

**SOCIALIZATION AND SENSE OF BELONGING IN AN ONLINE NURSE
PRACTITIONER PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY**

by

Catherine (Kate) E. DeLuca

Bachelor of Arts, Duquesne University, 2004

Bachelor of Science, Duquesne University, 2004

Master of Business Administration, Duquesne University, 2008

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
the School of Education in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

University of Pittsburgh

2017

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

This dissertation was presented

by

Catherine DeLuca

It was defended on

May 23, 2017

and approved by

Stewart Sutin, Clinical Professor, Department of Administrative and Policy Studies

John Weidman, Professor, Department of Administrative and Policy Studies

Linda Goodfellow, Clinical Associate Professor, Duquesne University

Dissertation Chair: Michael G. Gunzenhauser, Associate Professor, Department of

Administrative and Policy Studies

Copyright © by Catherine DeLuca

2017

**SOCIALIZATION AND SENSE OF BELONGING IN AN ONLINE NURSE
PRACTITIONER PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY**

Catherine (Kate) DeLuca, Ed.D.

University of Pittsburgh, 2017

The purpose of this study was to examine the socialization experience of students who were enrolled in an online master's level nurse practitioner program. The focus of this study was on the experience of students in the Duquesne University School of Nursing (DUSON) online Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) program. Despite extensive growth in online education and nurse practitioner programs nationwide, little research had been done to examine the online graduate programs, specifically the FNP program, and/or gain insight into the student experience (AANP, 2015; Lehman & Conceicao, 2010, 2013). Studies have found that socialization is critical in student development and building sense of belonging among students, particularly among students in online programs (Hart, 2012; Holley & Taylor, 2009; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012).

This study used the Weidman, Twale and Stein (2001) theory of Graduate and Professional Student Socialization and Goodenow's (1993) theory of Sense of Belonging as the conceptual frameworks. This study also employed a single case study methodological approach and utilized a three-pronged data collection plan that included a document review, survey, and interviews. Fourteen students completed a modified version of the Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2003) Doctoral Student Socialization Questionnaire. Fifteen students completed individual interviews. Results indicated that students' experiences were positive and that they were able to

experience socialization in the graduate student and professional roles. Furthermore, many participants indicated that they had felt a strong sense of belonging to their cohort, despite being enrolled in an online program. Implications for practice are presented for higher education professionals that include: campus residencies to strengthen cohort bonding, a peer mentoring program, and the establishment of a supportive environment in which students feel comfortable communicating with faculty and peers and developing their own support systems for success.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	XIV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	XV
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND ON DISTANCE EDUCATION	2
1.1.1 Student-centered education	4
1.1.2 Quality in distance education	4
1.2 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH.....	7
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	8
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	9
1.5 DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	10
2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	13
2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	13
2.2 SOCIALIZATION.....	14
2.2.1 Weidman, Twale and Stein’s theory of graduate and professional student socialization.....	16
2.2.1.1 Stages of socialization	19
2.2.2 Socialization in other subpopulations	21
2.2.2.1 Graduate students, socialization, and sense of belonging.....	22

2.2.2.2	African American students, socialization, and sense of belonging .	23
2.2.2.3.	First-generation students, socialization, and sense of belonging ...	25
2.3	SENSE OF BELONGING	26
2.3.1	Defining sense of belonging.....	27
2.3.2	Sense of belonging for online students.....	30
2.4	SOCIALIZATION ACTIVITIES	32
2.4.1	Orientation	32
2.4.2	Campus residency.....	33
2.4.3	Advisement.....	35
2.4.3.1	Professional advisement models	36
2.4.3.2	Faculty advisement models	37
2.4.3.3	Combination advisement models.....	38
2.4.4	Outcomes of socialization and sense of belonging	40
2.5	SOCIALIZATION FOR THE ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSE	44
2.6	SUMMARY	47
3.0	METHODOLOGY.....	49
3.1	RESEARCH SUBECTIVITY AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE.....	49
3.2	RATIONALE FOR CASE STUDY DESIGN.....	51
3.3	RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	53
3.4	STUDY DESIGN	53
3.4.1	Setting	54
3.4.2	Program background information.....	55
3.4.2.1	Orientation.....	56

3.4.3	Population and sample	59
3.4.4	Recruitment.....	59
3.4.5	Consent	62
3.5	DATA COLLECTION.....	63
3.5.1	DOCUMENT REVIEW	66
3.6	INSTRUMENTS	66
3.6.1	Survey	66
3.6.2	Interview consent/demographic form.....	68
3.6.3	Interviews	69
3.7	DATA ANALYSIS.....	71
3.7.1	Data analysis plan.....	71
3.7.1.1	Document review data analysis.....	72
3.7.1.2	Survey data analysis.....	73
3.7.1.3	Interview data analysis	73
3.8	LIMITATIONS.....	76
3.9	SUMMARY	78
4.0	RESULTS AND FINDINGS	79
4.1	DOCUMENT REVIEW RESULTS.....	80
4.1.1	Student handbooks	80
4.1.2	FNP student blackboard site	83
4.1.3	Orientation information and materials	83
4.1.4.	Physical assessment residency week information and materials	86

4.1.5	Clinical diagnosis/foundations i residency week information and materials	89
5.0	SURVEY RESULTS	95
5.1	SURVEY DEMOGRAPHIC AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION RESPONSES	95
5.2	CAMPUS RESIDENCY EXPERIENCE RESPONSES	100
5.3	PERSONAL EXPERIENCE RESULTS	102
5.4	INTERPRETATIONS OF SURVEY RESULTS	108
5.4.1.	Demographic and background information	108
5.4.2.	Campus residency experiences.....	109
5.4.3	Personal experiences.....	112
6.0	INTERVIEW PROCESS RESULTS	117
6.1	INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION	118
6.2	INTERVIEW RESULTS	122
6.2.1	Student experience and perception of online education.....	122
6.2.2	Student experience with the DUSON.....	126
6.2.3	Student experience with faculty	135
6.2.4	Student experience with peers	137
6.2.5	Socialization to the graduate student and professional roles	143
6.2.6	Sense of belonging.....	148
6.3	EMERGENT THEMES FROM THE INTERVIEWS	153
6.3.1	The role of the campus residencies	154

6.3.2	Moving from “I” to “we”	155
6.3.3	Finding ways to connect to their peers	158
6.3.4	Socialization and role transition.....	159
6.3.5	A sense of belonging	161
6.4	DISCUSSION OF ALL RESULTS.....	163
7.0	CONCLUSIONS	168
7.1	IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.....	171
7.2	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	173
	APPENDIX A	175
	APPENDIX B	176
	APPENDIX C	178
	APPENDIX D	184
	APPENDIX E	186
	APPENDIX F	189
	APPENDIX G.....	193
	APPENDIX H.....	194
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	196

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Definitions	11
Table 2. Abbreviations.....	12
Table 3. MSN FNP Program Table.....	55
Table 4. Data Collection Plan.....	64
Table 5. 2014, 2015, and 2016 Select Orientation Session Results.....	85
Table 6. 2015 and 2016 Physical Assessment Residency Select Session Scores.....	88
Table 7. 2014, 2015 and 2016 Select Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Session Scores	92
Table 8. Survey Demographic Information (N=14)	95
Table 9. Survey Program Status Responses (N=14).....	96
Table 10. Online Educational Experience (N=14).....	98
Table 11. Use of Social Technology (N=14)	99
Table 12. Campus Residency Experiences	100
Table 13. Personal Experience of Interaction with Faculty and Students (N=14).....	102
Table 14. Advantages/Disadvantages of Academic Programs (N=14)	103
Table 15. Student Participation while enrolled in the MSN FNP program (N=14)	106
Table 16. Student Feelings of Support from the School of Nursing (N=14).....	107
Table 17. Students Responses to Choosing DUSON again (N=14).....	107

Table 18. Interview Responses - Demographic Information (N=15)	119
Table 19. Interview Responses - Program Status and Motivation (N=15).....	120
Table 20. Interview Responses - Use of Social Technology (N=15)	121

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Data Collection and Analysis Plan	65
Figure 2. Combined Analysis Process	74
Figure 3. Student Interactions with their Professors	105
Figure 4. Student Interaction with their Peers	105

DEDICATION

President Teddy Roosevelt once said, “Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is a chance to work hard at work worth doing.” Several years ago, I stumbled in to higher education, more specifically student affairs, and every day since then I am reminded of why I love what I do.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Eileen Zungolo, who I could not thank enough for giving me the confidence (and the push) to start this journey. I wish you were here for me to thank in person.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people have helped me to accomplish this goal. I would like to thank my dissertation committee (Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Dr. Stewart Sutin, and Dr. John Weidman) for all of their insight, guidance and support during this journey. Your support and expertise helped me tremendously. A special thank you to my chair, Dr. Michael Gunzenhauser. Your coaching, direction, encouragement and periodic pep talks made this easier than I thought possible.

A very special thank you to Dr. Noreen Garman who early on in my program told me, “You belong here and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.” Your words have kept me “pressing on” over the years.

I would like to offer a special thank you to my parents for teaching me to love school. I would also like to thank the rest of my family and friends for their love, support, and encouragement, and for understanding when I was “writing” and could not come out to play.

Thank you to my Pitt friends who were always happy to read a draft, offer advice, or just meet in the back room at Hem’s to support one another. I do not know how some people can go through a doctoral program alone and am so thankful that I had all of you.

Thank you to my colleagues at the Duquesne University School of Nursing for your advice, support and encouragement. Finally, thank you to the Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner students for letting me share your experiences.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, distance education, and more specifically online education, has grown exponentially (Lehman & Conceicao, 2010, 2013). Several reasons for this surge have been identified, such as the development of technology, improvements to the Internet, and the interests of a specific population of students who are seeking flexibility when it comes to their educations. The National Center for Education Statistics (2014) reported that, in the Fall of 2012, approximately 26% of all students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs in the United States took at least one online course. Of that 26%, approximately half were in programs that were exclusively online (NCES, 2014).

As distance education has developed, so has the need to meet the distinct needs of online students. Scagnoli (2001) posits that, through the inherent nature of distance education, online students do not have the same experiences as traditional students. As a result, online students often do not make close connections to institutions, faculty, and classmates, thus creating feelings of isolation that traditional students are often able to avoid. Because this isolation is common and can contribute to student dissatisfaction and attrition, Scagnoli (2001) and Rovai (2002) challenge higher education institutions with the responsibility to create an atmosphere where socialization and the development of a sense of belonging can be explored by students.

1.1 BACKGROUND ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

The evolution of distance education over the past two decades has offered advancements in addressing cost and access barriers for both students and institutions of higher education. In recent years, there has been a great deal of legislation and regulation put in to action to address the practices of for-profit institutions. Additionally, as the cost of education has risen along with student debt, so has the importance of students' choices of which program or institution to attend. With the general accountability and choice movements associated with higher education, it has become a top priority of higher education institutions to broaden their focus from traditional instructional design to one that uses technology as its foundation (Allen & Seaman, 2015). While the overall rate of growth for distance education continued to rise at 3.7% in 2014, private, non-profit, four-year institutions saw the most growth at 12.7%, followed by public, four-year institutions at 7.2% (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Both traditional and adult learners are examining distance education as a mode of access for their coursework or programs. There is still a debate about the value and academic rigor of distance education, and many institutions view distance education as a method of expanding course offerings and even campuses. Growth in distance education programs has led to the need for focused research and programming to address the needs of the online student population.

Students of all demographic backgrounds are attracted by the opportunities that distance education offers (Shea & Bidjerano, 2014). Generally, students benefit from the flexibility of scheduling classes around their own personal schedules and the ability to take classes from anywhere (physically); these factors typically attract students to distance education classes or

programs (Del Valle & Duffy, 2009). Since distance education programs have developed, many students have depended on distance education programs as their sole source of education. This is often due to other access barriers to face-to-face education, such as geographic location, disability, family commitments, professional obligations, and cost, including ancillary student costs such as housing and transportation (Del Valle & Duffy, 2009).

The student does not reap the benefit of distance education programs alone; universities also benefit from distance education programs. Allen and Seaman (2015) found that the number of academic administrators that reported the importance of distance education to their long-term strategic goals rose significantly from 48.8% in 2002 to 70.8% in 2014. Institutions have found that not only can they reach a new, broader audience, but they can also be creative with regard to pedagogies used in online settings (Del Valle & Duffy, 2009). Through the use of distance education, higher education institutions have found that they can reach students from all over the world (Rhoads, et al., 2015). Such developments have also meant the growth of revenue streams via increases in enrollment, the addition of new programs, and the ability to reach a broader audience (Chaney, Chaney & Eddy, 2010; Ozdemir & Abrevaya, 2007). While the evolution of higher education and distance education has created opportunities for both the institution and student to be successful, there is not enough known about the student experience. Institutions now have an opportunity to examine the student experience in an effort to focus strategies on meeting student needs which leads to further enhancement of experiences (Ali & Smith, 2015; Schaeffer & Konetes, 2010; Swan, 2002).

1.1.1 Student-centered education

With the increase in educational options for students, many higher education institutions are seeking to differentiate themselves and stand out. Hadfield (2003) viewed higher education in adult students as a service. Hadfield's approach has become more widely accepted in higher education settings where institutions recognize that all learners are making costly decisions about higher education and that providing student-centered experiences is key to student satisfaction. Researchers argue that in order to help students to be successful, and in turn to allow for the institution to be successful, it is important to focus on a student-centered approach to education (Bowden, 2011; Harrison & Risler, 2015). A key to this approach is the acknowledgement that students have choices in the selection of educational programs and that the quality of the education is a determining factor (Bowden, 2011; Harrison & Risler, 2015). Additional factors that help potential students make decisions include: support services, welcoming environments, strong focus on student needs, and the overall experience (Crawley, 2012; LaPadula, 2003). Some researchers suggest that creating opportunities for socialization and an environment that supports building a sense of belonging between the student and the institution is a critical step in accomplishing this goal (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem & Stevens, 2012; Gallagher-Lepak et al., 2009; Restauri, 2004; Rovai, Wighting & Liu, 2005; Strayhorn, 2012).

1.1.2 Quality in distance education

In 2001, the Online Learning Consortium, formerly known as the Sloan Consortium, developed a framework that focuses on five pillars critical to establishing quality distance education. The five pillars focus on access, scale, learning effectiveness, faculty satisfaction, and student

satisfaction (Moore & Shelton, 2014; Porto, 2014). These pillars are the basis of the Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Education Programs, which was developed from best practices to benchmark online programs for quality. Each pillar has quality indicators that speak directly to the goals and objectives of the pillar and offer suggestions to meet the standard. For example, the student satisfaction pillar presents many quality indicators to address specific measures linked to positive student experiences that lead to student satisfaction (Moore & Shelton, 2014; Porto, 2014). These indicators include such measures as:

- Program demonstrates a student-centered focus rather than trying to fit support services to the distance-education student in on-campus student services;
- Students should be provided a way to interact with other students in an online community;
- Efforts are made to engage students with the program and institution;
- Students are instructed in the appropriate ways to enlist help from the program.

(Moore & Shelton, 2014, pp.47-48)

By using this scorecard as a guideline, institutions can improve students' online experiences. Institutions strive to create a sense of belonging for online students by focusing on key strategies such as socialization to the role of the graduate student, the institution, and the program (Moore & Shelton, 2014; Porto, 2014). Crawley (2012) and LaPadula (2003) found that students who believe they are supported and have a more positive experience are more likely to persist, graduate, become satisfied alumni, and possess a sense of belonging to the institution.

While students are able to socialize and develop relationships and a sense of belonging at some level, the university has a responsibility to support students and offer opportunities for them to engage with others and the institution (Sweitzer, 2009). The greater the sense of belonging a student feels for the institution, the greater the chance of the student completing his or her degree and feeling a sense of loyalty to the institution (Hoffman et al., 2002). Elliott and Shin (2002) also attribute student satisfaction to socialization through the consistent and ongoing interactions between students and their institution, and instructors and their peers. This holds true particularly for online programs (Crawley, 2012; LaPadula, 2003).

Socialization is an essential part of both student development and building sense of belonging among students. An abundant amount of research has been conducted focusing on socialization and sense of belonging in students. More specifically, a large amount of research has been conducted focusing on the sub-populations such as graduate students, first-generation students, and African American students. While there have been a few studies that were conducted with online nursing students that focused on socialization, they were specifically focused on those in doctoral programs (Billings, 2000; Broome, Halstead, Pesut, Rawl and Boland, 2011; Goodfellow, 2014; Halter, Kleiner and Hess, 2005). The research on online doctoral nursing students is beneficial to studying other online nursing students; however, in my review of the literature, I was unable to find any studies that addressed socialization and sense of belonging in online master's level nursing students. This study is an attempt to fill this gap in the literature.

