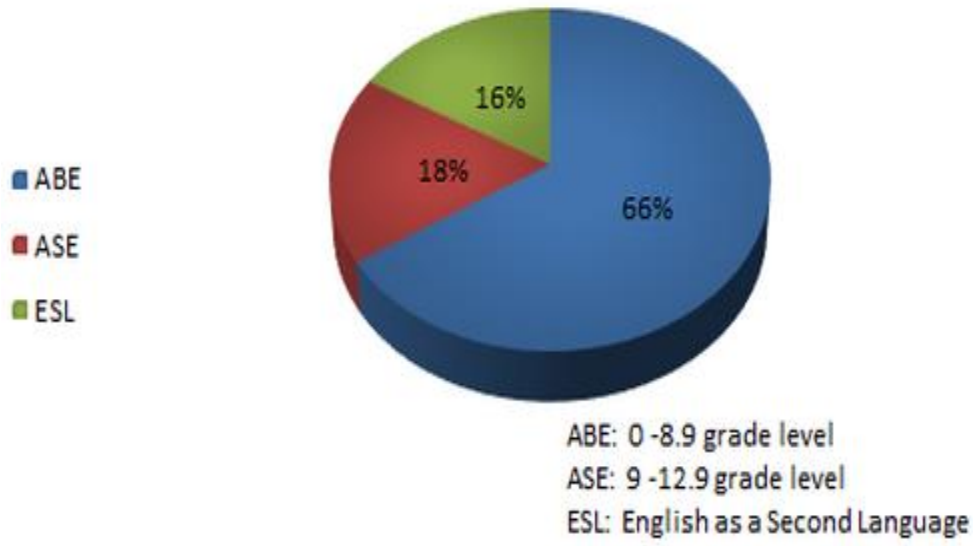
The majority of students seek enrollment in the College and Career Readiness program at MTCC because they previously "dropped out" of the traditional high school setting. Attaining basic literacy is essential for adults who are motivated to return to the classroom and continue their education. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), a division of the U. S. Department of Education, establishes clear goals for each state in the areas of student educational progress. Adult literacy programs operating in North Carolina have been striving since 2011 to increase their accountability scores, as

reported by the National Reporting System (NRS). These scores or skills impact everyday life and are often taken for granted by those who do not struggle with college-ready mathematical and literacy competencies. Basic literacy is often described as a measure of one's comprehension, vocabulary, and the ability to communicate effectively across a wide variety of contexts (Rudd, Moeykens & Colton, 1999). The federal department of OVAE classifies these adult programs in one of three categories. These categories are organized by one's level or competency in reading and math. The three categories serve as descriptors of what a typical student functioning at that level should be able to do. The NRS divides educational functioning levels (EFL) into three main categories. The three primary levels are as follows:

1. Adult Basic Education (ABE)-grade level range 0-8.9
2. Adult Secondary Education (ASE)-grade level range 9.0-12.0
3. English as a Second Language (ESL)-grade level range 0-12.0

The following pie chart represents the EFL placement for MTCC students enrolled during the 2013-2014 program year. The majority of students at MTCC place in the category of Adult Basic Education (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. 2014 Student EFL Placement



Source: NC Community Colleges, 2014

Before a new student has completed 12 hours of adult literacy instruction, they are required to be evaluated with a NRS approved assessment. This assessment establishes a placement score for each student. The assessment does not provide a comprehensive delineation of all the skills at that level, but does provide a framework to guide further assessment and instruction. After 70 hours of appropriate instruction, students are assessed again to measure if EFL movement or an educational gain has been achieved.

The first measure in the North Carolina Community College Performance Summary is based on EFL movement for adult literacy students. McDowell Technical Community College's EFL benchmark in 2014 was 35.8%. This was a shortfall of 15.4% (North Caroline Performance Summary, 2014). The desired state or goal is to increase EFL movement that will have a positive impact on the nontraditional students who are pursuing a high school credential. The Performance Measures for Student Success Report is the North Carolina Community College's primary accountability document. This annual performance report is based on data compiled from the previous

program year and serves to inform colleges and the public on the performance of all North Carolina community colleges. McDowell Technical Community College is dedicated to the validity of this system and uses outcomes to continuously monitor, evaluate, and improve the quality of programs offered at the College.

A high attrition rate is one common obstacle of adult literacy programs. In rural areas similar to the community of McDowell County, adult educational programs encounter more challenges with persistence. Many of these nontraditional students stop attending class or drop out of educational programs for a variety of reasons. When students exit a literacy program, their departure can often be attributed to changes in their life, insufficient support services, or lack of satisfaction with the adult literacy program in which they are enrolled (Comings, Cuban, Bos, Porter, & Doolittle, 2004). While the literacy program at MTCC cannot control all challenges or obstacles in a student's life, they can strive to provide effective support services. The aim of this intervention is to identify and increase the support services required for MTCC's nontraditional students to be successful.

Intervention

The aim of the improvement initiative was to increase the educational gains for new and returning CCR students at MTCC. The improvement initiative was conveyed through the implementation of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (Atkinson, 2013). This advising tool was refined by the three collaborative practitioners to encourage student reflection, engagement, and buy-in through the identification of potential educational barriers (see Appendix A). The initiative was implemented by a team of MTCC staff, instructors, and Cooke. Cooke facilitated and delivered a face-to-face training during a

staff development session on December 18, 2014 at MTCC. This session provided Cooke an opportunity to train and provide guidance on how to best implement the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. This training session also provided Cooke an opportunity to share, clarify, and answer questions about the process while forming a deeper relationship with the implementation team. Cooke discussed the importance of framing the discovery questions in a kind tone, so that the students receiving the intervention would not feel intimidated or uncomfortable. Other key stakeholders contributing to the implementation were the cohort of 19 nontraditional CCR students who would receive the intervention.

