

Lessons Learned in Our Academic to Academic Partnership Nursing Research Project

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Two universities are joined in an academic/academic partnership to research Evidence Based Practice (EBP) attitudes, behaviors and knowledge of Registered Nurses (RNs) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) seeking a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. This study is in progress; however, we have learned valuable lessons regarding academic partnerships to share with colleagues as we found the literature limited regarding academic partnership. Our intent is to share our learning with others to encourage more academic/academic partnerships.

One of the major benefits of our academic partnership is the increased number of students available to study. This project entails three blended sites and an online site. The blended sites have an online component with face to face meetings once a month and clinical components. This format includes the LPN-BSN and RN –BSN students. The online format is RN-BSN only. With the assistance of a mentor, the group designed a research project to evaluate attitudes, skills and behaviors related to EBP concepts before formal learning on the subject, upon completion of formal learning and one year following graduation of formal learning.

Faculty gained knowledge and new understanding working collaboratively across multiple campuses. Discussions revolved around how to recruit students with the various sites, platforms and multiple teachers. It was decided to send emails to all incoming students to the RN to BSN and LPN to BSN cohorts using a scripted message. These emails were sent from the initial researchers to all sites. The response was very low as the students did not know the researchers. The initial number of students in year one was five. The group met and discussed having faculty from the individual sites send the scripted message so all students received the same information but from a person they knew. The impact of this action was huge as the numbers increased from year one to year two by 600% and in year three another 300%. We started with only five respondents and currently there are 90+ students participating in the study. We attributed this growth to the relationship and trust students have with faculty on their individual sites.

Another benefit is the rapport built between faculty members across our state. We realized we needed to develop relationships and trust among the researchers as we are scattered across our state. We have met face to face on several occasions to review our progress, socialize and network together regarding future plans or to problem solve issues.

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One occasion we all gathered for lunch at a designated location. Following lunch, we discussed completion of our first cohort results, the increased growth in year two and year three students and spent time celebrating our successes face to face. We also used the Internet to have video calls periodically, telephone calls, email and other academic meetings. The personalization of building these relationships allowed for honest dialogue among the researchers and built cohesiveness. According to Lao and Omollo (2013), face to face meetings provide invaluable assets in building rapport and allow questions and feedback with increased tolerance than when using other forms of communication.

Some of our sites are rural rather than metropolitan. Thus our student populations vary as do the resources available. Our rural researchers are encouraged and excited to be given the opportunity to express their ideas and knowledge regarding needs in rural communities. This interaction promotes understanding of many differences within our state. Generally, metropolitan sites have access to greater resources than do the rural sites and by working collaboratively the rural sites gain access while the metropolitan sites gain perspective regarding rural needs. Malloch and Porter-O'Grady (2011), suggest the insights and feedback gained through partnerships provide opportunities for academic experts to validate and test insights regarding realities either in education or practice.

Roles within a diverse team of researchers must be a topic of discussion. Fortunately, our group has an experienced researcher to guide us in developing goals and subgroups. We highly recommend a mentor for academic/academic partnerships. Our team brainstorms to create topics and ideas for scholarly projects. The ideas are shared with all members and open for discussion. Several ground rules are established as follows: 1) before starting a writing project decide who is to be first author and who desires to work on the project, 2) if you are listed as an author you must contribute to the writing in a meaningful way, 3) the first author is the lead on the project and sets timeline, provides monitoring and collaborates with other authors, 4) if the author is unable to meet article obligations as agreed, they must contact team prior to deadline to seek a resolution, 5) not every member of the research team must be on all the projects, and 6) team members need awareness of commitments prior to volunteering for a project to avoid creating conflicts.

We are still in the beginning stages of our longitudinal study, and we are confident more lessons remain to be discovered. Academic/Academic partnerships are worthwhile endeavors, and we encourage you to consider reaching out to other institutions to form new alliances. In this world of instant communication, the opportunities abound for sharing ideas and knowledge with your peers, and by doing so you can increase knowledge and understanding for all parties.

References

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