1.2 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to examine the socialization experience of students who are enrolled in an online master's level nurse practitioner program. The focus of this study is on the experience of students in the Duquesne University School of Nursing (DUSON) online Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) program. The primary goal is to examine the experience of the students in this specific professional program so as to gain an in-depth perspective of a socialization experience of online MSN FNP students. A secondary goal of this study is to build the knowledge base for student affairs practice in professional education. While practitioners often make decisions based on available resources, best practices, or their own experiences or ideas, it is critical to consider the perspective of the students and learn from their experience.

The sample population for this study was chosen for several reasons including the overall growth in nurse practitioner programs across the country in the past several years. The American Academy of Nurse Practitioners reported that in 2011-2012, 14,000 new nurse practitioners completed programs (AANP, 2013). This number jumped to 17,000 in 2012-2013 (AANP, 2015). One of the reasons for this increase has been the Affordable Care Act, which was signed in to law by President Obama in 2010 and upheld by the Supreme Court in 2012 (USDHHS, 2015). One of the goals of the Affordable Care Act was to increase the number of primary care nurse practitioners, which corresponds to the role of the family nurse practitioner (FNP). In 2013-2014 family nurse practitioners made up 48.9% of all nurse practitioners, an estimated 94,000 FNPs (AANP, 2015). Significant growth in nurse practitioner programs, particularly family nurse practitioner programs, offers a rich opportunity to study this complex group of students.

A second reason for choosing the family nurse practitioner subpopulation is that the doctoral population within education has been studied extensively with regard to socialization and sense of belonging. The master's level nurse practitioner population has not. This again offers an opportunity for further research on a specific group of students to understand their experience and the nuances of an advanced practice nurse program. A third reason is the population and setting. Duquesne launched the first online Nursing PhD program in the country in 1997 and two years later converted all of its graduate programs to distance education. Since its beginning, the faculty and administration have been very deliberate in its vision, planning, and programming to focus on the student as a whole and their online experiences. For this reason, it is valuable to examine the students' experiences and understand their perspectives. Yet in spite of this, little research has been done to examine the online graduate programs, specifically the FNP program and/or gain insight into the student experience.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study uses a three-pronged approach to data collection that includes a document review, student surveys, and semi-structured interviews of the students. Through these approaches to data collection, I hope to obtain rich data to gain insight into the students' experiences specifically examining socialization and sense of belonging. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What does it mean to be an online graduate student in nursing in the Duquesne University Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner program?

2. How do students experience socialization as online students?
3. How do students experience a sense of belonging as online students?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As noted, while an abundance of research is available on the experience of traditional students and the significant role that socialization has on the student experience, research on online students is still in its infancy. As a student affairs professional who works with online graduate students, I strive to meet the needs of students by building programming, developing student services, and assisting students toward success in their respective programs. In this capacity, I not only grew to appreciate the dedication and commitment that it took for online students to complete their programs, but also saw firsthand the struggles that online students often faced. By focusing this study on online education in a professional discipline, the results are significant to both Education and Nursing programs.

The research also has significance for the study of online degree programs and socialization in higher education. Socialization among online students has been found to be essential to students' overall experience by helping students to avoid the feelings of isolation and experience feelings of acceptance and support (Bumblauskas, 2009; Lehman & Conceicao, 2013). Programs that have used targeted socialization interventions have reported higher retention rates (Berman & Ames, 2015; Sull, 2013). Additionally, Holley and Taylor (2009) found that engagement in online programs not only leads to socialization and learning, but also helps students to develop professionally. Studies have also shown that the persistent student is

able to build connections in a supportive, collegial environment which helps to establish his or her sense of belonging and fit to a program or institution (Hart, 2012; Ivankova & Stick, 2007).

Socialization is a critical piece of student development and building a sense of belonging among students. This is particularly true for subpopulations such as graduate, online, and professional students. The need for online students to have opportunities for socialization is essential to building a sense of belonging and leading to positive outcomes, such as student satisfaction, retention, and graduation. Nurse practitioner students, particularly those in online programs, are in need of examination.

The study also carries personal significance. I have spent the last five years of my doctoral program investigating and exploring higher education management through the lens of distance education in an effort to build a body of knowledge. I serve as the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at the Duquesne University School of Nursing. Previously I served as an academic advisor to the graduate online nursing students. My education and professional experience provides a foundation of knowledge about higher education, online graduate students, programming, nursing education, and student affairs management. These academic and professional experiences stimulated my drive to shed light on to the unique online experience of the students in the MSN FNP program.

1.5 DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

There are several terms that need to be defined for the reader to better understand the context of this study. These appear in a table of definitions below. Table 1 denotes these terms, their definition, and the source of the definition.

Table 1. Definitions

Term	Definition	Source
Advanced Practice Nurse (APN)	Advanced practice nurse (APN) is recognized as an overarching term for licensed registered nurses (RNs) who are prepared at the graduate level in nursing as a nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, certified nurse-midwife, or nurse anesthetist.	American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 1996
Distance education	Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously.	National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2016
Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP)	The family nurse practitioner is a specialist in family nursing, in the context of community, with broad knowledge and experience with people of all ages. The focus of care is the family unit, as well as the individuals belonging to the family, however the family chooses to define itself.	US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), 2002
Nurse Practitioner (NP)	Clinicians that blend clinical expertise in diagnosing and treating health conditions with an added emphasis on disease prevention and health management	American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP), 2016(a)
Preceptor	Nursing preceptors provide the clinical teaching opportunities that are critical to Nurse Practitioner preparation.	American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP), 2016
Socialization (in the context of graduate and professional school)	The process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry in to a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills.	Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003
Sense of Belonging	A students' sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teachers and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of	Goodenow, 1993

Table 1 continued

	feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class A students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)	Strayhorn, 2012
Sense of Community	A feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together	McMillan (1976) and McMillan and Chavis (1986)

Additionally, I use several abbreviations that may not be familiar to the average reader. Therefore, I have also created a table of commonly used abbreviations in this study to assist the reader, Table 2.

Table 2. Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Unabbreviated explanation
APN	Advanced Practice Nurse
APRN	Advanced Practice Registered Nurse
DU	Duquesne University
DUSON	Duquesne University School of Nursing
FNP	Family Nurse Practitioner
MSN	Master of Science in Nursing
SON	School of Nursing

2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature includes the conceptual framework that guided this study, the importance of socialization in student development, sense of belonging, and the socialization of nurse practitioner students. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a summary of the selected literature on socialization and sense of belonging, particular to the online nursing community. In this chapter I define socialization and sense of belonging, how each is used separately to enhance students' experiences, and how they work together to build relationships, and may lead to positive outcomes such as student satisfaction, retention, and graduation. This section includes a synthesis of both theoretical and research based literature.

2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework, the “guide and ballast” for this study (Ravitch & Riggan 2012, p. 194) is Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2001) theory of graduate and professional student socialization. It was used in conjunction with Goodenow's (1993) theory on the role of a sense of belonging in education. Weidman et al.'s model focuses on four stages of socialization: anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal. Their theory of graduate and professional student socialization draws on previous work in education, student development, career development, and adult and undergraduate student socialization. Goodenow's (1993) theory on sense of

belonging in education focuses on relationship and community building through socialization as a way to create a sense of belonging for the student. Socialization and sense of belonging are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary concepts that together enhance the student experience. By using these two theories as the framework of this study, I hope to effectively examine the experience of students in the online MSN FNP program.

2.2 SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is a key strategy in establishing students' sense of belonging and encouraging professional development, leading to positive student outcomes (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem & Stevens, 2012; Gallagher-Lepak et al., 2009; Restauri, 2004; Rovai, Wighting & Liu, 2005; Strayhorn, 2012). Socialization is defined by Weidman, et al. (2001) as “the process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills and values necessary for successful entry in to a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills” (p. iii). Higher education institutions are charged with creating an atmosphere where socialization and the development of a sense of belonging can be experienced by students. In order for the socialization process to be successful, the institution must commit to providing a supportive environment in which socialization is fostered (Goodfellow, 2014; MacLellan, Levett-Jones & Higgins, 2015; Weidman & Stein, 2003).

Socialization can happen both formally and informally. Formal socialization occurs as a part of structured or planned activities to help assimilate students to their roles. Informal socialization occurs naturally as a result of the interaction between students, faculty, and peers, or as students navigate through the program (Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). While formal,

structured socialization is beneficial to students, the informal interactions between students and their faculty, peers, and institution are just as important (Austin, Cameron, Glass, Kosko, Marsh, Abdelmagid, & Burge, 2009; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). The relationship between students and faculty has been identified as particularly important to student success. Programs found to have higher ranked relationships between students and faculty have also been found to be ranked higher in overall quality (Austin et al., 2009; Katz & Harnett, 1976). Austin et al. argue the reason that building relationships with faculty is so critical is because the students will eventually become colleagues of the faculty with the potential to work together again professionally. The peer relationship between students is also very important to students' overall success (Austin et al., 2009; Weidman et al., 2001). In traditional programs, socialization among peers and relationship building happens in the classroom, in study groups, and student lounges. In an online setting, this relationship typically develops through continued interaction in the courses via discussion boards, live classes, or chats and provides the basis for a bond to be formed (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2003; Munich, 2014).

Collaborative learning communities are especially important for distance learners and “building community online is one of the greatest challenges in distance education” (Silvers, O’Connell & Fewell, 2007, p. 81; Weidman, et al., 2001). Leners, Wilson, and Sitzman (2007) found that students enrolled in online programs did not feel distance to be a barrier to socialization or mentoring. Advances in technology have created ways for students enrolled in distance education programs to work collaboratively in groups with peers and faculty, hold assistantship positions, participate in asynchronous classes, and still feel connected (Silvers, O’Connell & Fewell, 2007; Weidman et al., 2001). Faculty are able to develop creative ways to present content, create learning communities and environments that are supportive, and facilitate

knowledge acquisition and professional development (Irwin & Berge, 2006; Silvers, O'Connell & Fewell, 2007; Weidman et al., 2001).

2.2.1 Weidman, Twale and Stein's theory of graduate and professional student socialization

Several socialization models exist in the literature; however, I chose the Weidman, Twale and Stein (2001) theory, because it is one of the few models that focuses on both graduate and professional students (Goodfellow, 2014). This model is widely used and considered to be fundamental to student affairs theory and practice (Gansemer-Topf, Ross & Johnson, 2006). A significant amount of socialization research concentrates on doctoral students. Weidman, et al. recognize that masters and professional programs are very different than doctoral programs and so are the students' experiences: "Despite similarities between them, no two graduate and professional programs are identical, and no two students experience graduate or professional school in quite the same way" (Weidman, et al., 2001, p. v.). Weidman, et al. draw on previous theories and literature including education, student development, career development, and both adult and undergraduate student socialization. Their theoretical model has been widely used in other research studies specifically focusing on the successful socialization of doctoral students (Cole & Griffin, 2013; Gardner, Jansujwicz, Hutchins, Cline & Levesque, 2014; Goodfellow, 2014; O'Meara, Knudsen, & Jones, 2013; Russell, 2015).

One of the theories that Weidman et al. (2001) draw on is Thorton and Nardi's (1975) role acquisition framework. Using their role acquisition theory as a basis, Weidman et al. employ two significant assumptions. These two assumptions play an important role in understanding the socialization experience of students more thoroughly. The first assumption is that socialization is

a developmental process that students experience (Weidman et al., 2001). While other models depict socialization as linear, unidirectional, and specific to students' interactions within the institutions, Weidman, et al. disagree. Socialization is "dynamic and ongoing, without a definitive beginning and end" (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 40). They found that socialization is a process that is not linear; students may experience the different stages of socialization at different times and the stages often overlap. Similarly, Weidman, et al. also proposed that socialization is multidirectional, meaning that it is not limited to occurring from the institution to the student but rather between and among students and institutions, faculty, and peers. Additionally, Weidman, et al. asserted that there were many influences that affected students' socializations experience including academic, social, professional, personal, and collegial. These influences help students to socialize to both their roles: student and professional (Holley & Taylor, 2008; Weidman, et al., 2001). Weidman, et al. also found that the socialization process does not end upon graduation but rather continues into professional practice.

The second assumption is that socialization of graduate and professional students model is based on core elements that are linked to the development and commitment of role identity (Weidman et al., 2001). These elements help to explain the engagement of the student in the stages and the process (Weidman et al., 2001). The core elements can be broken down in to three areas: knowledge acquisition, investment, and involvement. Knowledge acquisition refers to the process by which knowledge shifts from general to specific in both the student and in the professional role. As students move to an awareness of their roles, they are able to learn their roles through gaining the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill the roles, and find how they individually fit in to their chosen role (Weidman et al., 2001). Investment focuses on the time, money, learning, social status, and the choice of program or profession that was chosen as

compared to those that were not. The individual places the value on the investment, but the level of investment depends on the level of commitment and goals of the students (Weidman et al., 2001). Involvement refers to students' participation in their roles and their role preparation. As students move through the socialization process, they begin to internalize their roles, reflect on its dimensions, develop interest in specializations, and learn to perfect their skills (Weidman et al., 2001). Involvement also encompasses interaction with faculty and peers, particularly formal and informal mentoring from faculty and more advanced students in the programs. These interactions are important for students to experience as they build bonds through shared experiences such as milestones, and progression (Weidman et al., 2001).

Institutional environment and its importance on students' socialization experience is also a significant part of the theory of graduate and professional socialization (Weidman et al., 2001). Organizational structure, the mission, academic and program requirements, reputation, and the faculty and administration structure, can all influence socialization. Additionally, the higher education culture and the culture specific to the school, department, or program also can affect students' socialization (Weidman et al., 2001). There are often norms, values, expectations and standards that are particular to each program, department, or school that can be formally learned and those that are only observed when students become a part of the environment (Weidman et al., 2001). Specifically, Weidman et al. argued that learning affects not just the professional role, but professionalism as well. Weidman et al. used four stages (anticipatory, formal, informal, and personal) to illustrate the developmental components of socialization. Each of the four stages is described in detail later in this chapter.

2.2.1.1. Stages of socialization

There are four stages of socialization: anticipatory, formal, informal and personal (Weidman et al., 2001). These stages are based on Thornton and Nardi's (1975) concept of the stages of role acquisition. The term, stage, refers to the position of each student in the socialization process. Because socialization is understood as a developmental process that students experience, it is also believed that the stages may overlap or happen concurrently without following a linear progression (Weidman & Stein, 2003; Weidman et al., 2001).

The anticipatory stage of Weidman, et al.'s (2001) theory of graduate and professional student socialization is the earliest stage in the process. This stage typically focuses on the investigation of potential programs, and recruitment and application processes (Weidman et al., 2001). The anticipatory stage also includes the knowledge that a potential student brings with them about the student role, although these ideas may change over time as the students gain more information (Senge, 1990; Shields, 2002). Although the interaction that a prospective student may have with faculty or peers is usually limited, the socialization that occurs is focused on the role of being a graduate or professional student and not social interaction. It is typically during this time that a student will decide whether to officially enroll in a program, taking the next step to becoming a graduate or professional student (Gansemer-Topf, Ross & Johnson, 2006).

The formal stage of Weidman, et al.'s (2001) theory of graduate and professional student socialization addresses the interactions after a student is admitted to a program and when formal instruction begins. The students often are able to grow in their role as graduate or professional students through coursework or clinical or practicum hours (Gansemer-Topf, Ross & Johnson, 2006). Role expectations are again explained to students and they are beginning to set personal goals, seek feedback, and focus on their academics. Socialization activities such as orientations

or campus residencies can facilitate the transmission of role expectations and assist with navigation and explanation of the program (Strayhorn, 2012). The responsibilities of students increase as they navigate through their program (Weidman et al., 2001).

The informal stage of Weidman, et al.'s (2001) theory of graduate and professional student socialization occurs when students move from the student role to the professional role. While most of the interaction and influence happens in more informal ways, it is perhaps one of the most important stages of the socialization process. Students are able to better understand acceptable behavior and cultural norms and as a result begin to display them. Students also seek support systems and opportunities for bonding over shared peer experiences (Weidman et al., 2001). The role of peers becomes increasingly important as students share concerns and questions, and seek advice from each other as they establish their identity as students who will assume professional roles (Gansemer-Topf, Ross & Johnson, 2006; Weidman, et al., 2001). Programs that admit students as a cohort can significantly influence students' socialization experience. This can be done through the learning process itself. Bonding can occur for a group that experiences the same milestones, progression, or navigation and can create rich, supportive environments for students and their peers (Weidman et al., 2001).