Implementation

The improvement initiative occurred on June 15, 2015 during student orientation. Student orientation is an admissions requirement for all new and returning CCR students and is held bi-monthly. During this time, all incoming students are also required to take a National Reporting System approved assessment. The College and Career Readiness program administers the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to meet this federal data reporting requirement. The Proactive Advising Lifewheel was implemented on the second day of student orientation. The aim of the intervention was to build rapport between student and advisor, and mentor students as they identified and discussed potential barriers that may restrict them from achieving their educational goals. The Proactive Advising Lifewheel was facilitated by two members of MTCC's intervention team. The cohort receiving the improvement initiative consisted of 19 students. Each student was asked to draw a picture that symbolized eight aspects of their life. Using these responses, students were also asked to rate each aspect in terms of satisfaction by

using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest. Once completed, students then shared their results privately with their advisor who was also a member of the implementation team. It was important for the advisor to follow the five prompts provided in the second section of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. These questions were designed to jumpstart authentic conversations and gather information from the CCR students in a safe nonthreatening environment. With this pertinent informal information, the advisor could suggest strategies or support services that may address any educational barriers.

Results

One hundred percent of the 19 incoming College and Career Readiness students completed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel during new student orientation. The majority of CCR students were satisfied with their family, health, and hobbies. Documented areas in their life that received low ratings were satisfaction with their job, money, and education. The advisors individually debriefed each student prior to their enrolling in the College and Career Readiness program at MTCC. According to both advisors, completing the Proactive Advising Lifewheel encouraged active collaboration between the students and themselves**.** These early conversations established an opportunity before actual enrollment for advisors to identify, and recommend campus or community resources that might assist these nontraditional students in being able to attend class and complete their educational goals. After these initial conversations, a second advising session was scheduled as a follow-up. This second session was important to further nurture the student and advisor relationship, and determines if further assistance or support was needed. This also provided an opportunity for advisors to

check the status of their recommendations and gauge if there were additional barriers that were not previously identified.

At the end of the 90-day cycle, a descriptive statistical scan was performed to measure the assessment of change. The data collection fields were placement and post-test scores, increase in EFL, GED® attainment, and current active student enrollment in a CCR class. Of the 11 students who were placed in reading, four students or 36% made educational gains on the TABE approved NRS assessment. In addition, four of the eight students or 50% who placed in math demonstrated EFL level movement, five students or 26% earned their GED®, and four members of the cohort or 21% were still enrolled in a CCR class.

Limitations

Limitations of the intervention are largely directed at the uncontrollable factors that can often be attributed to students being nontraditional. Student attendance is usually sporadic in adult literacy programs and it can be difficult to provide effective advising sessions when students do not attend on a regular basis. Active student attendance is also central for follow-up sessions to occur. A number of CCR students who received the Proactive Advising Lifewheel intervention appeared to be hesitant when asked to rate certain aspects of their life. Without this transparency, it was difficult for advisors to suggest strategies that would help address potential educational barriers. Also, it was not a requirement for students to take advantage of the suggested resources that were shared during the advising sessions. In addition, three of the nontraditional students had confirmed learning disabilities that were identified years earlier while in the traditional

school setting. Adults with disabilities may perceive that their educational choices are limited and struggle with academic success (Rocco & Fornes, 2010).

Recommendations

The intervention of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel establishes an opportunity for open dialogue to occur between incoming students and their advisors. Through these deliberate conversations, advisors can share community and college support services in a communal environment. In addition, these resources or support services are often universal and available to students free of charge. Facilitating this intervention early during program orientation is vital for the success of adult literacy students. This active exchange is especially important as adult literacy programs help nontraditional students identify potential attendance barriers that may have a negative impact on their ability to earn a secondary credential, continue their education, or attain employment.

MCDOWELL TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE – PENNY CROSS

Program: Practical Nursing

The MTCC Practical Nurse Education program was established in 1975. It is a one-year, diploma program and admits up to 44 nursing students per year. The top 44 students meeting program admission criteria are offered admission into the day or evening section and additionally 10 to 12 students are offered alternate status. The PNE program consists of both day and evening sections; 24 students are admitted to the day section and 20 students are admitted to the evening section. Students typically spend a minimum of two to three semesters preparing to enter the PNE program. Not every student who applies is accepted; it is a selective admission program. The MTCC PNE program is a rigorous diploma program that requires steadfast student commitment for

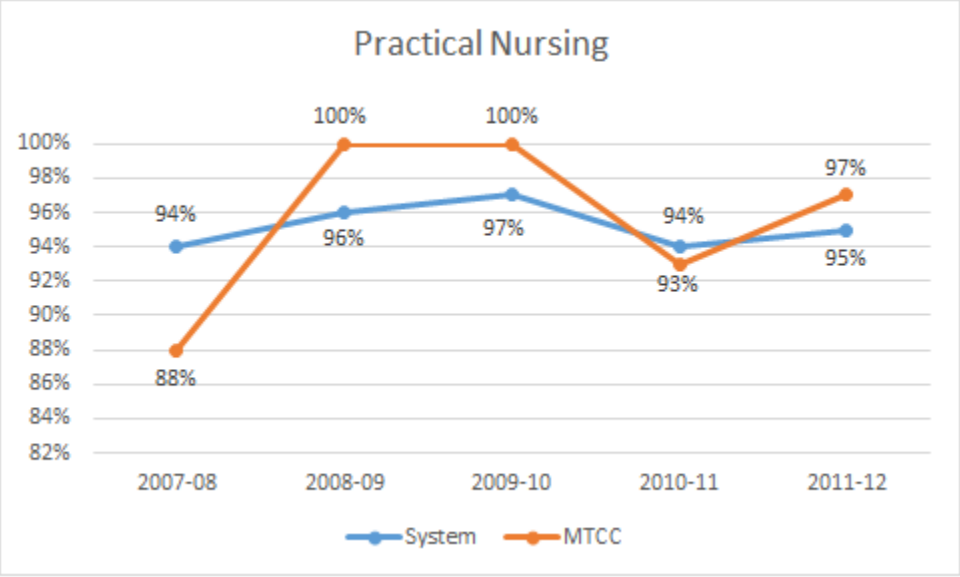
completion. Successful completion of the nursing program is the first step to a nursing career. Low retention rates for nursing schools are nationwide and global phenomena (Last, 2003; National League of Nursing, 2007). Not all students admitted to nursing programs complete the program. The North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON, 2012) reports the three-year (2010-2012) aggregate retention rate for the MTCC PNE program is 78% and the average retention rate for all North Carolina diploma practical nursing programs is 63% for the same time period.

