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Evaluating the impact of flexible teaching strategies on student success

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Keywords

Academic Success; Trauma informed education practices; Cross-Sectional Studies; Leadership; Delivery of Health Care; Workforce Diversity; Surveys and Questionnaires; Health Inequities; Workforce

Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this presentation is to share identified instructional flexibility strategies that facilitate student success.

Objectives:

1. Define instructional flexibility
2. Identify flexible teaching practices to support student academic success

Background: Institutions of higher education in nursing seek to reduce health disparities by increasing diversity in the nursing workforce.¹ The OHSU School of Nursing is meeting this challenge with support from the administration to develop diverse, inclusive, and equitable programs that advance the profession of nursing. One method for improving healthcare education is through the adoption of Trauma Informed Education Practices (TIEP).¹⁻⁶

Most adult learners must balance educational demands as well as other competing obligations such as employment and family obligations. A flexible learning pedagogy addresses the differences in needs, preferences, and skills between students by providing them with different choices regarding how to learn and providing personalized learning and a student-centered approach while maintaining rigor.⁷

Methods/Learning Strategies

This study used a cross-sectional design. Students enrolled in the NRS 412 Leadership in Healthcare Delivery Systems, were eligible to participate. Faculty incorporated specific instructional flexibility practices including 1. Alternative assignment; 2. Life happens late work passes (3 for the term); 3. Unlimited time for tests and quizzes; and 4. purposeful social interaction between faculty and students.

Participants who consented to participate took a single online survey through Qualtrics. The survey evaluated student experiences regarding barriers and aids to academic success, as well as how specific instructional design principles impacted their overall success in the course.

Results

In all, 19 participants completed the online survey. 74% of respondents indicated balancing school work and other responsibilities as the greatest barrier to success. Participants identified that all flexible instructional methods contributed to their success with flexibility regarding deadlines, having an alternative assignment option, and having unlimited time for tests and quizzes being the most highly regarded. Based on open-ended questions, students felt overall decreased stress in this course, felt the life happens pass made them feel less stressed, and faculty availability outside of class time increased student support.

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As healthcare educators are preparing to educate a more diverse workforce, this work contributes to the growing literature on inclusive teaching practices to support a trauma informed environment. While best practices are still being identified and may vary by institution, this study highlights the benefits of instructional flexibility in one course in the School of Nursing. Lessons learned from this study can be helpful to other programs as they begin or continue to incorporate inclusive teaching practices to support all students.

Possible Applications

The findings indicate that instructional flexibility practices supported student academic success, as well as decreased their overall stress level. These data may assist in the formulation of best practices and standards, to create an equitable and inclusive learning experience for all students.

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