The personal stage of Weidman, et al.'s (2001) theory of graduate and professional student socialization centers on the individual student and the development of student's professional identity. During this transition in the socialization process, students internalize their roles as professionals and mature as they become more serious about their future (Gansemer-Topf, Ross & Johnson, 2006; Weidman, et al., 2001). Although remaining part of the peer group, students begin to separate themselves by assessing their future and making decisions to help them become ready to enter the professional market place. The students focus on their own

professional image and future, often looking to specialize their practice through a research project or clinical focus to prepare them for their post-graduation plans (Gansemer-Topf, Ross & Johnson, 2006; Weidman, et al., 2001).

Collectively, these four stages describe the process of socialization that graduate and professional students experience, according to Weidman, et al. (2001). While the completion of all four stages means that students have progressed through the socialization process, it does not mean that they are ready to assume professional roles. Even after graduation, and entry into professional practice, they continue to learn and grow in their professional role (Weidman et al, 2001).

2.2.2 Socialization in other subpopulations

A significant portion of the literature on socialization examines specific subpopulations of students (e. g., graduate level, African American, first-generation). Literature also shows that sense of belonging “takes on heightened importance” among specific subpopulations (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 20). However, the pool of literature looking at socialization within the online student population is much smaller. Online educators and administrators have identified a need to socialize online students in an effort to advance student success (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem & Stevens, 2012; Restauri, 2004; Rovai, Wighting & Liu, 2005).

The literature on specific subpopulations provides further support for the development of programming and creative ideas for online student populations. I chose to review the literature on socialization and sense of belonging for graduate, African American, and first-generation students for comparison purposes. While I use these subpopulations for comparison purposes, I do not suggest or conclude that the experience of the graduate, African American, or first-

generation student is the same as the experience of an online student. I chose these subpopulations of students to illustrate the importance of socialization and sense of belonging on the educational experience and to provide an appreciation for the variation in socialization experiences. Comparison also demonstrates how creating an environment that is open to and supportive of socialization activities and opportunities can enhance the students' experiences and lead to positive outcomes.

2.2.2.1 Graduate students, socialization, and sense of belonging

Much of the previously conducted research with graduate students, specifically doctoral students, focused on the role of socialization as a key to positive student outcomes, such as persistence and completion (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn found that the process of socialization helps students to transition from “outsiders” to “insiders,” and experience a sense of belonging. Socialization orients students to role expectations and helps them form supportive relationships and networks, essential to persistence (Janson, Howard & Schoenberger-Orgad, 2004). Socialization within their fields of study leads to developing a sense of belonging to peer groups, the institution, and to the profession. Graduate students' capacity to socialize, build communities, participate in orientation activities, and navigate the higher education system are essential steps in the overall experience that leads to success (Weidman et al., 2001). Each component helps graduate students to transition into their new roles and to develop their identities as graduate students. The institution can facilitate the socialization process formally through orientation sessions and supporting graduate student organizations, and informally by providing common spaces for the students to interact (such as graduate student lounges).

Higher education institutions use a variety of strategies for socializing and developing relationships with and among graduate students. Strayhorn (2012) conducted a study that

surveyed 60 graduate students across 15 institutions, focusing on the types of socialization activities and opportunities that were used to build relationships and develop a sense of belonging among them. According to the results, the most commonly utilized opportunities in graduate programs included: orientation programs, advisement, social gatherings with faculty and peers, research training sessions, workshops, internships, and engagement in professional associations (p. 97). Although Strayhorn's study sample was 15 institutions, many of these activities and opportunities are commonly used in graduate higher education (Harrell, 2008; Lehman & Conceicao, 2010; Lehman & Conceicao, 2013; Newberry & DeLuca, 2014; Pizzolato, 2008).

2.2.2.2 African American students, socialization, and sense of belonging

Literature on the socialization of undergraduate African American students supports socialization strategies as well. Carson (2009) focused on the role of collectivism as a key component in the development of identity and academic achievement among African American college students. Akbar (1991), Allen and Bagozzi (2001), and Nobles (1991), as cited by Carson, defined collectivism as "an individual's concern with the advancement of the group to which he or she belongs" (p. 327). Carson studied African American racial identity theory and the value of collectivism to the African American culture using qualitative methods. Carson conducted interviews with African American students to examine their decisions about higher education within the context of their families, friends, community, and their experience. Carson identified the salience of collectivism to the students positively and negatively. The students he studied found it helpful to be part of a larger group of African American students in transitioning into new situations and making friends (Carson, 2009). An extension of this finding was the

importance of support and relationships with African American faculty and staff directly influenced their success.

Tatum (1997) identified the need for higher education institutions, specifically predominantly white institutions, to provide environments where African American students can feel safe and comfortable enough to come together and share their culture, norms, and experiences. Having such an environment, students are more likely to “feel anchored in one’s community” (p. 80) which allows students to focus on academic achievement and campus life in a more positive way. Likewise, Anglin and Wade (2007) conducted a study using questionnaires which were completed by 141 African American college students who were enrolled in one of two institutions; a predominantly white institution and a racially diverse institution. Anglin and Wade found that socialization among African American college students “positively contributes to academic adjustment” (p. 207). Their findings showed that shared interests and experiences can help forge bonds between individuals and students which themselves lead to “feelings of connectedness” (p. 213). The relationship between racial socialization and overall college adjustment was found to be marginally significant, $B=17$, $t(137)=1.92$, $p=.06$. This connectedness is not just directed to other students, but can also assist students in being more connected to their institutions.

Kunjufu (1997) examined the African American students’ college experience in terms of the student’s decisions, identity, and place within the context of higher education in his qualitative study. Kunjufu breaks down the African American college student experience into specific areas, including: choosing a college, transitioning into college, developing habits and discipline, retention, social life, personal relationships, and life after college. Kunjufu challenges

students to own their development and transition offering insight into how students may seek out new opportunities or take advantage of existing opportunities to do so.

2.2.2.3. First-generation students, socialization, and sense of belonging

First-generation undergraduate students are another subpopulation of students who face distinct challenges and have been examined in socialization studies. First-generation students are “those students whose parents have not completed a college education” (McKay & Estrella, 2008, p. 357). Similar to other subpopulations, first-generation students often struggle to transition into college. Terrenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) identified the transition from high school to college as one of the three most important areas of research conducted with first-generation students.

A study by Terrenzini et al. (1996) showed that transition programs designed to assist first-generation students through their freshmen year and beyond increased the likelihood of graduation. Because first-generation students may not have an informed support system, a grasp of academic cultural norms and navigation guides for academic systems, the transition to college can be intimidating and overwhelming (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Witt, 2005). Socialization can help to decrease feelings of intimidation and decrease the sense of being overwhelmed by addressing some of the students’ fears and giving them supportive environments.

Petty (2014) found that “the social component and the need to belong are critical to motivating and retaining these students in college in order for them to succeed” (p. 260). First-generation students who feel that they do not “fit” socially are more likely to leave school (Petty). Other studies have shown that successful institutions and programs retain and graduate first-generation college students when they develop programming to identify, transition, and support students (Lightweis, 2014; Terrenzini et al., 1996). Successful programming includes

mentoring, advisement (using a variety of models), enforcement of housing policies, such as a requirement that all freshmen live on campus, or the creation of living learning communities for students with similar backgrounds (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Lightweis, 2014; Ramsey & Peale, 2010; Stuber, 2011; Wiggins, 2011). Kuh et al. (2005) found that the development of relationships for first-generation students, particularly with their faculty members, is essential for student success. Providing such opportunities for social integration can lead to positive outcomes for both the students and the institution. However, socialization coupled with support services increase positive outcomes by creating environments that are inviting, engaging, and supportive (Anderman, 2003; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Freeman et al., 2007; Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2012).

2.3 SENSE OF BELONGING

One of the most important aspects of a successful college experience for students is feeling a sense of belonging. Feeling a sense of belonging can influence students' academic progress, relationships, and support systems to help them persist and graduate (Strayhorn, 2012). According to Strayhorn, "Sense of belonging can come from peers, teachers or faculty, family members, social and academic groups, and living learning environments" (n.p.). A significant portion of the preparation for both undergraduate and graduate studies is spent identifying schools that the student feels he or she would like to attend, and where he or she would be supported as a student, along with learning and growing as an individual, and finding a place where they could "fit in." It is important that the relationships and interactions with these key players are positive in order for students to feel that they fit in or belong to the larger institutional

community (Goodenow, 1993). Building an environment that is rich with opportunity to develop relationships and a sense of belonging for students is important for the institution's success.

2.3.1 Defining sense of belonging

Research shows that a sense of community or sense of belonging is critical for students to persist and graduate (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow & Salomone, 2002; Osterman, 2000; Rovai, 2002; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2004). Specifically, a sense of belonging helps online students to “avoid the feeling of isolation, [and] gives students a sense of self-direction and management, thus reducing loss of control, contributing to learner satisfaction, and increasing motivation” (Lehman & Conceicao, 2013, p. 65). In order to understand the overall concept of sense of belonging and its role in distance education, grasping the meaning of “sense of belonging” is critical.

“Sense of belonging” is a broad phrase that is used not only in education, but also in business and psychology. It has informed research that focuses on organizational behavior and workplace performance (Osterman, 2000). It was not until the late 1980s that the term “sense of belonging” appeared in the education literature, addressing its role in persistence and completion (Osterman, 2000; Reilly & Fitzpatrick, 2008). Since the 1980s, however, it has been employed in the education literature in both K-12 and higher education settings. In business and psychology literature, “sense of belonging” refers to the basic need of an individual to build relationships with others, to be a part of something larger, and to feel accepted by that group in order to achieve success (Lambert et al., 2013; Mele, 2012). Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, and Collier (1992) studied the sense of belonging as an essential component of mental health and

defined it as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of the system or environment” (p. 173).

Goodenow (1993) more specifically defines a sense of belonging in education as the “students’ sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by others (teachers and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (p. 25). Similarly, McMillan (1976) and McMillan and Chavis (1986) defines sense of community as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Strayhorn (2012) more narrowly defines sense of belonging in higher education as “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (p. 17).

All three definitions focus on the feelings of acceptance, value, or importance in order for the sense of belonging or community to be achieved. They also reference interactions of groups, addressing the importance of feeling encouraged by other group members and having an expectation that within the group the needs of individuals are met. Additionally, Strayhorn (2012) found that sense of belonging has an innate reciprocal quality because it is relational in nature. For the purpose of this literature review, Goodenow’s (1993) definition and the definitions outlined by McMillan (1976), McMillan and Chavis (1986), and Strayhorn (2012) is used to define sense of belonging. The term community (as in sense of community) is also relational and refers to a community as a group of people, not the traditional definition of community as a specific location or neighborhood (Gusfield, 1975, as cited by McMillan &

Chavis, 1986). In addition to this distinction, the terms “sense of belonging” and “sense of community” was used interchangeably, as their operational definitions are very similar and much of the literature uses the terms in this way.

It is critical for institutions to attend to students’ sense of belonging. The premise for this theory comes from wanting to fit in and be accepted being a fundamental motivation of human behavior (Maslow, 1954). Decades of research have been conducted to aid psychologists, health care professionals, and educators in understanding the motivation behind this desire. The need to belong is a driving factor of human behavior and motivation (Maslow, 1954; 1968). Maslow (1954) theorized that belongingness is among the basic needs of human beings. In order for belongingness to be achieved, the other needs of hunger and safety must first be met. Once these basic needs are met, then and only then can an individual achieve belongingness, which in turn must be met in order for an individual to achieve esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). Building on Maslow’s work, Baumeister and Leary (1995) posited that the need to belong is also powerful and fundamental. They also found that all humans have a need to build interpersonal relationships. While this aspect of sense of belonging as a basic need speaks to the internal aspects of the individual, the external aspects of the environment are just as significant.

Both Maslow (1968) and Baumeister and Leary (1995) offer similar theories on how belonging is created. Maslow (1968) posited that safety, belongingness, love, and respect are external, and to some degree environmental. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that a sense of belonging can be created through social bonds. The authors also found that social bonds can be easily formed in most contexts by simply bringing people together, in a room, a situation, or through shared experience. McMillan and Chavis (1986) focus on four criteria for creating a community support: membership in a group, level of reciprocal influence within that group (both

in terms related to the individual on the group and the group on the individual), integration into the group and the fulfillment of the needs of both the individual and the group, and a shared emotional connection between the group members.

2.3.2 Sense of belonging for online students

Over the last few decades, distance education, and more specifically online education, has grown exponentially (Lehman & Conceicao, 2010; 2013). Several reasons for this surge have been identified: the development of technology, improvements to the Internet, and the interests of specific populations of students who are seeking educational flexibility.

As distance education has grown, so has the need to meet the distinct needs of online students. Scagnoli (2001) posits that through the inherent nature of distance education online students do not have the same experience as traditional students. As a result, online students often do not automatically make a close connection to the institution, faculty, and classmates. This can create a feeling of isolation which traditional students are often able to avoid. Because isolation is common and can contribute to student dissatisfaction and attrition, Scagnoli and Rovai (2002) challenged higher education institutions with the responsibility of not only creating an atmosphere where a sense of belonging or a sense of community can be explored by students, but also with actually helping the students to forge bonds with their institution, faculty, and classmates. Research has shown that a sense of community or a sense of belonging is critical for students to graduate (Freeman et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Osterman, 2000; Reilly & Fitzpatrick, 2008; Rovai, 2002; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2004). Specifically, Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, and Lee (2007) are among the many researchers who have found significant positive relationships between the development of a sense of community and online student

engagement, learning, and satisfaction (Drouin & Vartanian, 2010; Rovai, 2002; Rovai et al., 2005; Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012). Sense of belonging helps online students to avoid isolation and leads to increases in satisfaction and motivation to complete the program (Lehman & Conceicao, 2013).

Similarly, Scagnoli's (2001) literature review and Dunn's qualitative study (2005) support that it is not only the physical isolation from the institution, faculty, and other students that creates barriers to success, but also psychological isolation. Psychological isolation comes from not feeling connected to an institution or not even knowing how to address concerns or issues with the institutional system because of a lack of familiarity with it (Ali & Smith, 2015; Lehman & Conceicao, 2013; Rovai, 2002). Without identifying the students' experiences and perceptions, or the connection that they may feel with the institution, it is difficult to address areas for improvement. "Feeling isolated is a major cause of students' stress" Gummer, Shieh and Niess (2008, p. 62) found in their study, and this stress potentially leads to dissatisfaction. In addition to dissatisfaction, a lack of a sense of belonging can lead to higher attritions rates and lower graduation rates (Hoffman et al., 2002; Osterman, 2000; Rovai, 2002; Sedgwick, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Ivankova and Stick (2007) found that online students' progress correlates with satisfaction rates. Ivankoa and Stick conducted a mixed methods study in which 150 online students and 129 face-to-face students completed surveys that focused on variables that included classroom community, classroom social community, classroom learning community, school community, and school social community. Those students who withdrew or did not complete their online program rated their satisfaction as low. As distance education evolves, higher education institutions are challenged with evolving as well. These institutions need to be in tune with the needs of the students, and able to develop the necessary programming

to address these needs, support the students during their online programs, and create relationships and a sense of belonging to the institution.

2.4 SOCIALIZATION ACTIVITIES

Institutions that are attempting to build online communities and create supportive environments often report higher student retention and graduation rates (Charalambos, Michalinos, & Chamberlain, 2004). While there is no right or wrong way to develop online communities, there are a variety of socialization activities to promote a sense of belonging and community building among online students. Common activities and services include: orientations, on-campus residencies, mentoring, academic advisement, technology support, in-depth training sessions, and internships (Strayhorn, 2012). The majority of institutions use these activities and support services in one way or another to support both face-to-face (traditional) and online students. While the activities and support services previously described are not an exhaustive list, they are essential to building a sense of belonging and helping to achieve success.

2.4.1 Orientation

Beginning anything new, such as enrolling in college or graduate school, can be exciting and thrilling; however, it also can create anxiety and raise a plethora of questions for students. “How will I know what to do? What are my next steps? Where do I begin?” are common questions. These questions can create additional anxiety for students entering online programs, especially if they are not familiar with online classes or online programs. The need for online students to

socialize, build communities, participate in orientation activities, and learn to navigate higher education systems from a distance are essential to students' overall experience and success (Newberry & DeLuca, 2014).

Faculty and institutions with online programs are challenged with leveraging technology to allow students and faculty to maintain personal levels of interaction, thus overcoming negative influences of distance. Orientations include orientation to the institution, technology, faculty and staff, program requirements, system navigation, and how to access important resources. These skills help to set expectations at the beginning of the program so that students are clear on the rigor of the program and can make adjustments to put themselves in positions to be successful (Harrell, 2008; Kuh et al., 2005;). Some schools have orientation courses (some for credit) to assist students in transitioning into their role as online students (Kuh et al.). These courses can be particularly helpful for students who have not studied in online learning environments. Not only can orientations help with transition, it also assists retention by creating a supportive environment so that students are more likely to have positive online experiences (Lehman & Conceicao, 2013; Lehman & Conceicao, 2010). Harrell credited orientation as a way for students to bond early in the program and build their own support systems. Boling et al. (2012) found that creation of support systems and learning communities are “powerful motivators” for students to persist and graduate (p. 123). Similarly, students who felt supported were more likely to continue in their program (Rovai, 2002).