On average, today's nursing student (1) is older, (2) is a caregiver for children and/or parents (3) is enrolled in a nursing program while working, and (4) has been out of high school for several years (Jeffreys, 2007a). Nontraditional nursing students in the community college setting possess their own unique history, abilities, challenges, and needs (Rudel, 2006). Following the national trend, the majority of the MTCC Practical Nurse Education students are nontraditional students. The PNE class of 2014-2015 was comprised of 42 students ranging in age from 19 to 51. The majority of the students were in the age categories of 21 to 25 and 26 to 30 (MTCC, 2014). Most of the students were employed full or part-time and have children. Many MTCC nursing students pursue a career in nursing in search of a more lucrative career.

Upon successful completion of the practical nursing program, graduates are eligible to sit for the National Council Licensure Exam-Practical Nurse (NCLEX-PN). The nursing school graduate must pass the exam in order to be a licensed practical nurse. A nursing school's NCLEX pass rate is a quality indicator. All nursing schools strive to have a 100% pass rate. The North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) is the entity that approves nursing programs. The NCBON sets the North Carolina nursing pass rate as

95% of the national average. The national average typically ranges from 86% to 88%. If a nursing school's pass rate is below average three years in succession, the program is required to conduct a self-study to determine how the pass rate will be increased. The MTCC PNE three-year (2011-2013) average pass rate is 94%. The average pass rate of all North Carolina PNE programs is also 94% (NCBON, 2013) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Licensure/Certification Exams Practical Nursing



Source: MTCC, 2013 Fact Book

Jeffreys (2007b) describes a nursing school model of Ideal Success as Entry-Progression Retention-Graduation-Nurse Licensure Exam-pass on the first attempt. This student trajectory progression pathway reveals three different retention pathways (ideal, continuous, and interim/stopout), three attrition pathways (first semester failure, voluntary, and involuntary), and three licensure pathways (pass on the first attempt, fail on the first attempt and pass at a later date, or never pass NCLEX). This model is an approach aimed at documenting and understanding the pathways of nursing students today. Jeffreys' (2007b) model recognizes factors that may affect the Ideal Success

pathway such as pre-nursing GPA, anatomy and physiology grades, transfer credit and current grades. Jeffreys notes that progression may lead to graduation or may result in a dropout, stop out, or dismissal. If the student progresses to graduation and the nurse licensure exam, the graduate may (1) pass on the first attempt, (2) fail on the first attempt and pass at a later date or (3) never pass NCLEX. Ideally, nursing school students progress and graduate from the nursing program and pass NCLEX as first-time test takers.

Nursing schools must face the dual duty of admitting qualified students and retaining those students through program completion. Giddens (2009) asks "Is there really anything to celebrate when a nursing program with only 50% persistence to graduation rate boasts of a 100% first-time NCLEX-RN pass rate?" (p.124). Students must be given every chance for achievement and the nursing program has a duty to offer them the tools to be successful. Giddens (2009) spotlights the issue of balancing student retention with the all-important NCLEX. Batts (2014) reports a key issue affecting the healthcare workforce as attrition in nursing and allied health education programs. Attrition impacts the number of available graduates in these fields and is also costly to the educational entities and the students. Furthermore, Batts (2014) states "Because community colleges play a key role in the education of healthcare providers, reducing attrition in this setting would have a positive impact on students, community colleges, and the state's healthcare workforce" (p. 62).

The MTCC PNE program currently utilizes many strategies to support student success. The initial strategy for success is the admission criteria. The admission criteria ensure that admitted students are able to function at an acceptable academic level in order

to have a positive likelihood of completing a diploma program. The second success strategy includes mandatory program and course orientations for all required nursing courses. Once the students are offered admission, they are required to attend a four-hour nursing program orientation. The program orientation consists of a welcome from the director and the faculty, a general overview of the program, collection of documentation such as immunization records and proof of cardiopulmonary resuscitation certification, and uniform fittings. Student advising takes place at class registration times and as needed. The faculty act in the capacity of academic advisors.

The third success strategy includes requiring the students to utilize a Comprehensive Assessment and Remediation Program (CARP) from Assessment Technologies Institute, Inc. (ATI). ATI is utilized by students in the first semester and throughout the program. The CARP offers comprehensive testing and remediation to evaluate student learning as they progress through the three semesters. The ATI comprehensive predictor is given in the last semester to evaluate the probability of the student passing the NCLEX-PN. McDowell Technical Community College's PNE program is utilizing proven strategies to aid in student success and retention.

Rudel (2006) states that nursing schools have an obligation to understand how to meet the challenges facing nontraditional nursing students and it should be a measure of quality assurance for the program. The current program orientation method does not adequately welcome, engage or prepare incoming nursing students for the reality of nursing school. Students have family and work obligations that impact how much time they will have available to meet the demands of nursing school. An enhanced model of program orientation will emphasize the student and family commitment that will be

required. Nursing school program orientation should be informative, thorough and reflective of all aspects and expectations of the student once they enter the nursing program. The program orientation should be welcoming and set the tone for student behavior as they enter the program (Fontaine, 2014).

