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Academic Integrity Institutionalization in an Online RN-BSN Program

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Background

The number of universities and colleges offering online programs continue to expand. Online education is still a relatively new method of instruction that warrants extensive classroom research and evaluation. Previous research on academic integrity reported higher levels of cheating among students that are male, single, and with lower GPA's (Rakovski & Levy, 2007; Finn & Frone, 2004; Hughes & McCabe, 2006; Lane, 2006; McCabe & Revino, 1997). Current research also indicates there may be more cheating in online classrooms (Lanier, 2006).

Model

Model of Academic Integrity Institutionalization

Gallant and Dorman (2008)

Stage 1-Faculty Concern

Discussion among nursing faculty revealed concern that there may be a difference in academic integrity in the online and traditional BSN program.

Stage 2- Method

A descriptive comparative design was used to evaluate academic integrity in an online RN program and a traditional face-to-face BSN program. The two cohorts had identical curriculum and many of the same faculty. The cohorts differed only in method of content delivery and testing. The McCabe Academic Integrity assessment survey was sent to all RN-BSN students enrolled in the 2008-2009 academic year. This included 2048 online students and 100 traditional classroom students.

Stage 2-Conclusion

Overall cheating in the RN-BSN program for both online and traditional students was very low. This may be related to the unique demographic profile of these students and their exposure to ethics in practice and their ADN programs. This study did not support concerns that there may be more cheating in online courses. This study found higher levels of cheating in the traditional classroom, especially in students age 40 and under. The majority of cheating involved collaboration among students.

Stage 3- Response Implementation

As online nursing programs continue to proliferate, academic nurse educators must thoroughly evaluate academic integrity and outcomes of online nursing programs. Measures to increase the awareness of academic integrity policies and to clearly delineate academic integrity expectations should be included in all nursing programs. An academic integrity intervention study is in progress in the online cohort. For the intervention study students are randomized into a class as usual or a class with a message board discussion about faculty expectations for academic integrity and a testing policy pop up before each exam.

Stage 4-Future Research

Although the McCabe survey of academic integrity has been used extensively for over a decade, the survey is not tailored to assess online programs. An academic integrity tool designed to specifically assess online programs is in development. This study will be replicated with a larger population from different universities.

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Results- Stage 2- Response Generation

The traditional classroom cohort reported higher levels of cheating compared to the online cohort. The traditional classroom students age 40 and younger reported more instances of cheating than the 41 and over age group. The majority of the cheating that occurred involved student collaboration.

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