2.4.2 Campus residency

Although the majority of online programs are taught completely online, over the last several years, there has been an increase in the number of institutions that conduct some form of on-

campus residencies (voluntary and mandatory). For example, schools such as Purdue University and Auburn University found their on-campus residencies for online students to be successful (Auburn, 2015; Purdue, 2015). Researchers at Kennesaw State University reported that on-campus residencies helped to improve retention rates in online courses (Ali & Leeds, 2009). In a study conducted by Nepal and Lawrence (2011) on a project based on on-campus residency, the researchers found that the campus residencies helped students to interact and build relationships with students and faculty. If on-campus residencies are held early in the students' programs, students can tour the campus, learn institutional cultures, and gain a better perspective on the expectations and structure of their chosen program. Similarly, Bumblauskas (2009) found that an on-campus residency offered students and faculty opportunities to meet face-to-face and to link names and faces, making the online experience more personal. It also stimulated faculty and students to build a rapport and lessen in feelings of isolation later in the program.

While some studies found on-campus residencies beneficial, others found them unnecessary, defeating the purpose of having online experiences (Power & Morven-Gold, 2011). Mills, Knight, Kraiger, Mayer, and LaFontana (2011) reported that on-campus residencies can create a barrier for student recruitment, as many students seek out online programs for flexibility and the ability to complete a degree from a distance, and thus they do not require a presence on campus. Mills et al. (2011) also found that on-campus residencies require more resources including staffing and facilities (rooms, parking, and meals). Some online degrees or programs do not have brick and mortar facilities that can accommodate on-campus residencies. Pennsylvania State University (2015), with its large online World Campus enrollment, does not offer on-campus residencies, but does offer both online and on-campus activities to its online

students. Overall, administrators of the programs that use on-campus residencies found them to be beneficial to not only the student's experience but also to the institution (Ali & Leeds).

2.4.3 Advisement

O'Banion (1972; 2009) purported that academic advisement is a critical part of the education process not merely "an additional service to be performed...it can become the service through which most other services are realized" (p. 86). There are a variety of advisement models currently used in higher education and specifically in distance education. The primary models are professional advisement model, a faculty advisement model, and a combination of these two.

Although online advisement can pose a challenge, these challenges can be overcome by developing and maintaining student-centered approaches and the use of technology, such as GoToMeeting, Skype, and FaceTime. While technology is very important in advisement of online learners, it is critical for the advisor to understand online advisement is not transferring typical advisement services to online students. Because online students have their own challenges and skills, the advisement of these students should be specially crafted to address their needs (Chakiris, 2014). The advisor, whether he or she is a faculty member or professional advisor, links the online student to the institution. He or she is often the first person students contact when they are confused, need clarification around expectations or navigation issues, or experience personal issues (Crawley, 2012; Crawley & Fetzner, 2013; Newberry & DeLuca, 2013). While an institution may commit to any of the advisement models, advisement is a critical support service for online students (LaPadula, 2003; O'Banion 2009, 1972).

2.4.3.1 Professional advisement models

Crockett (1985, as cited by McDonnell, Soricone & Sheen, 2014) defined academic advising as a “developmental process, which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals” (p. 6). A professional advisor is a person who does not hold a faculty role, whose primary job responsibility is to advise students. Academic advisors offer more than just assistance with the scheduling of courses and completion of required paperwork. For example, Duquesne University academic advisors are available to students to help with career counseling and identification of resources (both academic and financial) to help students succeed. In some cases, advisors are prepared to offer personal counseling (Duquesne University “Advisement,” 2014).

Over the years, many academic advisors have adopted aspects of Baxter Magolda and King’s (2004) learning partnership model and moved from simply monitoring student registration and notifying students of class schedule changes to building partnerships with students to ensure their success (Pizzolato, 2008). As Pizzolato points out, “An academic advisor who has built a one-on-one relationship with a student over an extended period is in an ideal position to become a partner in helping shape the advisee’s academic experience” (p. 21). As a result of this finding, in addition to the partnership with the learner, academic advisors often serve as the liaison between the student and the school, and as an advocate for the learner to ensure that fair treatment and academic due process are preserved (Miller et al., 2014). Academic advisors often serve as advocates in a variety of ways. The role of the advocate can be expressed through the writing of letters of recommendation or serving as a reference for employment. It can also be achieved through more formal proceedings, such as serving as the student’s advocate on the academic standing committee or at a conduct board hearing.

While the role of professional academic advisor is important, it does have challenges associated with it. One such challenge is the limitation of the role as it relates to knowing specifics of students' discipline or profession. For example, a professional advisor is typically trained in the areas of student affairs management, higher education, or counseling, and not in a specific major such as nursing, engineering, or philosophy. Consequently, the professional academic advisor who does not have the same background in the students' specific discipline may be less able to help the student with professional development, socialization, integration, and career advice (Jeffreys, 2012).

2.4.3.2 Faculty advisement models

Jeffreys (2012) defined faculty advisement as “the active involvement of nursing faculty in the student’s academic endeavors, career goals, and professional socialization” (p. 127). In schools or institutions that use faculty advisement models, the faculty member is typically the individual responsible for assisting students in navigating the system, choosing classes, setting goals, and monitoring progression. This is an effective model for establishing working relationships with faculty, socializing the student to professional roles, and developing a formal or informal mentorship between the faculty member and student (Baker & Griffin, 2010). Baker and Griffin also suggest that the role of the faculty advisor has evolved over the years and has added the role of developer. The faculty’s role is not to just advise and mentor, but also to help the student develop skills, goals, and plans for achieving those goals.

Fayetteville State University uses the faculty advisement model and has found it effective for faculty advisors to teach in the freshmen seminar courses in order to connect students and their faculty advisors early in a student’s program (Kuh et al., 2005). Other schools, such as the University of Texas-El Paso and Wheaton College, assign faculty advisors at the beginning of a

student's program and have advisors and students work on projects or initiatives together (Kuh et al., 2005). Although these practices are primarily used with face-to-face students, these efforts can be easily translated for online students. In fact, Kumar, Johnson, and Hardemon (2013) showed that online students found that the use of technology was not a hindrance to building relationships; in some cases, the students used multiple forms of technology to work with their faculty members, including workflow software, data sharing software, and remote access so that the faculty could have access to the student's data set in real time and discuss it with the student.

One of the challenges of utilizing a faculty advisement model is the increase in workload for the faculty member. In addition to the faculty member's teaching schedule and scholarship obligations, faculty advisement can require a significant amount of time: planning, meeting with students, and monitoring their progress. In addition to these duties, faculty in some disciplines (such as healthcare fields) are also often required to maintain active practice. Some nursing specialties require a prescribed number of clinical practice hours to obtain and retain certification (NONPF, 2010). All these obligations are demanding on a faculty member's time and effort. It is important for a faculty member to balance these demands, not only to meet their obligations to the institution or profession but to students, as well.

2.4.3.3 Combination advisement models

While each type of advisement model brings its own strengths and weaknesses, perhaps the most comprehensive approach combines the professional and faculty advisement models. By creating a two-tier advisement model in which each student has access to and support of a professional academic advisor as well as faculty advisor, the student can utilize the expertise of both. This also produces what Kuh et al. (2005) called a "safety net" or "tag-team" for the student by creating a team whose joint responsibility is to focus on the student as an individual and his or

her particular needs. It allows for a more comprehensive assessment of student needs and better identification of services to assist students.

Schools such as Wheaton College and George Mason University use their own versions of a combined advisement model to identify student needs and potential barriers to success early in the program, and they continue to work with each other and the student to develop goals (Kuh et al., 2005). Kuh et al. credited having a strong bond between the faculty and advisement staff with early identification of at-risk students and early referrals to support services such as tutoring and counseling. These approaches lead to more positive outcomes. Wheaton College assigns faculty and staff advisors during students' freshmen year to help students through the transition into college and continue to work with them throughout their entire program. Because of the early identification of this support system, some students have even termed them their "freshmen family" (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 247). Both these institutions have found that the utilization of the freshmen family concept helps students feel more supported and experience a sense of community.

A combination advisement approach can also be beneficial to the institution. This team-based approach does not require the institution to create and fund new positions and it allows the individuals to share responsibilities. This makes the workload more feasible and enhances communication between faculty and the advisement staff. By sharing the work, each advisor (professional and faculty) can be an expert in his or her area instead of trying to make one person all things to all students (Kuh et al., 2005). Institutions can also address the ongoing issue of advising training and development, which can be problematic.

Studies have shown that both faculty and professional advisors are undertrained due to such factors as resource constraints or the undervaluing of advisement training (Hemwall, 2008).

While a lack of formalized advisement training does not mean that a faculty member or professional advisor cannot successfully advise a student, they may not be well-versed in commonly used practices, advisement approaches, or tools available to assist students. Although the literature shows both the benefits and challenges of different advisement models, the overwhelming majority of the literature suggests that a positive relationship between the faculty, advisement staff, and student leads to improved outcomes such as student satisfaction, retention, and strong graduation rates.

2.4.4 Outcomes of socialization and sense of belonging

Sense of belonging has been linked to positive outcomes in education, such as achievement, retention, and graduation (Anderman, 2003; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Freeman et al., 2007; Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2012). In addition to the connection between a sense of belonging and positive educational outcomes, the sense of belonging is also credited with leading to additional positive long-term outcomes such as increased self-esteem, self-actualization, better physical and mental health, and happiness (Hagerty, et al., 1996; Maslow, 1954, 1968; Osterman, 2000). It is also believed that, in order for these outcomes to be positive and to remain pertinent to the individual's sense of belonging, the interactions, relationships, and the individual's need to belong must be continually met. It is not enough to have a positive first interaction with a person, group, or institution in order to achieve (or maintain) the long-term outcomes; the interactions, relationships, and the sense of belonging must be consistently positive and supportive, as well as perceived as sustainable (Strayhorn, 2012). Goodenow (1993) warns that even once a sense of belonging is achieved, it is not guaranteed, and the feeling or sense can change if there are circumstances or events that an individual perceives as an interruption or as meaningful. For

example, changes in faculty or a student's unpleasant interaction or experience can influence sense of belonging. This is one reason why it is important for institutions to recognize that the relationship with a student is an ongoing one that needs continual monitoring and investment.

Student satisfaction has been found to be a result of the consistent and ongoing interactions between students and their institution, instructors, and their peers (Bean & Metzner 1985; Elliott & Shin, 2002; Kember, 1998; Tinto, 1975; 1993). One study discovered varying levels of online student satisfaction, these being dependent on the level of activity or engagement reported in the online courses (Swan, 2002). Students who reported their own level of activity as high also reported considerably higher levels of learning and satisfaction (Swan, 2002). These findings are consistent with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) work, which focused specifically on understanding the need to belong and the importance of positive experiences in developing the need to belong. They found that the need to belong has two main features: "frequent, personal contact or interactions" with others and "an interpersonal bond or relationship" with the expectation of it having a future (p. 500). These findings are also consistent with best practices as outlined by the Online Learning Consortium's quality scorecard indicators for student satisfaction (Moore & Shelton, 2014). Specifically, the indicators that address these beliefs are:

- Program demonstrates a student-centered focus;
- Students should be provided a way to interact with other students in an online community;
- Efforts are made to engage students with the program and institution. (p. 47)

While student satisfaction is a goal of higher education institutions, the ultimate goal is to be able to retain and graduate a student.

Although there has been extensive research on retention in higher education, comparatively, a much smaller amount of research has been conducted on retention in distance education (Boston, Ice & Gibson, 2011; Park & Choi, 2009). In order to understand the role of a sense of belonging on student retention, it is first important to understand student retention models, and specifically, how they apply to online students. Perhaps the most notable retention research in higher education (both generally and in distance education) has been conducted by Tinto (1975; 1982; 1993), Bean and Metzner (1985), and Kember (1988). Tinto's work was and continues to be widely accepted and used in a variety of settings – public, private, four-year, and two-year institutions, as well as tribal and historically Black colleges (Boston et al., 2011; Tinto, 1993). In his foundational research Tinto (1975) found that social integration was essential to persistence and retention. He explained that the more socially integrated a student is to an institution and its culture, the more likely that student is to remain enrolled because he/she feels connected to the institution. Additionally, his findings from his 1993 study showed that, although some environments are more challenging than others, the promotion and achievement of student engagement and their sense of belonging is still possible (Tinto, 1993).

The work of Bean and Metzner (1985) followed Tinto's model (1975), and focused on retention of non-traditional students. Although their findings do not use online students as a population, they support the role of the institution in helping a student to persist through a combination of support from both the institution and the student's family or additional external support (Bean & Metzner; Kember, 1995). Conceivably, the research that most closely speaks to online student retention is that of Kember. While Kember's research was consistent with both Tinto's (1975; 1993) model and Bean and Metzner's model, he specifically studied retention of distance education students (McGivney, 2009). Kember focused on the institutional factors of

retention (social and academic integration) and external factors (external attribution and academic incompatibility). External attribution and academic incompatibility include managing non-academic responsibilities and lack of academic readiness to engage in distance education (Kember; McGivney, 2009). All three models show the need for the institution to have an active role in helping to retain the student.

Consistent with these retention models, Simpson (2004) also found that institutions that assumed active roles in helping the student develop a sense of belonging achieve higher retention rates. Simpson suggested that some attrition is inevitable in an academic program, whether it is online or face-to-face. Common reasons for online student attrition include feelings of isolation, frustration, technology issues, poor communication between students and faculty, a lack of student support, and a lack of social interaction (Lehman & Conceicao, 2013). Gazza and Hunker (2014) warned that “it is imperative that both academic and social support be readily available and accessible to students to enable them to be successful in completing online courses and programs” (p. 1127). The more contact and positive interaction an institution has with a student, the less likely it is that the student will drop out (Simpson, 2004). Similarly, Park and Choi (2009) also found that organizational support is statistically significant in predicting if a student will be retained or drop out. Higher education has long researched retention, but it is important to focus on a retention model that is sensitive to the environment and population at hand in order to gain valuable insight into the nuances of distance education.

Although distance education has continued to grow in recent years, retention issues in distance education courses and programs continue to plague higher education institutions. Boyle, Kwon, Ross, and Simpson (2010) report that the highest dropout rates in education are among the populations enrolled in distance education courses or programs. Russo-Gleicher (2013)

reported that dropout rates are typically 10-20% higher with this population than the attrition rates of students enrolled in face-to-face programs. Additionally, Jenkins (2011) pointed out that “studies showing success rates in online courses of only 50 percent—as opposed to 70-to-75 percent for comparable face-to-face classes” (n.p.), illustrating the significant difference in retention rates for the two types of education. Other research has shown that one of the reasons that online students have a higher attrition rate is due to the feeling of isolation that these students can feel (Ali & Smith, 2015; Schaeffer & Konetes, 2010). In Shaeffer and Konetes’ (2010) study, social isolation was the top reason that students gave for dissatisfaction and often led to their disenrollment from online programs.

In addition to concern about retention from higher education institutions, in recent years, the federal government has shown additional interest in higher education outcomes and, more specifically, in the outcomes of distance education programs (Boston et al., 2011). Higher education institutions cannot afford to ignore increasing attrition and low completion rates. In addition to dealing with the lost revenue of student attrition, institutions are forced to focus on online student retention to remain competitive in the distance education market.

2.5 SOCIALIZATION FOR THE ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSE

Due to the challenging nature of graduate nursing education, it is critical that socialization be addressed by the institution to enable students to succeed in their chosen program (Weidman et al., 2001). MacLellan, Levett-Jones and Higgins (2015) stated that, “transitioning from registered nurse to nurse practitioner (NP) can be challenging personally and professionally” (p. 389). It is a developmental process in which students enter with previous knowledge, skills, roles, values,

and standards and are expected to move from the expert (as a professional nurse) back to the novice (as an advanced practice nursing student) back to the expert (as a certified, licensed, advanced practice nurse) (MacLellan et al., 2015; Waugaman & Lohrer, 2000; Weidman et al, 2001). Socialization between students, faculty, and peers is an effective way to enhance the self-confidence of students and to provide for a successful transition through this process (MacLellan, et al. 2015).