McDowell Technical Community College PNE faculty currently manage a full-time teaching load and advise 10 to 12 students for the academic year. The faculty registers the current PNE students each semester and handles advising on an as needed basis. The students are enrolled in a cohort and take prescribed courses. There are occasions when faculty must meet with students concerning issues such as academic, clinical, or lab performance or personal behaviors. Currently, advising sessions are utilized to address areas of poor student performance**.** The existing advising model does not emphasize advising of a mentoring nature and faculty typically react to the student situation. A proactive advising and mentoring model that includes periodic sessions to evaluate the student's current and future needs may have a positive impact on student retention. The PNE program faculty strive to offer various types of support to the PNE students but additional support is needed as evidenced by the first semester retention rate of 85%, three-year average program retention rate of 78%, and the 94% three-year average NCLEX pass rate. Improvement is needed in the following areas: comprehensive program orientation, proactive faculty advising and mentoring.

Intervention

In an attempt to bolster nontraditional nursing student success by decreasing student attrition and increasing student commitment, a comprehensive program orientation and the application of a proactive advising model were utilized. The

intervention design expanded the current program orientation into a comprehensive program orientation prior to the beginning of the program and proactive advising was instituted throughout the academic year. The comprehensive program orientation included a one-on-one session with the assigned faculty mentor to discuss the student plan to accomplish all of the requirements of the practical nurse program and to administer the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix A). Each student who entered the PNE program on August 20, 2015 was assigned a faculty mentor.

The interventions of a comprehensive program orientation and the utilization of faculty mentor advisors were supported by a design and implementation team. These teams were intricately involved in the improvement effort for the PNE program. The design and implementation teams were selected and established. Three main steps in the selection and establishing of the teams were: 1) communication of intervention goals 2) cultivation of stakeholder buy-in from the practical nurse faculty and 3) training practical nurse faculty on the utilization of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel.

The design team determined that the following interventions would be beneficial to incorporate during the comprehensive program orientation: (1) using small group icebreakers and team building activities to build student relationships and to provide a basis for student and faculty relationships, (2) guiding the students through the Proactive Advising Lifewheel to assist them in time-management and balancing family, work and school, and then debriefing the small group regarding the activity, and (3) providing a faculty mentor throughout the entire 12-month Practical Nursing program.

Implementation

To prepare for the interventions of comprehensive program orientation, proactive advising, and faculty mentors, training sessions were held during regularly scheduled PNE faculty meetings. The implementation team was trained through the use of a training protocol to utilize the Proactive Advising Lifewheel (see Appendix B). The training protocol consisted of deploying the Proactive Advising Lifewheel during a group advising session, allowing adequate time for students to respond to the different areas of the Lifewheel, followed by a session with the faculty mentors utilizing specific debriefing questions. Faculty members were asked to fill out the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. After filling out the Proactive Advising Lifewheel, debriefing took place as a group. The debriefing questions from the Proactive Advising Lifewheel were utilized. Faculty were given the opportunity to respond to the debriefing questions and to ask questions concerning the process.

The comprehensive program orientation for the Practical Nurse Education was held on June 11, 2015. Forty-one accepted and two waitlisted students attended (one accepted student was unable to attend program orientation). All students and family members met in the MTCC auditorium. Nursing faculty provided a program overview. Each nursing course, NUR 101, 102 and 103 was reviewed to inform students regarding class, clinical and lab hour requirements. Students and their families were given an opportunity to ask questions concerning program requirements. Additional MTCC staff shared information about financial aid and scholarships, disability services, tutoring services and the services of the Academic Resource Center (ARC). The group meeting in the auditorium lasted from 9:00 am-10:00 am. Family members and waitlisted students were able to leave after this part of the orientation. Next, the nursing director, assistant

director and nursing faculty members provided detailed information concerning individual class schedules, uniform requirements, and the criminal background check and urine drug screen process. Physical exam, immunizations and cardiopulmonary resuscitation requirements were discussed. Students had access to the nursing program director, assistant director, and all faculty members, including the department secretary to have questions and concerns addressed. At the conclusion of this portion of the orientation session students were given a one hour lunch break. They were offered lunch as part of the orientation session or they were able to leave campus for lunch on their own.

The afternoon portion of the orientation session consisted of each faculty member meeting with their advisees. The 41 accepted students in attendance were divided among the four full time PNE faculty members. There were 10 to 11 students in each group. During this group session faculty members deployed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel and utilized an ice breaker activity and a team building activity.

Additionally, faculty mentored their student advisees throughout the fall semester. The student and faculty mentor met at the beginning, middle, and end of the fall semester. Faculty mentors meeting with student advisees allowed the students time for self-evaluation and the opportunity for the faculty mentors to guide and advise the students prior to the development of severe academic deficiencies. Students were required to turn in a written plan showing a weekly schedule that included time for family, school attendance, work, and school homework. Documenting all of the competing demands for the students' time encouraged students to maintain a healthy balance of family, school, work, and self. Students received formative evaluations and remediation as needed from

their faculty mentor. If a student advisee received less than 80% on a unit test, remediation on the material missed was required within two weeks of the test.

The interventions implemented consisted of a comprehensive practical nurse program orientation along with proactive student advising with a faculty mentor for practical nursing students admitted to the MTCC PNE program. The goal of the interventions was for students to gain a deep understanding of the commitment needed to be successful in the three semester practical nurse program. The students were given access to all the tools needed for successful program entry through program completion. Assigned practical nurse faculty mentors employed a proactive stance to guide students through the program.

Results

The interventions were monitored during the implementation phase. First semester student retention was tracked. Program retention and NCLEX-PN pass rate will be measured at the conclusion of the program, August 2016, and each graduate will sit for the NCLEX-PN exam post-graduation. The goals of the interventions were to enhance student retention, assist the student in successful program completion, and increase the program NCLEX-PN pass rate.

The evaluation of the comprehensive program orientation occurred on an ongoing basis from the time of the program orientation, June 11, 2015, until the first day of the semester, August 20, 2015. The success of the orientation was measured by the number of students entering the program equaling the number of students who attended the comprehensive program orientation. Forty-one of the 42 admitted students attended the comprehensive program orientation and 35 of those who participated in the

comprehensive program orientation entered the PNE program on August 20, 2015. Six of the comprehensive program orientation attendees declined their seat prior to program entry. A total of 39 students entered the PNE program. Three waitlisted students were offered acceptance to the program after program orientation when six of the originally accepted students declined.

