

Blended Learning Activities in the DNP Classroom

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Background

In the last ten years there has been a significant increase in blended learning in higher education. Blended learning is the fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). An important aspect of blended learning is to ensure that in-class learning engages students and requires them to engage with other classmates in meaningful activities (Bonwell & Elison, 1991).

The use of active learning strategies in DNP programs is appropriate as it provides students the opportunity to engage with and apply course content to realistic problems while in the classroom. In undergraduate active learning classrooms, student outcomes included improved learning and increased engagement. There is paucity of research conducted to evaluate the learning needs of DNP students.



Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe nursing graduate student learning gains, attitudes and satisfaction with a blended learning class experience.

Methods

The sample for this study included thirteen graduate nursing students enrolled in a blended learning graduate policy class. Participants were interviewed and asked open-ended questions about their learning gains, engagement level with the course materials and overall satisfaction.

Results



Students reported significant learning gains in the course. The blended learning environment improved engagement in their own learning. Themes identified include Enhanced Knowledge, Engaged Learning and Environmental Perspectives.

Enhanced Knowledge

This theme addresses the knowledge gains from blended learning.

"I think a lot of the learning comes from the students themselves, instead of just having the instructor standing up there talking at us. I think you get so much more knowledge having discussions and being a participant in your learning... within guidelines to be able to learn what you want to learn and what's interesting to you versus just what the instructor wants you to learn. And I think you get so much more out of it when you're actively participating."

"I personally learned better this way (blended learning classroom rather than lecture). I think you get so much more out of it instead of... memorizing all this stuff and then digging it out for a test."

Engaged Learning

This theme describes the level of student responsibility for learning.

"When you know you are going to be going to class and having to discuss personally what you learned that week, it makes you read a bit more deeply than maybe I would have. I engaged in what I was reading instead of just skimming through it. I had a mental note of what topics I thought were interesting and how I could discuss those topics. You don't want to come to class not knowing what you are talking about, whereas when you go to a lecture you kind of can cheat and not read the material beforehand."

Environmental Perspectives

This theme compares varied learning outcomes from online and in-person classes.

"I liked both in-class activities as well as the online. You get a slightly different approach. It mainly has to do with the dialogue, you know, verbal versus the written dialogue. I feel that in in-person classes you can expand your base knowledge, and online you had more time to actually research it, so you had more facts and sources. I would probably say I learned more technically with the online classes, but (in-class) I also learned more about other people's viewpoints, their experiences, and that's a... more personal knowledge base."

Lessons Learned

- Need a safe, respectful environment to facilitate conversation, developed by students and course professor.
- Most students prefer in-class sessions, but discuss the need for blended learning.
- Students value professor engagement in both online and in-person classes.
- Physical environment must be conducive for group interaction and learning.

References

- Bonwell, C.C. & Elison, J.A. (1991). Active learning: Creating excitement in the classroom. Retrieved from <http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/91-9dig.htm>. Accessed March 4, 2013.
- Garrison, D. & Vaughan, N. (2008). Blended learning in Higher Education: Framework, principles, and guidelines. Jossey-Bass publications; San Francisco.