Experiencing emotional connectedness is critical to build community and confidence, and to decrease feelings of isolation (Gallagher-Lepak, Reilly, & Killion, 2009). “Socialization varies by discipline or professional field” (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 71). In addition to the socialization with faculty and peers, the roles of the preceptor and mentor are also extremely influential. Not only do nurse practitioner students have to focus on the academic setting, but they also have to address the clinical setting as well. Nurse practitioner students complete a specific number of clinical hours with a preceptor who serves as their clinical faculty. The role of clinical preceptors in nursing education is critical to the professional socialization of students (Donley, Flaherty, Sarsfield, Burkhard, O’Brien & Anderson, 2014). Clinical preceptors enrich students’ skill development and learning process, and can serve as a mentor in the students’ transition to the advanced practice role (Donley et al., 2014; Link, 2009). Such mentorship can be established formally through a structured program or informally as the relationship with a faculty member, preceptor, or other advanced practice nurse evolves (Hayes, 2005). Relationship development with faculty, peers, and preceptors can assist nurse practitioners and nurse practitioner students to meet their professional goals by having a support system, sounding board, or mentor (Hayes, 2005). More specifically, positive relationships and support from faculty, peers, mentors, and

preceptors can lead to sense of belonging for students (Crafter & Maunder, 2012; MacLellan et al., 2015; Szanton, Mihaly, Alhusen & Becker, 2010).

Very few studies of doctoral students in nursing including students in online programs have been conducted; additionally, little research has been done on the master's level nurse practitioner students who engage in online programs. Although little research has been conducted in this area, research on a similar subpopulation, online doctoral nursing students, can prove helpful. Socialization and support is especially important for online nursing students (Munich, 2014). The research that has been done with doctoral students in nursing often focuses on isolation (Halter, Kleiner & Hess, 2005) and scholarly productivity (Billings, 2000; Broome, Halstead, Pesut, Rawl & Boland, 2011; Goodfellow, 2014). Goodfellow (2014) conducted a study using the Doctoral Student Socialization Questionnaire (DSSQ) derived from the socialization framework of the authors, Weidman and Stein (2003). Goodfellow's (2014) study was conducted at the same institution and school as my proposed study; she employed the survey to students enrolled in the PhD in Nursing program at Duquesne University. In this study, Goodfellow (2014) looked at the six dimensions of the DSSQ. Her findings showed that five of the six dimensions of socialization were significantly correlated with each other including faculty-student interactions, student-peer interactions, supportive faculty environment, collegiality, and student scholarly encouragement (Goodfellow, 2014, p. 598). This finding is particularly interesting as it suggests that socialization can be experienced in online programs, specifically online doctoral programs. The remaining dimension, participation in scholarly activities, was not significantly correlated with the other dimensions (Goodfellow, 2014). The reason for this could be that the students who rated the survey items having to do with participation in scholarly activities as low had not been in the program for long and may not have

had an opportunity to do so yet. Additionally, Goodfellow (2014) found that faculty in online doctoral programs in nursing can foster socialization; however, the faculty need to promote collaboration and opportunities for students to do so.

2.6 SUMMARY

In an educational setting, and particularly in distance education, the sense of belonging can be tied to a student's success and, in turn, the success of an institution (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging has been identified as a basic human need that has a significant influence on an individual's mental health, social integration, cognitive development, and ability to achieve (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty et al., 1992, 1996; Maslow, 1954, 1968). From a student affairs professional perspective, sense of belonging can be achieved by using a variety of socialization activities including mentoring, orientation, campus residencies, advisement, and targeted support services. As Charalambos et al. (2004) found, it is not the implementation of a particular strategy or service that leads to a sense of belonging, but rather an overall understanding that the sense of belonging through socialization should be addressed by the institution.

As the need for flexible and convenient educational options grows, distance education opportunities continue to grow. Lehman and Conceicao (2014) reported that participation in online courses has grown by 358% since 2003 (p. 4). Institutions with a history of distance education options, as well as those new to the market, are investing in a way to reach new audiences across the world and expand their reach without having to build new buildings and invest in physical facilities (Lehman & Conceicao). Socialization and sense of belonging have

been linked to higher rates of online student satisfaction and retention, and is a critical way to strategically increase the success of an online program (Freeman et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Osterman, 2000; Reilly & Fitzpatrick, 2008; Rovai, 2002; Sedgwick, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 1975; 1993; 2004). It is not enough to simply create an online presence; institutions can invest in their students' success by focusing on creating opportunities for socialization and sense of belonging.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methodology utilized in the study. This chapter explains why qualitative research was chosen and more specifically the reason a case study design was chosen as the methodological approach to study the socialization experience of Duquesne University online Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner students. This chapter also provides a detailed explanation of the case study design, the sample, setting, and instruments chosen, data collection procedures, planned analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 RESEARCH SUBJECTIVITY AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The goal of this research was to collect data on the student experience in the Duquesne University School of Nursing MSN FNP program to determine what it means to be an online graduate student in nursing and how students experience socialization as students in this program. This research is particularly important to understand the nuances and complexities of this online graduate program. Subsequently, the findings may assist practitioners, educators, and administrators that work with online graduate nursing students in understanding the need for targeted socialization activities in order to better serve them.

I serve as the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at the Duquesne University School of Nursing. I am also a doctoral student in Higher Education Management at the University of

Pittsburgh. I previously served as an academic advisor to graduate online nursing students for six years. I was a part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curricula, policies, and support services for all graduate programs. I have relied on my strong institutional memory to provide some of the details about processes and how decisions were made. My education and professional experience provide for a foundation of knowledge about higher education, online graduate students and programming, nursing education, and student affairs management. These professional experiences are what prompted me to focus on the online experience of the students in the Duquesne University School of Nursing online Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner program. Additionally, it could provide additional data to practitioners, educators and administrators when working with this subpopulation of students. To address some of my own assumptions, prior to any data collection I stated my assumptions and any preconceived notions in writing.

The assumptions that I made focused on the methodology included that my knowledge of the MSN FNP program and my role in the School of Nursing allowed me to access documents more easily. It was assumed that the recruitment emails sent by the graduate academic advisor were received by all the students to whom they were sent. I assumed that all participants in the study provided honest responses on both the surveys and in the interviews. It was also assumed that my role as the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs in the School of Nursing did not influence the students' responses.

I also documented my assumptions and pre-conceived notions about the expected results and findings of the study. I expected that students would feel a sense of belonging to Duquesne University and the School of Nursing despite being in an online program. I projected that students built relationships and friendships with their classmates outside of the program. I

expected that students were able to socialize to the graduate and professional roles in an online program. I anticipated that student interactions with faculty and staff supported their socialization experience and influenced their feeling of a sense of belonging. Finally, I expected that students valued the on-campus residencies.

By considering my own assumptions and preconceived notions I was able to collect data with an open mind. By doing this prior to data collection, I was making an attempt to address any concerns or issues around influencing participants because of my role in the School of Nursing. Additionally, I employed the use of a peer debriefing strategy to address potential bias.

3.2 RATIONALE FOR CASE STUDY DESIGN

The results of the study allowed me to gain an in-depth perspective of the socialization experience of the MSN FNP students by both survey and interview methods of data collection. Although the results may contribute to student affairs practice, it was not my primary goal. While practitioners often make decisions based on available resources, best practices, or their own experiences or ideas, it is critical to consider the perspective of the student and learn from their lived experience. A qualitative research approach provided me the ability to collect rich data from the students' perspectives. "Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it" (Hatch, 2002, p.7). A qualitative methodological approach also allowed me to focus on the underlying meanings, patterns, complexities, and nuances that make the socialization experience of these particular students so unique (Babbie, 2013; Hatch).

While a qualitative methodological approach allowed for in-depth examination into the experiences of the students in the chosen program, a case study approach more specifically

emphasized the context of a phenomenon of an individual, group, program, or event (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hatch, 2002; 2010; Yin, 2014). I believe that these nursing students have a unique experience particularly with regard to their socialization and the support services that exist and promote socialization opportunities for the students. Consistent with Yin's basic criteria for determining if a case study approach should be utilized, I sought to understand "how" and "why" students experience socialization the way that they do. More specifically, I sought to understand how socialization is experienced in online education, why the online student may experience socialization differently than traditional students, and why the socialization experience of online students is critical to study.

Additionally, the context of the Duquesne University School of Nursing and specifically the online MSN FNP program are salient to the student experience. As a result, it would be difficult to separate the context out from the student experience without removing an integral part of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). Conducting a study of the socialization experience of all online students across the country would create an overabundance of variables to be reviewed and to account for in determining a positive student experience. A single-case study concentrating on one program in one particular school allowed me to focus on how and why the specific support strategies, programming, and even institutional culture may influence the student experience (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2014). This study was intrinsic in nature based on the researcher concentrating on a particular case to understand that case better (Stake, 1995). More specifically, the concentration of an intrinsic case is specific to that case and is not necessarily representative of other cases or a larger concept or phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995).

Stake (1995) posited that, “the real business of case study is particularization not generalization” (p. 8). This case is not meant to be representative; the goal is to emphasize the nuances and complexities of the DUSON MSN FNP program. Petite and modified generalizations may be made about this intrinsic single case study. Additionally, the context of the case makes it relevant, interesting, and potentially transferrable. I expect that the findings of this study will help student affairs practitioners understand the complexities of working with and supporting online students, particularly online graduate nursing students.

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The focus of this study was on the socialization experience of Duquesne University School of Nursing online Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner students through the following research questions:

- 1.** What does it mean to be an online graduate student in nursing in the Duquesne University Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner program?
- 2.** How do students experience socialization as online students?
- 3.** How do students experience sense of belonging as online students?

3.4 STUDY DESIGN

The setting, program background information, population, sample, and recruitment were purposefully chosen to capture the richest data about the socialization experience of Duquesne

University School of Nursing online Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner students. The following sections discuss the research design details. The study used a three-pronged approach to data collection that included a document review, student questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews of the students. Through these approaches to data collection, I was able to obtain rich data to gain insight into the students' experiences specifically examining socialization and sense of belonging.

3.4.1 Setting

Duquesne University is a small, private, Catholic university in the northeastern Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Duquesne enrolls approximately 10,000 students at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The mission of the School of Nursing at Duquesne University is consistent with the mission of Duquesne University. Both missions focus on the value the delivery of programs of professional education founded on a commitment to serving God through service to students so that students can serve others (DU, 2015; DUSON, 2015).

The School of Nursing (SON) currently enrolls 1,012 students in its seven undergraduate and graduate degree programs. All graduate-level nursing programs are offered online using an internet based learning management system and have been since 1999. The School of Nursing launched the first online PhD in Nursing program in the country in 1997, and since that time, the School of Nursing has continued to offer online programs and support services to its students. Online graduate students study from numerous areas throughout the United States, as well as a number of locations abroad. The specific focus of this study is the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) Program. The Family Nurse Practitioner program prepares students to become a nurse practitioner and work in a primary care setting, serving

individuals and families across the lifespan. Table 3 outlines the important details about the MSN FNP program.

Table 3. MSN FNP Program Table

Family Nurse Practitioner Program (MSN FNP) Spring 2016	
Credits	46
Full-time/Part-time Designation	Full-time = 6 credits per semester; Part-time = less than 6 credits per semester
Length of Program	3 years; 8 semesters
Leads to Licensure/Certification	Yes
Required Clinical/Practicum Hours	750
Required In-person Orientation	Yes (Cohorts 1, 2 & 3)
Required Residency	Yes (Cohorts 1, 2, & 3)
Retention Rate (2014-2015, based on conversion of first year student to second year)	87%
Total Program Enrollment	118

3.4.2 Program background information

While enrolled in the MSN FNP program, students are required to attend specific campus visits. Students that enrolled in the program prior to the Summer of 2016 were required to attend three (3) campus visits: orientation, Physical Assessment Residency Week, and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations Residency Week. Beginning in the Summer of 2016, the School of Nursing faculty and administration moved to an online orientation with all of its new MSN programs including the FNP program. All students are still required to attend the Physical Assessment and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Weeks. Additionally, students

complete clinical practice hours as a requirement of the program, the term clinical refers to such clinical practice.

3.4.2.1 Orientation

Since the MSN program was launched in 1999, the School of Nursing has provided an orientation to its online students to help them to transition into the program. Following the students' acceptance and tuition deposit to the University, each student is expected to take part in the school/program orientation. The orientation has taken on several forms over the years including one-day, two-day, optional, mandatory, in-person, and online formats. For several years, the orientation was made mandatory and if a student was unable to attend, his or her admission was rescinded and deferred to the next academic year (Duquesne University School of Nursing 2015-2016 Student Handbook, 2015).

The orientation included presentations on the orientation to the school, technology, faculty and staff, program requirements, navigation of the system, and expectations of the students. The faculty and administration developed the orientation content to set the bar at the beginning of the program so that the student was clear on the rigor of the program and could possibly make adjustments early on to be sure he or she has put themselves in a position to be successful. The orientations are also a way for students to bond with each other early on in the program and build their own support system.

The orientation had been held in person in either a one or two-day format until the cohort that was admitted in the Summer 2016 semester. In Summer 2016 the School of Nursing delivered the orientation in an online format. The School of Nursing moved away from the mandatory, face-to-face orientation due to a decrease in enrollment and the additional burdens (financial, time commitment, logistical) that the orientation put on students.

Physical Assessment Residency Week

FNP students follow a prescribed, sequenced curriculum. They are required to participate in two residency weeks associated with coursework. The first residency week is the Physical Assessment Residency Week named for the course it is associated with, GPNG 528 Advanced Physical Assessment, which is taken in the second fall of the students' curriculum. Students enrolled in the course each fall (offered Fall only in the current curriculum) are required to come to campus during the scheduled week. The focus for the residency is on clinical skill development, and students have the opportunity to observe, practice, demonstrate, and test on the following skills: head to toe physical examination, patient health history interview for patients across the lifespan, men's and women's health abnormalities, and infant health assessments. The course is three (3) credits but is split into two (2) credits of theory and one (1) credit of clinical, which is equivalent to 75 clock hours at the graduate level. In addition to the Residency Week (40 clinical hours), students are also required to complete 35 additional hours of clinical with a preceptor.

Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week

The second residency week is the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week named for its associated course, GNFN 504 Clinical Diagnosis (in the old curriculum) or GNFN 510 Foundations of Family and Individual Care: Across the Lifespan I (current curriculum). This course is taken in the third and final fall of the students' curriculum before graduation in the following semester (spring). Students enrolled in the course each fall (offered Fall only in the current curriculum) are required to come to campus during the scheduled week to meet the course objectives. The course is six (6) credits, but is split into three (3) credits of theory and three (3) credits of clinical, which is equivalent to 225 clock hours at the graduate level. The

focus of this residency week is on developing advanced practice skills (EKGs, suturing, office procedures), transitioning to the family nurse practitioner role, and preparing for the next steps of the professional role (licensure requirements and trends and issues in healthcare). In addition to the Residency Week (40 hours), students are also required to complete an additional 185 clinical hours with a preceptor for a total of 225 clinical hours.

Clinical Hours and Preceptors

A significant portion of the preparation for an advanced practice role, such as the Family Nurse Practitioner, is made up of clinical hours. The number of clinical hours required for this program is 750, which is broken down into 670 precepted clinical hours and 80 residency hours. At the graduate level, hours are completed using a clinical preceptor. The clinical preceptor works one-on-one with the student to help meet the clinical objectives of the course. In an online program such as this, students use preceptors in their own geographic area so as to make the completion of the hours easier on the student. In order for the student to be able to work with the preceptor for a given course the clinical preparation process must be completed. This process includes the review and approval of the preceptor, the establishment of a preceptor and clinical site contract, and the student's completion of clinical and health requirements, such as CPR, Blood Borne Pathogens training, and immunizations. During the semester, the student works one-on-on with the preceptor to complete the hours and clinical objectives of the course. The preceptor completes periodic evaluations of the student's performance and submits them to the course faculty, who incorporate this feedback in to the student's final grade. The course faculty are in contact with the preceptor several times a semester to monitor performance.

3.4.3 Population and sample

As of the Fall 2016 semester, Duquesne University School of Nursing had 122 active students enrolled in the MSN Family Nurse Practitioner Program. For the purpose of this study, the target participants were the MSN FNP students who graduated in the Spring 2016 semester (Cohort 1; n=29), those preparing for graduation in the Spring 2017 semester (Cohort 2; n=29) and those students in the second year of the program who are expected to graduate in May of 2018 (Cohort 3; n=45). The total number of students targeted to participate in this study was 103. Cohort 1 was chosen because they had participated in all three required campus visits and completed the program. Cohort 2 students were chosen because they had participated in all three required campus visits and were at the end of their program. Cohort 3 students were chosen because they had completed two of the three required campus visits, orientation and the Physical Assessment Residency Visit, and will prepare for their third and final campus visit in the Fall of 2017. By identifying and inviting only those students who had completed at least two of the campus residencies, I was able to gain insight into the student's experience in the program over the length of the program.