Thirty-three of the original 35 (94%) students who attended the comprehensive program orientation and entered the program, successfully completed the first semester of the practical nursing program. Thirty-five students out of the 39 students (90%) entering the PNE program on the first day of class on August 20, 2015 successfully completed the first semester of the practical nursing program (four of the 39 students did not attend the comprehensive program orientation).

A student satisfaction survey provided student feedback to determine if the comprehensive program orientation provided needed information and clear directions on the navigation of meeting the final admission criteria for program entry. Thirty-five students attended the Comprehensive Program Orientation on June 11, 2015, and entered the practical nursing program. These 35 students also answered the student satisfaction survey. Ninety-one percent of the students responded that they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the Comprehensive Program Orientation.

Thirty-nine (100%) of the entering PNE students successfully completed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel. The faculty mentors debriefed the exercise within a small group or individually prior to the student entering the PNE program. The debriefing exercise revealed that the majority of the students were satisfied with health, job,

education, family, and spiritual life (80% satisfaction rate or higher). The categories in which students indicated less satisfaction were money, friendships, and hobbies.

Faculty mentors met with each of their advisees at the beginning of the semester. Students were required to turn in a weekly schedule demonstrating how they intended to balance life, work, family and nursing school. Faculty mentors were able to evaluate the student perception regarding the time allotted for family, work, school, study, sleep, rest, etc. Faculty mentors also met with each advisee at midterm and at the end of the first semester.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is time constraint. Due to the 90-day cycle of *plan, do, study, act,* all findings will not be reported as the program is a one-year program. Graduates are not eligible to take the NCLEX-PN until successful program completion. Some graduates sit for the NCLEX-PN one to two weeks after graduation. Other students wait months to sit for the exam due to limited finances, as the NCLEX-PN costs $313.00. Another limitation of the study may be the reluctance of students to share personal information. Students may not reveal all of their life situations affecting their ability to complete an educational program and therefore the advisor may not be able to offer appropriate available resources.

Recommendations

For those students who are attempting to complete a full time nursing program with all of its inherent stressors and who work full or part time, while raising children, it becomes an even more stress-filled and difficult process. It is beyond the scope of the nursing program's resources to assist with all of the hurdles students face in their

educational journey. However, the interventions of a comprehensive program orientation including team building activities, a proactive advising stance utilizing the Proactive Advising Lifewheel, and faculty mentoring undergird the students as they attempt to complete an educational program.

The interventions of an enhanced comprehensive program orientation that included icebreaker and team building activities, Proactive Advising Lifewheel, and faculty mentoring had a positive impact on the MTCC PNE program's first semester retention. The *plan, do, study, act* cycle was an effective model to use to implement and assess change (Langley et al., 2009). Complete evaluation results to include first semester retention, program completion and NCLEX-PN results will determine how successful the interventions were. These interventions will be utilized for the 2016-2017 MTCC PNE class.

GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY – SARA NEWCOMB

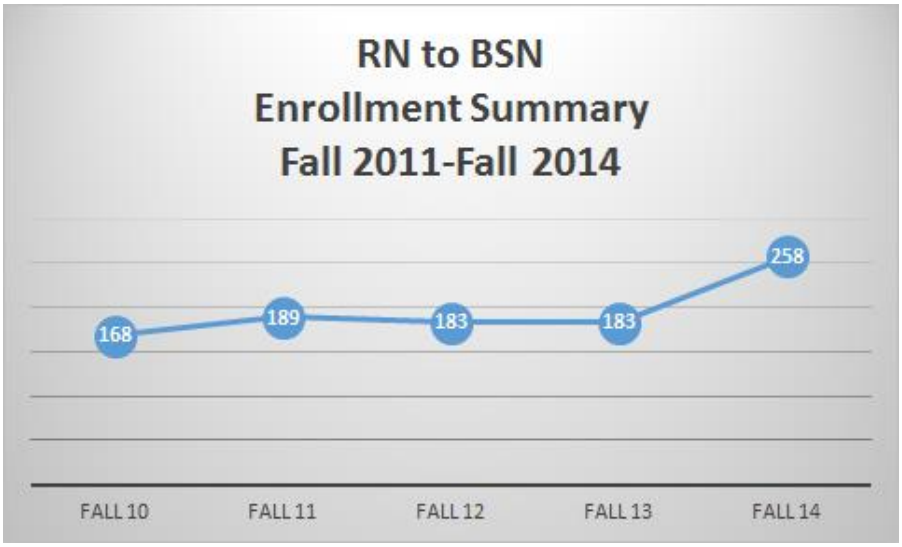
Program: Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing

The Degree Completion Program at GWU was established over 35 years ago. The program was developed to allow community college transfer students the opportunity to complete a degree online or in the evening at one of the 12 locations in North Carolina. The program offers nontraditional students opportunities to fulfill their educational goals while working and balancing family responsibilities through flexible scheduling. In a recent demographic study of students entering the program in Fall 2014, 92% were NC residents and 7% were SC residents. Also, the Fall 2014 incoming class was 75% female, 25% male and was 32 years old on average. The following age groups were represented: .7% teenage, 31.3% twenties, 34.7% thirties, 25.3% forties, 7.7%

fifties, and .7% older than fifty (Schenk, 2014). In addition, the largest major represented by the incoming Fall 2014 students was Nursing, 24% (Schenk, 2014).

