



Doctoral Scholarly Project Expectations: Challenges with Understanding, Suggestions for Improvement, and an Evaluation of an Orientation Program



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Abstract

A surge in nursing doctoral programs is underway due to recent policy changes requiring attainment of the terminal doctoral degree for entry into the field as an advanced practice nurse.^{1,2} Nurse anesthetists obtaining the doctoral degree experience unique challenges causing inefficient use of faculty resources and delayed graduation.³ This project examines:

- What are the challenges encountered by CRNAs in doctoral programs?
- What is the feasibility of providing a process to prepare CRNAs as they face these challenges?

Objectives

1. What are the challenges encountered by CRNAs when obtaining the DNAP degree?
2. What is the feasibility of a comprehensive orientation program for CRNAs enrolled in the DNAP program at UM-Flint?
3. What do current students and alumni of DNAP program recommend as inclusion in the orientation program?
4. What is the influence of an orientation program on knowledge, understanding, and level of confidence in newly-admitted students?

Methodology

Conducted in two phases:

- Phase one - survey of current students and alumni (n = 38, response rate 47.5%) to identify challenges encountered
- Phase two - orientation program to address the challenges identified (n = 3)
- Mixed quantitative – qualitative design for both phases

Theories:

- Transformative Learning Theory⁴
- Professional Identity Development Theory⁵

Results

- The scholarly project sequence is the most challenging component of doctoral curriculum (p = 0.041)
- An introduction to the capstone / scholarly project was rated most helpful in an orientation program (p = 0.0027)
- The utilization of outside resources to understand the capstone / scholarly project was significant (p = 0.0005)
- Enhanced knowledge (9.5% difference increase) and confidence of orientation content (130.7% difference increase) was demonstrated through a pre-test/post-test

Conclusion

- Scholarly Project process is both challenging and difficult to understand for students
 - Students utilized help to address this deficit, especially outside resources
 - An Orientation Program for newly admitted CRNAs enhances base knowledge and level of confidence
- What are the implications?
- Present program requirements upfront
 - Appropriate utilization of faculty time
 - Timely graduation of doctoral students

References

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Acknowledgments

My sincerest appreciations go out to my academic advisors, Dr. Kodjebacheva and Dr. Motz, as well as my husband for his constant support and the Office of Research for printing this poster.