3.4.4 Recruitment

The Dean of the Duquesne University School of Nursing gave permission for me to conduct the study with currently enrolled online MSN FNP students (Appendix A). Once approval from the Institutional Review Board at Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh was obtained, communication with the students and dissemination of the recruitment email (Appendix B) began. Recruitment was conducted in two phases (Phase 2 and 3) specific to the

method of data collection as outlined in the Data Collection and Analysis Process. I collaborated with the Duquesne School of Nursing's graduate academic advisor to obtain a list of the MSN FNP students who met the criteria for Cohorts 1, 2, and 3.

In Phase 2, an email was sent by the graduate academic advisor to all Cohort 1, 2, and 3 students, which is 103 online students, who are all enrolled full-time. The email message (Appendix B) details the purpose and significance of the study and invited subjects to voluntarily participate in the study by completing a survey by clicking on the link in the email notice they received. The email contained a link to the secure online data collection site, Qualtrics, for those students who were interested in participating in the study anonymously. All communication with the participants was conducted electronically, via email sent by the graduate advisor in the School of Nursing on my behalf and online survey completion (Qualtrics). The graduate advisor also sent students an email reminder to complete the survey at day 7 and day 10. Although participation was voluntary, all participants who completed the survey were eligible for a drawing for one of two \$25 gift cards. They had the ability to enter their name in the drawing separately from the actual survey. This way, their responses remained anonymous.

The second part of the recruitment process occurred in Phase 3 and pertained to the interview phase of the study, two weeks after the survey had been closed. Again, the graduate advisor sent all 103 students in Cohorts 1, 2 and 3 an email inviting them to participate in a 30-45 minute interview about their experience in online graduate education. Because the students were enrolled in an online program, the student had the option of completing the interview in person at an agreed upon location on or off campus, virtually via GoTo Meeting, or via telephone. The goal was to recruit at least six students from each cohort for a total of 18 interviews or until saturation of data was achieved. To increase participation, the graduate

advisor sent out a second email invitation 1 week and 3 weeks after the first email was sent. Respondents were asked to schedule an interview with me at an agreed upon day and time by responding to the email. I then contacted each student directly to schedule the interview and identify which of the options the student had chosen to complete the interview. While participation was voluntary, a monetary incentive was offered in the form of a \$25 gift card. Once a student completed the interview they were sent the gift card via U.S. mail. The recruitment strategy was designed in two parts in an effort to maximize participation. If a student was interested in completing the survey but not the interview (or vice versa), I would still be able to include both survey and interview data in analysis.

Due to issues around the recruitment of participants in the first attempt at recruitment and data collection for the surveys, I made a second attempt after approval by both the Duquesne University and University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Boards. In the second attempt, I increased the number of participants but the overall response rate was still low. The low response rate was unusual as the SON usually receives higher response rates to surveys. After further investigation, I identified potential reasons for the low response rate having to do with the timing of the surveys. The first call for surveys was the week before and the week of midterm exams in which the students may have been focused on their coursework and upcoming exams. The second call for surveys also came right before their campus visits and again the students may have been focused on their courses and preparing for the residencies. Other reasons may include that they were not interested in participating or were concerned about participating in the study since I was the researcher. Students may have felt uncomfortable answering these questions.

3.4.5 Consent

Following the regulations set forth by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University, I obtained consent from each individual participant in the study prior to the start of the survey and again prior to the start of the interview. In Phase 2 of the Data Collection and Analysis Process, students were invited to voluntarily participate in the study by responding to the email notice they received. The email contained a link to the secure online data collection site, Qualtrics, for those students who were interested in participating in the study. The survey had a cover letter that explained the purpose of the survey and explained the consent process. The student then clicked on the consent option to begin the survey. Because consent was obtained by the click of a consent option on the online entry system, there were no consent forms to store. Students were able to complete the survey anonymously. Students were also told that they could stop the survey at any time and that their responses in no way would affect their status within the Duquesne University School of Nursing. They were also told that once they submitted the completed survey they were not able to withdraw their responses if they decided to withdraw their consent to participate in the anonymous survey.

After Phase 2 of the Data Collection and Analysis Process was complete, Phase 3 commenced. Students received an email (Appendix D) inviting them to participate in a 30-45 minute interview. Potential subjects were asked to respond to the interview to express interest in participating in an interview. Once the student responded to the email, I contacted the student directly to schedule the interview and identify which of the options the student had chosen to complete the interview. All participants were asked to complete a form that asked them basic demographic and background questions on their use of technology and experience with online learning. The participants were also asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview. At the

start of the interview, I reviewed the consent with the participant and reminded him or her that the interview could be stopped at any point without penalty. I also reviewed that the interview had no influence on the student's status and/or progression in their FNP program at the DUSON. Due to my position in the School of Nursing, it was very important that I make this very clear to the students. In addition, the consent form clearly stated that there was no benefit and/or penalty regardless of whether a student participated, did not participate, or withdrew from the study.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

I utilized multiple sources for data collection that included document review, a survey tool, and interviews. The use of multiple sources of data, including both qualitative and quantitative, in case study research is crucial, more so than any other type of research method (Yin, 2014). Yin suggests utilizing multiples sources of data to achieve convergence of evidence, which shows the consistency in findings and reinforces the construct validity of the case study. While the document review and survey provide for a wealth of data that was important in understanding the socialization experience as a whole, the addition of the interview in the data collection process was critical in understanding the experience from the students' perspectives:

A researcher can approach the experience of people in contemporary organizations through examining personal and institutional documents, through observation, through exploring history, through experimentation, through questionnaires and surveys, and through a review of exiting literature. If the researcher's goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing

provides a necessary, if not completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry. (Seidman, 2013, p. 10)

Table 4 outlines the data collection plan for this study and the evidence and data that answers each of the guiding research questions.

Table 4. Data Collection Plan

Data		Evidence	Method of Data Collection
Background and demographic information about participants		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic information Background information Previous distance education experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic form Grand tour questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 14 Follow up questions 1a, 1b, 4a, 14a
Research Question 1	What does it mean to be an online graduate student in nursing in the Duquesne University Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DUSON Student experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey Questions 14, a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m; 15 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, o, p, q; 16 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i; 20, 21 Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grand tour questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 Follow up questions 1a, 1b, 4a, 4b, 4c, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 10a, 11a, 11b, 11c, 13a, 13b, 14a, 14b, 18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e, 18f, 18g, 18h
Research Question 2	How do students experience socialization as online students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DUSON Student experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document review Survey Questions 14 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m; 15 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q; 16 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, I; 17, 18 a, b, c, d; 19 a, b, c, d; 20, 21 Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grand tour questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16 Follow up questions 4b, 4c, 4d, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 10a, 11a, 11, 11c, 13a, 13b, 14a, 14b, 18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e, 18f, 18g
Research Question 3	How do students experience sense of belonging as online students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DUSON Student experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey Questions 15 a, b, c, e, f, g, j, l, o, p, q; 16 a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i; 18 a, b, c, d; 19 a, b, c, d; 20, 21 Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grand tour questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18 Follow up questions 4d, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 10a, 11a, 11b, 14b, 18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e, 18f, 18g

Figure 1 below outlines the various steps and the timing of the Data Collection and Analysis Plan. The figure depicts the three sources of data collection (document review, survey questionnaire, and interviews) and the four phases of data collection and analysis.

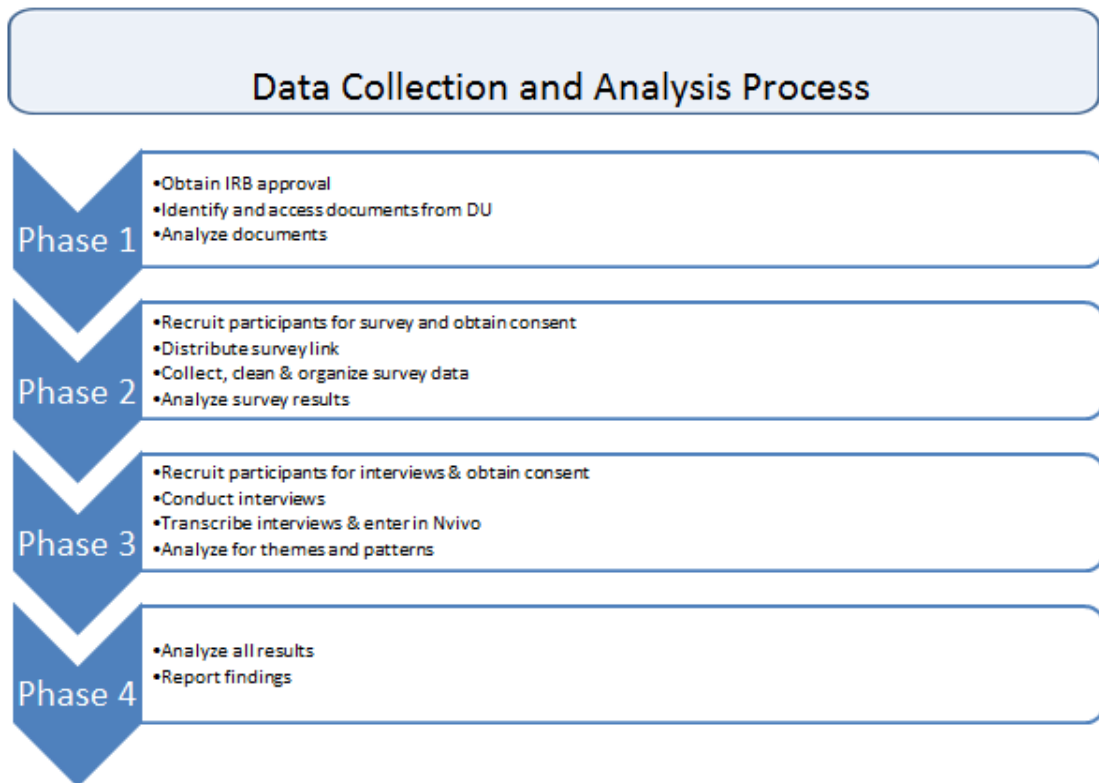


Figure 1. Data Collection and Analysis Plan

3.5.1 DOCUMENT REVIEW

I conducted a document review of Duquesne University School of Nursing materials. This method is particularly beneficial to the researcher as it allows for data to be verified for accuracy and assists in the triangulation of data when used with additional sources of data (Yin, 2014). It also allowed me to view the information from a student's perspective and gain insight to how a student may experience it. This review included student handbooks, emails, campus visit itineraries, video presentations (when available), PowerPoint presentations from campus visits, and information on planned activities. Specifically, I concentrated on gathering data on the policies, procedures, planning, and information around the student experience and activities and opportunities that promote socialization so that I could describe the case. It also provides a rich context for the reader. The document review was in the first phase of data collection.

3.6 INSTRUMENTS

3.6.1 Survey

Survey research is one of the most popular forms of data collection due to such features as flexibility and adaptability to any research topic and for use with any population or sample (Picciano, 2015). In addition, it provides a researcher the ability to collect a large amount of data and to manage it in an effective and efficient way. In Phase 2 of the Data Collection and Analysis Process, the graduate academic advisor sent a recruitment email to students identified

as Cohort 1, 2 or 3. The recruitment email (Appendix B) had a link to the secure online survey in Qualtrics. The instrument, entitled Master's Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire, was adapted from the the Doctoral Student Socialization Questionnaire (DSSQ) with permission from the authors (Appendix C). The original DSSQ is a survey questionnaire that assesses the socialization experience of a doctoral student (DSSQ, 2015). The tool derives from the theoretical framework of the authors, Drs. John Weidman and Elizabeth Stein (2003). The questionnaire centers specifically on six areas: "participation in scholarly activities, student-faculty interactions, student-peer interactions, supportive faculty environment, department collegiality, and student scholarly encouragement" (Weidman & Stein, 2003, p. 647). Weidman and Stein (2003) focused of these areas as key to a doctoral student's socialization experience. Each of the six areas is made up of specific questions focusing on gathering data on the student's experience in his or her respective program.

While the original survey has been widely implemented with doctoral students—including online doctoral nursing students—there has been no documented usage of it for online master's level online nursing students. Since there was no documented use of the tool for online students, adaptations were necessary, as some of the questions were not relevant to a master's level population. While the questionnaire focuses on six areas, it was broken down in to three sections: Part 1. Demographic and Background Information, Part 2. Campus Residency Experiences, and Part 3. Personal Experiences. Part 1 collected data about the participants, age, race, gender, academic background, experience with online education, and number of credits completed to date. Part 2 concentrated on the students' campus residency experiences and how they have interacted with faculty, staff, and other students. Part 3 focused on the overall experiences of the students with regard to online education. Survey research provides an

effective and efficient way to collect data; however, it is not necessarily to be used in isolation of other data collection methods.

Initially the Graduate Academic Advisor sent an email to 103 students who met the inclusion criteria outlined in Chapter 3, students enrolled full-time in the DUSON MSN FNP program who had completed at least two on-campus residencies. The email message explained the purpose and significance of the study and invited students to voluntarily participate in the study. Participation was indicated when students completed the surveys by clicking on the link in the email they received. The instrument (Appendix C), entitled Master's Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire, was adapted from the the Doctoral Student Socialization Questionnaire (DSSQ) with permission from the authors (Weidman et al., 2001). The Master's Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and includes three sections: demographic and background information, campus residency experiences and personal experiences. Twenty-one of the 103 student invited to participated started the survey for a 20.4% response rate; however, only 14 students completed the survey, so the completion rate was 66.7%. The results are presented in three sections in Chapter 4 demographic and background information, campus residency experiences, and personal experiences.

3.6.2 Interview consent/demographic form

I used a consent/demographic form to collect consent and basic demographic and background information from all interview participants. The link to the demographic form was entered in Qualtrics. Once a student contacted me to set up an interview, they were sent the demographic form that included the consent form. The demographic questions focused on the participant's

standing in the program, length of time in the program, previous experience with distance education, and frequency of use of technology. The goal of the demographic and background form was to provide me with more information to support the data collected in the interview and assist in the interview process.

3.6.3 Interviews

Phase 3 of the Data Collection and Analysis Process commenced once Phase 2 was completed. Phase 3 of the Data Collection and Analysis Process focused on the interview portion of the study. All 103 students in Cohorts 1, 2 and 3 received an email sent by the graduate academic advisor inviting them to participate in a 30-45 minute interview about their experience. Interested students responded to the email and I then contacted the student to set up an interview with me at an agreed upon day and time and using the preferred interview option. Because the students were enrolled in an online program, they had the option of completing the interview in person at an agreed upon location on or off campus, virtually via GoToMeeting, or via telephone. After the interview was scheduled, I then sent the participant the consent/demographic form for their review and completion. Once the completed consent/demographic form was submitted (via Qualtrics), the interview was conducted. The demographic form allowed me to collect basic demographic and background information from all interview participants.

At the time of the scheduled interview, I provided a brief description of the study and asked if there were any questions or issues. I reinforced that their participation, lack of participation, or withdrawal from the study at any time would not affect their progression in the program. The demographic information that I collected included the participant's gender, age, standing in the program, length of time in the program, and expected graduation. The

background data that I collected included: motivation for pursuing a graduate degree, previous distance educational experience, and decision to choose an online program. The collection of this information helped me to look for patterns and trends in the data analysis phase of the study.

Because the students were enrolled in an online program, the student had the option of completing the interview in person at an agreed upon location on or off campus, virtually via GoToMeeting, or via telephone. GoToMeeting is web conferencing software that allows for collaboration both in and out of the classroom. The School of Nursing currently uses this software for collaborative synchronous sessions through the Blackboard Learning Management System utilized by the university. GoToMeeting provides the opportunity for users to utilize two-way audio, multi-point video, screen sharing, drawing tools, chat, polls, and tests (Citrix GoTo, 2015). Attendees can participate through the email or a session link. All GoToMeeting interviews are audio recorded with the permission of the participant. If the participant did not want to be audio recorded via GoToMeeting, the participant had the option of completing the interview via telephone. No students chose to complete the interview using GoToMeeting. In-person interviews and telephone interviews were recorded using AudioNote Lite v. 5.2, a software application for recording audio. All audio files were downloaded and stored electronically in a secure location on my work computer, which is password protected.

The interviews were semi-structured interviews conducted by me with the goal of gathering data on the participants' socialization experience. I used an interview guide (Appendix F), which consisted of a basic script and series of questions that served as a starting point for the interview to allow the participant to feel comfortable answering questions. The semi-structured interview guide was loosely based on the dimensions from Weidman's DSSQ tool and the modified questions in the Master's Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire.