The academic area with the most substantial growth in Gardner-Webb University's Degree Completion Program over the last academic year has been the School of Nursing. The Degree Complete Program offers registered nurses an online option to complete their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). The BSN program experienced an increase of 75 students in Fall 2014 from Fall 2013. In the next academic year, responding to the growth within the BSN program was critical to maintain high customer service standards and individualized support (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. RN to BSN Enrollment Summary: Fall 2011-Fall 2014



Source: Schenk, 2014

Currently, the staff consists of four nursing faculty who serve on the program team for the RN to BSN program in DCP. With such a large enrollment, the four team members can not advise all 250 students; therefore, the advising load is dispersed between all 10 faculty in the School of Nursing. Overall, each faculty in the School of

Nursing has 40-60 advisees and teaches an average of 15-16 hours each term (Schenk, 2014).

A design and implementation team was identified at Gardner-Webb University that played a vital role in directing and influencing deep change within the RN to BSN program. In order to manage the increased number of RN to BSN students the design and implementation team must:

- reduce the average time spent on new student processing in admission and academic advising by introducing mandatory online orientation and automated completion plans
- reduce the overtime worked by advisors and enrollment staff
- increase first semester student retention
- reduce faculty overload and course overload

The target audience for the information generated through the implementation plan was the RN to BSN and DCP administrative staffs. Nursing and DCP administration are the key stakeholders in the improvement processes and programming opportunities for the RN to BSN program. The RN to BSN and DCP administrators are the key decision makers regarding the program and process; it was imperative to collect and generate information that the target audience views as important when making decisions regarding the improvement effort.

The focus of the implementation plan was to improve performance measures in the following areas: new student processing time, student retention, faculty workload, and course load. The goal of new student orientation was to reduce the average time that academic advisors spent processing and helping new students during the first semester.

Advisors reported that during first semester registration, they were spending approximately 45 minutes per student, and the goal is to reduce the average by 20%. Student retention is an important measure for all institutions of higher education. For this intervention improving first semester retention of RN to BSN students from 78% to 85% is a central performance measure. Also, reducing the number of course overloads and faculty overloads was important. Reducing the number of courses each faculty member was teaching and reducing the number of students enrolled in each course was a priority for the upcoming Fall 2015 term.

Intervention

An initial goal of the intervention was to assess the current satisfaction of enrolled students and their experience with first semester transition services and support. With this intervention, Sara Newcomb sought to determine the effect upon new RN to BSN students and their experience entering Gardner-Webb University's DCP program and the impact of the recent growth. Second, surveys were conducted to assess and gather data from new and currently enrolled students within the RN to BSN program regarding their first semester experience. The scan of the current environment regarding student experience and student satisfaction, faculty workload and morale was central in designing the innovation in the next phase of the improvement cycle. Recent literature and initial data gathered assisted in the administration of the improvement efforts.

Two interventions were developed to address the excessive faculty workload regarding advising and enhancement of the student experience: development of a new student orientation and a proactive academic advising model. The implementation team

used data collection to guide the primary direction of the intervention. Other activities that took place included:

- test initial intervention design on a small scale
- rapid short term test to readjust and improve interventions
- test in practice by review of other collaborative practitioners
- refocus and produce final intervention product(s)

The evaluation and data collection exercises took place March 2015 to December 2015. The implementation plan included short and rapid assessments of change to adjust and deliver the best initiative possible. Continuous improvement efforts were used to assess and adjust to ensure positive change was occurring specifically during the delivery of personal academic advising in regards to degree planning.

Implementation

The first intervention initiated with new RN to BSN students enrolled in Fall 2015 was student orientation. Prior to the re-design and development of the student orientation, RN to BSN students received brief "getting started" materials during the admissions process in an email. The "getting started" content included only basic information regarding logging into various portals for email, online learning platforms, ordering textbooks, and financial aid. Online orientation was provided one week after the start date and was offered both during the day and evening.

Orientation

Incoming students for Fall 2015 had the opportunity to attend one of two online sessions: August 24, 2015 at 2:00 pm and August 25, 2015 at 6:00 pm. The implementation team sent e-mail blasts to all incoming students and made phone calls to

students reminding them of the upcoming online orientation sessions. E-mail blasts were sent three times in the two weeks prior to the orientation dates.

In the implementation, Newcomb utilized online software that allowed students to access the orientation at their convenience. Students were able to log-on and access the materials in a variety of formats. Students with webcams were able to access the orientation and interact remotely. Others without access to specific technology were encouraged to call-in and participate telephonically. This format allowed for document and screen sharing, virtual face-to-face interaction, and session recordings. Those who were unable to participate were e-mailed a pre-recorded session.

In determining the content, Dr. Nicole Water's and Newcomb worked together to include the most pertinent information needed during the first semester. We intentionally limited information to approximately an hour and allowed for questions and answers from the students. Content covered included a focus on navigating and using learning management software, understanding program requirements, available student services, future registration procedures, and identifying individual academic advisors. After the orientation session, students were prompted to complete a satisfaction survey regarding their experience in orientation and usefulness of the content.

Proactive Advising

The second key initiative Newcomb implemented at Gardner-Webb was a five-step approach for first semester academic advising. This approach to academic advising allowed students to interact with an advisor virtually and develop their own program completion plan. This five-step approach shifted the advising experience for students into an interactive model, rather than a responsive model. Currently, RN to BSN

advisors provide little information to students unless the student initiates the conversation regarding his or her academic progress or asks questions about upcoming registration. The five-step approach implemented included a welcome email, introduction phone call, one-on-one academic advising, mid-term check, and final grade review.

The first step was to send incoming students a welcome e-mail. In this e-mail, Newcomb introduced herself and explained that she would be working with them during their first semester. She also detailed the upcoming opportunity for one-on-one advising and provided information needed to start their courses. The content included information on: ordering textbooks, accessing two learning management systems, financial aid services, and setting up their Gardner-Webb e-mail accounts. This e-mail was sent two weeks prior to start of term and was also sent to any students who enrolled late on the first day of classes for Fall 2015.

The second step was an introductory phone call to all new students. Newcomb placed a phone call to all 54 new students for Fall 2015 during the first week of classes (August 17-22, 2015). All students were contacted and assisted with any issues or concerns they had with getting started during the first week of class. The most common questions regarded assistance with Gardner-Webb's online student portal, and the enrollment verification processes required of all students enrolled in online courses. At this time, students were also reminded about the upcoming opportunity to participate in virtual advising in October, in anticipation of the upcoming term's registration. Of the 54 new students for Fall 2015, Newcomb spoke with 38 students (70%) individually during the first week of classes. These phone conversations allowed the students to address any critical issues that arose during the first week of classes.

The third step offered one-on-one advising sessions to teach educational planning and complete individualized completion plans. During the first two weeks of October 2015, students were invited to participate in virtual advising sessions that included: step-by-step instruction on generating and reading degree audits, developing a completion plan, interpreting and understanding transfer work and equivalencies and education of course rotations and expectations of prerequisites. Once this was completed, students were assisted in preparing for spring registration and provided direction on registration procedures for upcoming semesters. These sessions were offered in a virtual format that allowed for webcam interaction, and screen and file sharing. Students scheduled their own time to meet with an advisor through online scheduling software with day and evening times available. Newcomb also offered Saturday and Sunday meeting times for those students who were working during traditional operating hours. This was a very successful effort with 32 of the 54 students (60%) scheduling one-on-one virtual advising sessions.

The fourth step of the proactive advising model was to complete a mid-term check. Students were contacted to assess and discuss their progress at the midterm point. They were asked to participate and discuss the Proactive Advising Lifewheel with their academic advisor if they reported issues with their course work and transition into the RN to BSN program. Of the 54 new students, 29 of the students (54%) engaged in the midterm review phone calls, and 10 students completed the Proactive Advising Lifewheel to consider and refocus their efforts in their Fall 2015 courses.

Newcomb conducted a final grade check and adjusted course schedules as needed. This allowed her the opportunity to speak with any student who did not successfully

complete courses or earned grades that did not meet the minimum graduation requirements. This also provided an opportunity to encourage and work with students who were struggling academically in their first semester course work.

Results

Orientation was not well attended. At the beginning of the Fall 2015 term, 54 new students enrolled in the RN to BSN program. Only 10 students (5.4%) participated in the orientation sessions offered. Of the 10 students, only three students provided feedback regarding their orientation experience. Overall, students viewed the orientation with favorable satisfaction and reported that the most critical piece of information provided was navigating the two learning management systems: WebbConnect and Blackboard.

In order to assess the proactive academic advising model, students were given the opportunity to complete a survey regarding their virtual advising experience and a survey regarding their overall satisfaction of first semester services in the RN to BSN program. The first survey was developed for students to complete following their one-on-one academic advising experience. Twenty-two of the 32 students (69%) who participated in academic advising completed a survey. Of the 22 respondents, 100% strongly agreed that the advising session was informative and helpful. Seventy-seven percent of respondents reported that they strongly agreed and 22% agreed with the following statement, "I am confident in my ability to run and interpret my own Degree Evaluation". In addition, all respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were confident in interpreting their transfer work, had a clear understanding of registration procedures, and the advising session was a good use of their time. Students were asked to offer their

comments on the most important aspect of orientation, and their responses focused on understanding their transfer work, learning how to run degree evaluations, and developing a completion plan.

First semester retention rate was an indicator of the interventions success. Forty-nine of the 54 students who participated in the intervention (90%) returned for the Spring 2016 term. This was an increase from the previous three semesters. In Fall 2014 only 85.5% of the new students enrolled returned Spring 2015. Also, 72.7% of new students in Spring 2015 continued and enrolled in Fall 2015. The average first semester student retention for the previous 10 semesters was 85%. An increase was documented after the implementation of the interventions for Fall 2015 to Spring 2016. Long term assessment and implementation is needed to continue examining the impact upon first semester retention and overall program retention for graduates.

Limitations

A major limitation for this intervention was the lack of participation from the incoming Fall 2015 students in new student orientation. Historically, this program has not offered an orientation and students were not required to attend orientation for Fall 2015. With lack of participation, this improvement effort was difficult to assess and determine the impact on students and their first semester experience.

Technology was an identified limitation. Currently, GWU does not require all online students to have personal access to computers or require students to have minimum technology requirements. Some online students still use public computer access to complete online class work. Some students were able to take advantage of virtual advising using webcams, file sharing, and screen sharing, while others were

limited. For students lacking access to technology, Newcomb used phone conferencing to cover content. She followed up with completion plans via email to provide the same advising experience.

Recommendations

In response to the lack of participation in new student orientation, the implementation team decided to discontinue offering orientation in future terms and shift resources to the first semester advising approach. A key recommendation and strategic decision was to change the timeline of when virtual one-on-one advising occurs for new students. For the Fall 2015 term, virtual advising was offered during the first two weeks of registration, October 2015. This was eight to nine weeks into the student's first semester at GWU. In order to provide students with the needed information offered in orientation, the implementation team decided to offer the one-on-one advising sessions earlier in the first semester. This will allow students to receive the information provided in orientation, and also participate in the one-on-one advising experience. For the Spring 2016 term, students will be offered virtual advising appointments during weeks four or five in the first semester. With the discontinuation of orientation, the welcome e-mail and introductory phone call will address specific start of term issues previously addressed in the orientation. If the success of the advising effort continues, the implementation team anticipates the development and proposal of a full-time academic advisor position. The person in this new position would serve the RN to BSN student population. Assessing student satisfaction and long term student retention data will be used to justify a new position with the nursing department.

COLLABORATIVE REFLECTION

Nontraditional students face many life challenges as they attempt to complete educational programs and increase their earning potential. Supportive interventions fostered by educational institutions are central to the success of these students. The shared interventions of a proactive advising model, comprehensive orientation, and faculty mentoring had a positive impact on the student success in all three programs. Our focus to bolster nontraditional student success was accomplished by facilitating active student engagement. These improvement efforts assisted students in better understanding the requirements of each program and engaging in a personalized and collaborative relationship with an advisor or mentor.