This script helped me to focus the interview and keep the participant on topic. The script portion of the interview guide ensured that I reviewed consent with the student again and made them aware that they could skip questions or stop the interview at any time and decide to be removed from the study. The series of questions was to serve as a way to keep the conversation active and to stay on topic. The intention was that this would allow the conversation to evolve and give the participant the opportunity to provide their lived experience and the meaning they made of the experience (Seidman, 2013). Appendix F provides a list of the questions to use during the interviews. During the recording of the interview, I also took notes on each interview. Several students that participated in the interviews indicated that they would ask their friends to participate in the interviews as well. Upon completion of the interview, the audio files were sent to a company that specializes in transcription, Verbal Ink. Transcribed interviews were then entered into QSR Nvivo 11.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

3.7.1 Data analysis plan

Upon approval of this study from the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University Institutional Review Boards, I began Phase 1 of the Data Collection and Analysis Process. I locked all study materials in a file cabinet in my office. I have stored all electronic files in a password protected storage system. Only I have access to the data. Due to the multiple methods of data collection, I articulated the data collection and analysis process very clearly to be sure that adequate time and resources were allocated to analysis of the results. Figure 1 outlines the

data collection and analysis plan to be implemented for this study. The sections below provide detail on the process that allow for this.

3.7.1.1 Document review data analysis

In Phase 1, the document review data analysis happened in three parts: 1) the identification of pertinent documents; 2) accessing and collecting the documents; and 3) analyzing the documents. As described in section *3.4.1 Document Review*, I developed a potential list of documents to be reviewed. This list included student handbooks, emails, campus visits itineraries, videos (when available), PowerPoints presentations from campus visits, and information on planned activities.

While identifying the document itself was important, it was just as important to identify the location of the document and who was responsible for the document or who the person was that would need to give me access to the document. Many of the documents or artifacts in the case of videos were stored electronically and I had electronic access to those software or files. Once I began to collect the documents for review, I printed materials so that I could take notes on the actual document to assist in analysis. I took detailed notes that were included in analysis.

The third step in the document review analysis was the actual analysis of the collected data. Specifically, I concentrated on gathering data on the policies, procedures, planning, and information around the student experience, and activities and opportunities that promoted socialization or socialization activities. I analyzed the documents, videos, and recorded notes to provide the background and clear examples of how the Duquesne University School of Nursing MSN FNP program runs on a daily basis without interrupting the process or flow of communication or activities. The analysis also reviewed the structured amount of interactions,

support, and opportunities available to students that might allow them to experience socialization.

3.7.1.2 Survey data analysis

Survey data was collected over a two-week period of time through Qualtrics, a secure online data collection site. Qualtrics also served as an honest broker and stripped the data of identifying IP addresses. As a result, the actual setting varied depending on where the participant completed the survey, whether it was on their home, school, or work computer. Once data was collected, I downloaded the participants' responses from Qualtrics into an Excel spread sheet.

I prepared data for analysis by first inspecting it for missing data, outliers, and other invalid scores. Frequency tables, histograms, and graphs were generated to visualize data collected on major variables under study. Descriptive statistics including mean, mode, and median were calculated on background and demographic data to describe the population under study. This was done for all three cohorts. I was able to do some comparison between the three cohorts as they were at three different points in the program and were enrolled in two different curricula. I also analyzed the findings focusing on the dimensions outlined by the DSSQ, specifically focusing on faculty-student interactions, student-peer interactions, supportive faculty environment, collegiality, and student scholarly encouragement. Comparisons made and findings related were used to explain the experience of the group in depth, and not to make inferences about how the curricula are different.

3.7.1.3 Interview data analysis

Data analysis for the interviews was structured around one of Hatch's (2002) five models of qualitative data analysis, specifically interpretive analysis: "Interpretation is about giving

meaning to data. It's about making sense of social situations by generating explanations for what's going on with them. It's about making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings, drawing conclusions and extrapolating lessons" (Hatch, 2002, p. 180). Although the data analysis heavily relied on the use of Hatch's interpretive analysis, I also incorporated some of the steps in Hatch's typological analysis to ensure a comprehensive analysis of all data collected. It was my hope that by using a combination of the two data analysis approaches that my interpretations would be better supported by data. This interview data analysis strategy along with my plan for having a memo of assumptions and using peer debriefing, allowed me to be a part of the study and help me to manage my assumptions. This was especially important because of my experience, role, and relationship to the Duquesne University School of Nursing. Figure 2 outlines the steps of combined process of typological and interpretive analyses that I utilized based on Hatch (2002).

1. Review the data for a sense of the whole (Interpretive)
2. Review entries and sort by research questions, recording the main ideas or impressions (Typological and Interpretive)
3. Look for patterns, themes, and relationships by typologies (Typological)
4. Review data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged and identifying patterns and themes (Typological and Interpretive)
5. Look for relationships among the patterns and themes identified (Typological)
6. Write a draft summary (Interpretive)
7. Review interpretations with peer debriefer (Interpretive)
8. Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations (Interpretive)

Figure 2. Combined Analysis Process

While I used Hatch's steps as a guide for the interpretive analysis I modified it slightly to include the use of QSR Nvivo 11, qualitative data management software to assist in the analysis. QSR Nvivo 11 data management software was not only used for the analysis phase of the study, but it was also used to assist with the organization, secure storage, and retrieval of data to maintain the integrity of the study (QSR, 2015). I began the data analysis process by reviewing the data as a whole without recording impressions, as it was premature to do so this early in the process. From there I reviewed the data again, sorting by the research question. I used QSR Nvivo 11 to assist with the review of the data in identifying patterns and themes (Hatch, 2002). The next step was to search out patterns and themes to allow for a deeper or richer understanding of the data collected and potentially explain some of the findings or relationships, again using QSR Nvivo 11. From there I wrote a draft summary of my interpretations of the findings.

This draft summary was a significant portion of what I reviewed with the colleague who assisted me with peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is the process in which a researcher uses a colleague or colleagues as a sounding board in an attempt to address potential bias, ethical concerns, and data analysis (Schwandt, 2015). I had arranged to work with a colleague who is familiar with distance education in nursing and the setting but does not have a direct tie to the MSN FNP program. The role of the colleague was to review and discuss my study with me, particularly during the data analysis phase to ensure that my analysis was consistent with the results of the interviews (Polit & Beck, 2012; Schwandt, 2015). I gave the peer debriefer the coded interviews and a draft summary of the findings that included the patterns, themes, and relationships identified. She reviewed each interview and compared them to the summary provided to ensure that my findings were consistent with the student responses. We then met in person to review the process and her feedback. My colleague supported my findings and

discussed ideas for framing the discussion section for clarity and to provide the reader with a rich context. After the peer debriefing, I addressed the feedback given by my colleague and then wrote a revised summary and found excerpts that supported my interpretations (Hatch, 2002). I then wrote the results and discussion sections of my dissertation. I found the peer debriefing process to be helpful because it allowed me to discuss my findings with someone who was familiar with nursing and online education. I was also able to validate that my findings were consistent with the interview responses and that my subjectivity did not influence the results of the study.

3.8 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study were based on the study methodology and design. While I took precautions to lessen the effect of these limitations, it was impossible to nullify them completely. Therefore, disclosure of potential limitations is significant in the ethical considerations for this study. The potential limitations include researcher subjectivity, experience, role, and connection to the setting and population of the study; the use of a single case study approach; and the subpopulation of online graduate family nurse practitioner students. The online graduate FNP students are a particular group with a specific advanced practice nursing role to fulfill and tend to be segregated from the general graduate online student population because of the structured curricular and clinical requirements of the program.

Acknowledging these limitations, I have attempted to address them through a variety of measures. First, I disclosed my potential subjectivity, experience with online graduate

nursing students, and my connection to the setting and population of the study in section 3.1 *Research Subjectivity and Professional Knowledge*. My role as the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs may be seen as a position of power and could have potentially influenced the participant's willingness to participate in this study and their responses. In an effort to mitigate this, I disclosed my role and assured the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and their responses had no impact on their standing as a student in the program. By disclosing this information upfront, I was able to establish that this study was conducted ethically and any potential conflicts of interest have been revealed. Additionally, a single case study approach was selected because the socialization experience of the graduate online Duquesne University School of Nursing Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner students is rich with nuances and complexities with regard to programming, support services, and institutional culture. For these reasons, it was important to examine the context and role that these may have had on influencing the socialization experience of enrolled students.

Furthermore, the specific subpopulation of online graduate family nurse practitioner students narrows the scope and generalizability of the study significantly. I chose this setting to allow me to gain an in-depth understanding of the student experience of the MSN FNP. The MSN FNP program is a long-standing program with a proven track record of successfully preparing students as family nurse practitioners, which is why the setting and population is worth studying. I recognize that by choosing the setting and population that I did, I narrowed the scope of the study, but I believe that the setting and population provide depth in to the student experience that will prove to be beneficial. Based on Polit and Beck's (2010) explanation of transferability, a goal of the study is to provide a thorough examination of

online graduate family nurse practitioner students to allow for transferability of the findings from this case study to be used for other populations.

3.9 SUMMARY

This chapter concentrated on the methodology of the study, which examined the socialization experience of Duquesne University School of Nursing online Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner students. More specifically, it explained why qualitative research, a case study design, and both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were chosen as the methodological approach.

The specific phenomenon of socialization for students enrolled in the Duquesne University School of Nursing online Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner program make it rich for the use of case study to delve in to the story behind the program. A case study approach allowed the voices of the students to be heard and the nuances and complexities of the students' entire experiences to be examined.

The study design included a three-pronged approach to data collection, which allowed me to gather data from multiple sources in order to validate them or triangulate the results. The three-pronged approaches to data collection (that included both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods) include a document review, survey, and semi-structured interviews of the students enrolled in the Duquesne University School of Nursing online Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner program. Each of these methods allowed for very specific data to be collected and when combined allowed me to tell the story of the socialization experience of Duquesne University School of Nursing online Master of Science in Nursing

Family Nurse Practitioner students. Similarly, the data analysis plan allowed me to analyze the data from each of the collection methods separately and then to analyze the results collectively. This allowed for triangulation across the three data collection methods to validate consistency across sources of data (Mertens, 2010).

4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of a document review, online survey, and interviews with students enrolled in the MSN FNP program at the Duquesne University School of Nursing.

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What does it mean to be an online graduate student in nursing in the Duquesne University Master of Science in Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner program?
2. How do students experience socialization as online students?
3. How do students experience sense of belonging as online students?

This study examined the experience of students in a specific online advanced-practice professional program to gain an in-depth perspective of the socialization experience of online MSN FNP students. A secondary study goal was to build upon the knowledge of student affairs in education and the health sciences. Since the focus of this study is online education in a professional discipline, it will be significant in the fields of both Education and Nursing.

4.1 DOCUMENT REVIEW RESULTS

I examined a variety of documents and media to gain a more comprehensive perspective of how students receive information, and how specific activities, such as the campus visits, may create an environment that supports the socialization of students to both the graduate student and the professional FNP role. The document review focused on five main areas: the 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017 graduate student handbooks, the FNP Student Blackboard site, orientation information and materials, Physical Assessment Residency information and materials, and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency information and materials.

4.1.1 Student handbooks

The School of Nursing reviews student handbooks at each level every year and updates them as necessary. The handbooks are located on the School of Nursing's website, on the Academic Advisor's Blackboard Site, and on the University Intranet Site (DORI) to enable students to access the handbooks and use them as a resource (24 hours a day) even when faculty or staff are unavailable. Each year, students are required to review their respective program handbooks, and electronically document the acknowledgement of their own rights and responsibilities.

While the handbooks are University documents, they provide general information for graduate students and, more specifically, for the MSN FNP students. Each Handbook is divided into four sections: Introduction, Becoming a Student, Opportunities and Services, and Graduate Nursing Programs and Academic Policies. The Introduction of each Handbook contains basic information about the University and School of Nursing: the mission statements, the School's philosophy, the history and format of online learning in the School of Nursing, the program

outcomes for each of the graduate programs, and the faculty and staff directory. This gives the student basic information about the School of Nursing and the student's respective program.

The second section, *Becoming a Student*, provides direction about navigation of the University system, from initializing their multipass (University credentials for access to online documents and University services) to finding and ordering textbooks. This information includes: the Academic calendar, registration, changing academic schedules, viewing and paying bills, methods of obtaining a University ID, the email group list, and obtaining access to University technology, such as the Blackboard Learning Management System and DORI. This section also helps students troubleshoot "holds" on their accounts (academic or financial).

The third section, the *Opportunities and Services* section, describes financial resources, student support services, and graduate student organizations. The financial resources sub-section provides information about tuition discounts, teaching and research assistantships, and other financial aid opportunities. The support services sub-section provides detailed information on student support services, for example: the University Online Writing Center, the Counseling and Wellbeing Center, the Office of Disability Services, Health Services, and the Student Conduct office. Although these resources are traditionally offered to face-to-face students, the University has made them available to online students as well. The student organizations sub-section gives students information on professional organizations and honor societies that they may be interested in joining.

The fourth section of the student handbooks is the *Graduate Nursing Programs and Academic Policies* section. This section contains all policies specific to graduate students by program to illustrate the expectations and requirements of the MSN FNP program, such as clinical policies and procedures, course descriptions, program milestones, campus residency

requirements, and professional expectations. In this section students can find out about preparing for clinical experiences (or “clinical”), the process for finding and obtaining approval for preceptors, and the expectations for professional conduct in both the (online) classroom and clinical settings. It also walks students through the process of identifying potential preceptors, verifying their qualifications, submitting preceptors for faculty review, and scheduling clinical time with approved preceptors after clinical contracts are in place.

While I did find some minor differences in the handbooks across the three years, specifically in policy language, updates, and the addition of some policies, there was one area of major change that would have specific implications for the MSN FNP program: the on-campus residency requirements. In the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 graduate student handbooks, all MSN students (including the MSN FNP students) were required to come to campus for three residencies during their program: Program Orientation; the Physical Assessment Residency Week; and the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week. However, in the 2016-2017 Graduate Student Handbook, the in-person Program Orientation moved to an online format. Students who enrolled in the Summer of 2016 would only participate in two on-campus residencies: Physical Assessment and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I. Over the last several years, all graduate programs have experienced decreased enrollments. The MSN Committee proposed this change in policy and the full faculty approved it in an effort to attract more students. (As noted in Chapter 3, for the purpose of this study, I limited participation to students who had completed the on-campus orientation and the Physical Assessment Residency Week.)

4.1.2 FNP student blackboard site

Upon matriculation, students in the FNP program are automatically enrolled into the FNP Student Blackboard Site. This site is the central location for: program information, announcements, modes of preparing for clinical practice, professional and career development information, and technology that students will use in the program. This site is maintained and updated regularly by the FNP Program Director.

The FNP Student Blackboard site contains information that may also be found in the Handbook, such as the academic calendar, on-campus residency information, and professional organization information, in addition to information that is very specific to the FNP program. The FNP Student Blackboard site details the steps for working with a preceptor, preparing for the first day of clinical practice, what to do if the clinical assignments does not progress as expected, understanding the roles and responsibilities of students and preceptors, and evaluating preceptors. Additionally, a significant amount of content on the site was focused on FNP job opportunities, licensure and certification examination processes, advanced practice professional organizations, and helpful information about preparing professional presentations, and precepting the next generation of FNP students.

4.1.3 Orientation information and materials

I reviewed the orientation information and materials for the MSN FNP students for the 2014, 2015 and 2016 Orientations. As noted, the School of Nursing has held an on-campus MSN orientation until the Summer 2016 term, when the MSN Curriculum Committee and faculty voted to move to an online orientation. Before 2016, these program orientations were held in

early to mid-May, during the first two days of the summer semester. Students were notified of the orientation's requirement through the admission website, their acceptance letters, and the welcome emails from the academic advisors. Additionally, students received an orientation schedule so that they could see and plan for the two days.

In reviewing the three years of orientation materials, it was evident that although the presentation of the materials changed, foundational content was addressed each year. The format of these presentations varied: lectures, panel discussions, question and answer sessions, and online presentations. Each year's content, presentations, and schedules were developed by the graduate chairs, academic advisors, and MSN Curriculum Committee and faculty that teach in the MSN program. The main areas of content included: the program overview, navigation of the academic system, scholarly writing, program and graduation requirements, library orientation, specific specialty information (FNP, Forensic, or Nursing Education), and strategies for balancing work, life, and school. In addition to these areas, the faculty who taught the students' first class, (Historical and Contemporary Foundations of Advanced Nursing) would conduct an in-person class during the onsite Orientation so that the students could meet each other and the faculty member. During the Orientation, time was scheduled for students to meet FNP, Forensic, or Nursing Education program faculty members. Many students met with their faculty for the first time during these program meetings. These track specific meetings allowed the FNP faculty to review specific information about the FNP role: expectations, clinical hours, and planning for the future semesters. Students were encouraged to ask questions. Students, faculty and staff ate breakfast and lunch together, and enjoyed a reception where students interacted informally with their peers, faculty, and staff.

As noted, the new online MSN orientation format that started in 2016 covered the same content areas and topics as the face-to face orientation did. The online orientation resides on the Academic Advisor’s Blackboard site and must be completed before the summer semester begins (first day of classes). Each session was recorded and presented in the GoToMeeting format to allow students to follow the presentation. Students track their progress using the Blackboard dashboard and receive a certificate upon completion of the online orientation. The major difference in the two approaches was that entering students did not have the opportunity to meet peers, faculty, and staff in person or to spend time together during meals and breaks.