The comprehensive program orientation, proactive advising model and faculty mentoring were supported by the positive impact on student retention and success. These interventions provided students with information and support to reduce barriers and facilitate successful. By implementing the *plan, do, study, act c*ycle (PDSA), we were successful in facilitating incremental change (Langley et al., 2009). The PDSA cycle was a key component of each improvement effort, and allowed for continuous improvement grounded in theory, evidenced-based research, and institutional data. This model allowed for a systematic way to assess and document the improvement efforts implemented in each educational setting. The results of our improvement efforts allowed for clear recommendations and strategic ways to move forward by addressing the defined problems of practice in their educational setting to bolster nontraditional student success.

Working as a Networked Improvement Community was a powerful and new experience for each of us. We came from varied educational settings, bringing unique

pedagogical knowledge and skills that were applicable to a common problem of practice. Collaboratively formulating improvement interventions resulted in positive improvements in student learning and retention. These improvement interventions bolstered nontraditional student success within each of our educational setting and will continue to impact student success in the future at McDowell Technical Community College and Gardner-Webb University.

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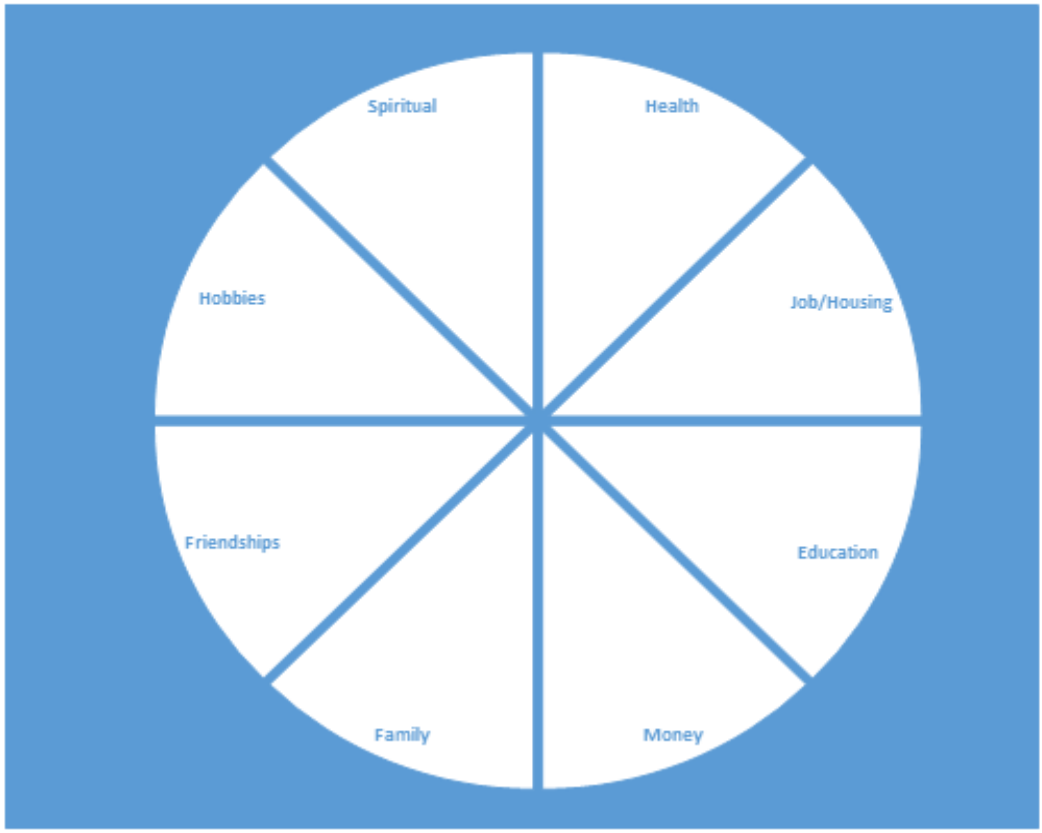
APPENDIX A

Proactive Advising Lifewheel

Student:_____ Initial Meeting Date:_____
Advisor:_____ Second Meeting Date:_____



In each section, draw a picture to symbolize the respective aspect of your life. Using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest, how would you rate each area in terms of satisfaction? Please place your ratings below.

Health____ **Family____**

Job____ **Friendships____**

Education____ **Hobbies____**

Money____ **Spiritual____**

Discovery/Advising Activity

Actively discuss the student's responses shared on the advising wheel. Use the following prompts and questions to guide your discussion.

1." Let's discuss the items that you rated a 6 or greater." "Why did you rate each of these areas as you did?"

2. "Let's discuss the items that you rated a 5 or lower." "Why did you rate each of these areas as you did?" "Let's discuss activities you could participate in to increase you score(s) in these areas."

3. "Are the items that you ranked 5 or lower creating educational barriers for you? If so, let's discuss strategies to help you raise these ratings." "Let's write some goals or strategies to improve these lower rated aspects." PROMPT: Share needed resources!

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

4. PROMPT: Facilitate proactive discussion to address the lower rated aspects. PROMPT: Share findings from your own advising wheel to help establish rapport and a supportive relationship with the student.

5. PROMPT: After strategies are discussed and documented, schedule follow-up advising session with student in two weeks to monitor progress.

APPENDIX B

Training Protocol - Proactive Advising Lifewheel

1) The facilitator meets with a small group (10-15) participants.
2) Each participant is given a copy of the Proactive Advising Lifewheel and asked to draw a picture that symbolizes the respective aspects of their life.
3) Using a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest, participants are encouraged to rate each life aspect in terms of satisfaction.
4) The facilitator utilizes the debriefing questions to encourage the participants share their results with the facilitator.
5) Participants share their ratings of their life categories providing opportunities for the facilitator to share campus and community services that may assist the participant in attending class and completing their educational goals.