At the end of the orientation (whether on-campus or online), students are asked to evaluate specific sessions or presentations and to answer several open-ended questions about their experiences. They were invited to offer suggestions for improvement. This evaluation is conducted by the MSN Committee as part of their continuing program evaluation. The faculty and administrators reviewed the evaluations and used the student feedback to revise the orientation for the following year. These evaluations were based on a tool developed internally. Table 5 provides the mean scores for select sessions from the 2014, 2015, and 2016 Orientations, highlighting the highest and lowest mean scores.

Table 5. 2014, 2015, and 2016 Select Orientation Session Results

Year	Session	n	Mean Score
2014	Library Orientation	60	4.5
2014	Specialty Track Meetings	60	4.5
2014	Successful Strategies for Balancing Work, Life and School	60	4.5
2014	Preparing for Clinicals	60	4.0
2015	Specialty Track Meetings	68	4.6
2015	Successful Strategies for Balancing Work, Life and School	68	4.6
2015	EndNote Presentation	68	4.0
2016	Navigating the System	53	4.6
2016	Successful Strategies for Balancing Work, Life and School	53	4.4

Results were based on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 was the lowest score and 5 the highest.

4.1.4. Physical assessment residency week information and materials

I also reviewed the Physical Assessment Residency Week information and materials for 2014, 2015, and 2016. As explained previously, the Physical Assessment Residency is a requirement of the GPNG 528 Advanced Physical Assessment course, in the second fall of the students' curriculum. Students enrolled in this course are required to come to campus. The course is three (3) credits, two (2) credits of theory and one (1) credit of clinical, which is equivalent to 75 clock hours at the graduate level. In addition to participation in the Residency Week (40 clinical hours), students are required to complete an additional 35 hours of clinical practice with their preceptors.

Notification about the Physical Assessment Residency Week requirements were posted on the program website, in the Graduate Student Handbook, and on the students' program plans, and reviewed during orientation. In January of each year, a save the date email notified students of the exact dates of the visit to facilitate planning. The focus of the Physical Assessment residency is clinical skill development. Students have the opportunity to observe, practice, demonstrate, and then be tested on the following skills: infant and adult health assessments, complete head to toe physical examinations, and patient health history interviews with patients across the lifespan. The sessions and activities during the Physical Assessment residency are led by advanced practice nurse faculty. Students were divided into small groups of two or four to practice skills. Each day was scheduled (8-10 hour days) to enable students to meet the residency objectives. Throughout the Residency Week, each student was required to show competency in performing and documenting a complete history and physical examination to pass the clinical portion of the course. Time for remediation with one or more faculty members was built into the evening schedule for students who needed more time. In addition to formal faculty remediation,

students were encouraged to practice their skills with their partners or in small groups during “down times” and in the evenings.

The School provided some meals (breakfast and lunch) during the week; on other days, students scheduled meals to fit their schedules. The faculty and staff joined students for scheduled meals in a more informal environment than the clinical lab or testing environments. Students who came from a distance were able to stay at a local hotel at a discounted rate. Several students sent emails looking for roommates to share the cost of hotel rooms or travel.

In the three-year review (2014, 2015, and 2016) of the Physical Assessment residency, I did see some differences. In 2014, the Residency Week was held in early November. That year, the School ran two Physical Assessment Residency Weeks because of scheduling conflicts. The Residency Weeks were moved the following year solving the scheduling conflicts. Another notable change, the Physical Assessment Residency Weeks reorganized schedules and assignments. In 2014, students had several written assignments to complete: the write up of their health histories and findings from the physical examinations. In 2015 and 2016, the schedule was changed to include more time in the lab practicing with simulations, models, and other students. Assignments and write-ups were completed in the evenings and submitted at the end of the residency. Additionally, in 2016, to accommodate a larger number of students, the faculty reorganized the schedule to address utilization of the lab space and to better arrange for the rotation of students through each of the skill stations. As a result of these changes, campus visits were changed from five days to three days; students were also given additional days after the residency to complete and submit their written assignments. While the decrease in the length of the residency eliminated breaks and planned meals, faculty found that the new schedule allowed

for full immersion in the clinical skills development portion of the course and better use of faculty and student time.

At the end of the Physical Assessment Residency, students were asked to complete an evaluation of the residency by specific sessions or presentations, to answer several open-ended questions about their experience, and offer suggestions for improvement. The faculty and administrators reviewed the evaluations and used the feedback to revise the residency for the following year. Evaluations for each year were based on a tool developed internally by faculty that used a 5-point Likert scale, with answers that ranged from Not Beneficial to Very Beneficial. Evaluations for the 2014 Physical Assessment Residency were not available for review, however I did review the evaluation results for the 2015 and 2016 residencies.

Table 6. 2015 and 2016 Physical Assessment Residency Select Session Scores

	Frequency %				
	Not Beneficial	Somewhat Beneficial	Neutral	Beneficial	Very Beneficial
<u>2015 Sessions</u>	N = 38				
Hands on Practice	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (2.70)	14 (37.84)	22 (59.46)
Complete Physical Examination	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (2.63)	12 (31.58)	25 (65.79)
Complete Physical Review	4 (10.53)	9 (23.68)	10 (26.32)	8 (21.05)	7 (18.42)
Pediatric Health History Taking	0 (0.00)	4 (12.12)	6 (18.18)	17 (51.52)	6 (18.18)
<u>2016 Sessions</u>	N=37				
Hands on Practice Day 2	1 (2.70)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	10 (27.03)	26 (70.27)
Hands on Practice Day 1	0 (0.00)	1 (2.70)	1 (2.70)	9 (24.32)	26 (70.27)
Welcome & Overview	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (13.51)	18 (48.65)	14 (37.84)
Taking a Health History	0 (0.00)	2 (9.52)	2 (9.52)	7 (33.33)	10 (47.62)

Session scores for the 2015 Physical Assessment residency (N=38) were highest for “Hands on” Practice (97% Very Beneficial or Beneficial; 3% Neutral) and the Complete

Physical examination (97% Very Beneficial or Beneficial, 3% Neutral). The sessions that scored the lowest included the Complete Physical Review (39% Very Beneficial or Beneficial, 26% Neutral, 24% Somewhat Beneficial, 11% Not Beneficial), Pediatric Health History Taking (70% Very Beneficial and Beneficial, 18% Neutral, and 12% Somewhat Beneficial). Session scores for the 2016 Physical Assessment residency (N=37) varied slightly from 2015 scores. Scores were highest for the “Hands on Practice Day 2” (97% Very Beneficial or Beneficial, and 3% Not Beneficial) and “Hands on Practice Day 1” (94% Very Beneficial or Beneficial, 3% Neutral, and 3% Somewhat Beneficial). The sessions that scored the lowest included: the Welcome and Overview (86% Very Beneficial or Beneficial, 14% Neutral) and Taking a Health History (81% Very Beneficial and Beneficial, 9.5% Neutral, and 9.5% Somewhat Beneficial). Overall, students scored the sessions for the Physical Assessment Residency relatively high, indicating that they felt the residency to be a beneficial part of their program.

4.1.5 Clinical diagnosis/foundations i residency week information and materials

I reviewed the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week information and materials for the 2014, 2015 and 2016 visits. The Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week is named for its associated courses: GNFN 504 Clinical Diagnosis (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) or GNFN 510 Foundations of Family and Individual Care: Across the Lifespan I, (2016-2017). This course is taken in the third fall of the program in the semester before spring graduation. Students enrolled in this course are required to come to campus during one scheduled week to achieve the course objectives. The six-credit course is divided into three credits of theory and three credits of clinical practice, 225 clock hours at the graduate level. Forty clinical practice hours on campus comprise the residency.

Like the Physical Assessment Residency Week, students were notified about the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week requirements on the program website, during their orientation at the beginning of their programs, in the Graduate Student Handbook, and on their program plans. Students were sent a save the date email in January of each year giving the exact dates of the visit to facilitate planning. The focus of this residency week is practicing advanced practice skills (EKGs, suturing, office procedures) to support their precepted clinical practice, billing and coding training, transitioning to the family nurse practitioner role, and preparing for the next steps in their professional roles. Although this week provided students with large amounts of information, the primary focus was on professional development and transition to the FNP role. While students were required to complete a list of specific clinical competencies during the residency, sessions were focused on giving the students tools to help them successfully transition to advanced practice roles.

The Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week was led by faculty. Practicing nurse practitioners served as guest speakers and session leaders. The FNP faculty also asked at least one student from an earlier graduating class to speak about their experience, offer advice, and answer questions. In addition to the clinical competencies and sessions in which students practiced suturing, reading x-rays or interpreting other diagnostic tests results, and engaging in and billing and coding exercises. However, as noted, the major focus was on professional development. Students were helped to prepare for job searches by creating their resume/curriculum vitae, negotiating salaries, examining licensure and certification requirements and discussing trends and issues in healthcare.

The School provided several meals where students, faculty, staff and guest speakers eat together and have informal conversations. Students plan their own meals when meals are not

provided by the School. Since the schedule is less intense than the Physical Assessment Residency schedule, students are given additional time for lunch and small group meetings. Similar to the Physical Assessment week, I found emails from students looking for roommates or someone to drive with from a given area.

In my review of data for the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week for the three years (2014, 2015, and 2016), there was evidence of clear commitments to the focus on professional development and preparation for the transition of the FNP role. The 2014 and 2015 residencies contained several sessions that addressed preparing for licensure and employment. The students prepared some of the presentations. Earlier in the semester student groups were formed and topics to be presented at the residency were arranged. These assignments met two goals: provide information to the students but also give them experience in presenting their work. In 2016, the FNP faculty decided to revise the schedule to evaluate the clinical competencies of each student based upon the revised FNP program curriculum. In this curriculum, skills testing occurred in the Physical Assessment Residency. The episodic examination with standardized patients and the testing of more advanced clinical competencies were now a part of the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency. The presentations that students had completed during the Residency focused on preparing for the professional role were transferred to GNFN 512 Transitioning in to the FNP Role, a three-credit course in the final spring semester addressing professional development.

At the end of the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency students were asked to complete an evaluation of the residency by specific sessions or presentations and to answer a several open-ended questions related to their experience and offer suggestions for improvement. The faculty and administrators reviewed the evaluations and used the feedback provided by the

students to revise the residency for the following year. Evaluations for each year were based on a tool developed internally that used a 5-point Likert scale, with answers that ranged from Not at All Important to Very Important. Table 7 shows the results of these evaluations highlighting the highest and lowest scoring sessions.

Table 7. 2014, 2015 and 2016 Select Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Session Scores

	Frequency %				
	Not Beneficial	Somewhat Beneficial	Neutral	Beneficial	Very Beneficial
<u>2014 Sessions</u>	N=21				
Clinical Skills Review	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	21 (100.00)
Over the Counter Medications	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	21 (100.00)
General Faculty/Student Discussions	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	21 (100.00)
Billing & Coding	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (14.29)	5 (23.81)	13 (61.90)
Future Career Directions	0 (0.00)	1(4.76)	3 (14.29)	10 (47.62)	7 (33.33)
<u>2015 Sessions</u>	N = 33				
Radiology Review	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (3.03)	32 (96.97)
Antibiotic Review	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	8 (24.24)	25 (75.76)
Writing Prescriptions	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (3.12)	5 (15.63)	26 (81.25)
Advanced EKG reading	0 (0.00)	2 (6.25)	5 (15.63)	13 (40.63%)	12 (37.50)
Welcome & Overview	1 (3.03)	2 (6.06)	7 (21.21)	11 (33.33)	12 (36.36)
<u>2016 Sessions</u>	N=34				
Clinical Skills Review	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	34 (100.00)
Clinical Competencies	1 (2.94)	2 (5.88)	2 (5.88)	11 (32.35)	18 (52.94)
Victims of Violence	0 (0.00)	2 (6.06)	1 (3.03)	9 (27.27)	21 (63.63)
Welcome & Overview	0 (0.00)	2 (6.25)	4 (12.50)	12 (37.50)	14 (43.75)

Session scores for the 2014 Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency were highest for the Clinical Skills Review (suturing, office procedures, diagnostic test reviews), Over the Counter Medications and General Faculty/Student Discussion sessions. The sessions that scored the lowest included Billing and Coding, and Future Career Directions. Session scores for the 2015 Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency were highest for the Radiology Review,

Antibiotic Review and Writing Prescriptions sessions. The sessions that scored the lowest included Advanced EKG reading and the Welcome and Overview. Session scores for the 2016 Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency were highest for the Clinical Skills Review (suturing, office procedures, diagnostic test reviews). The sessions that scored the lowest included Clinical Competencies, Victims of Violence and the Welcome and Overview. Overall, it seems that students found the sessions and the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency to be helpful and important.

It was evident in the review of documents that the School of Nursing carefully developed its policies, procedures and other student-oriented information. The documents were clear and comprehensive. For example in addition to the “save the date” and campus visit schedules, students were provided travel and logistic information such as lodging accommodations, seasonal weather patterns, transportation options, restaurants within walking distance and the dress code. Meals were planned so that students had the opportunity to spend time-sharing a meal and talking with their peers and faculty, staff, and administrators. Also, students were given times in the evening to bond with their cohort.

Each campus visit is a program milestone. Orientation recognizes: the students’ entry into the program, the beginning of their journey, welcomes them into the graduate student role, and their transition from the anticipatory to the formal stage of Weidman, Twale and Stein’s (2001) theory of Graduate and Professional Socialization. The residencies (Physical Assessment and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I) marked the continuation of the students’ learning and the transition from the formal to the informal stage of Weidman, Twale and Stein’s theory. Overall, students’ evaluations of campus residencies indicated that the visits were beneficial. It would be helpful to assess the impact of online orientation on students’ outcomes in the future.

The document review was a valuable data collection method and enabled me to examine the information and materials used by students in the MSN FNP program. The document review supported the process of Graduate and Professional Socialization identified by Weidman, Twale and Stein (2001) and illustrated the alignment of their theory to current practices.

5.0 SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the Master’s Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire are presented in three sections: demographic and background information, campus residency experiences, and personal experiences.

5.1 SURVEY DEMOGRAPHIC AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION RESPONSES

Questions about demographic and background information were asked of the participants as part of the Master’s Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire. For ease of reporting results, the demographic and background information questions are presented in three areas: demographic, age, race, ethnicity and gender; program status, academic background, and number of credits completed at the time of the survey; online education and technology, motivation for choosing an online program, previous online educational experience, and use of social technology. The results that correspond to demographic questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 on the Master’s Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire are listed in Table 8.

Table 8. Survey Demographic Information (N=14)

Demographic Variable	N	Percentage (%)
Gender Identification		
Female	12	85.71

Table 8 continued

Male	2	14.29
Other	0	0.00
Age		
20-29 years old	4	28.57
30-39 years old	6	42.86
40-49 years old	3	21.43
50 + years old	1	7.14
Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic or Latino	14	100.00
Hispanic or Latino	0	0.00
Race		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0.00
Asian	0	0.00
Black or African American	1	7.14
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0.00
White	13	92.86
Other	0	0.00

The overwhelming majority of participants were non-Hispanic or Latino (100%), white (92.86%), women (85.71%), which is similar to the ethnicity, race and gender of the 103 students in the original sample (97.09% Non-Hispanic or Latino, 92.23% White, and 88.35% female) and the current MSN FNP enrollment (95.90% Non-Hispanic or Latino, 88.52% White, and 87.70% female). The age range of participants ranged from 27 to 51 years old with a mean age of 36 years old.

Program status questions addressed the respondents' academic backgrounds, program status, and number of credits completed at the time of the study. The results corresponding to program status questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12 on the Master's Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire are listed in Table 9.

Table 9. Survey Program Status Responses (N=14)

Program Status Variable	n	Percentage (%)
Started Program		
2013	4	28.57
2014	7	50.00

Table 9 continued

2015	3	21.43
Graduation/Expected Graduation		
2016	2	14.29
2017	8	57.14
2018	4	28.57
Number of Credits Completed		
20-29	9	64.29
30-39	4	28.57
40 +	1	7.14
Completed the Clinical Qualifying Exam		
Yes	14	100.00
No	0	0.00
Completed the Comprehensive Exam		
Yes	2	14.29
No	12	85.71
Student Self-Rating		
Among the Best	3	21.43
Above Average	5	35.71
About Average	6	42.86
Below Average	0	0.00
QPA (self-reported)		
3.75 – 4.00	7	50.00
3.50 – 3.74	3	21.43
3.25 – 3.49	4	28.57
3.00 – 3.24	0	0.00
Below 3.0	0	0.00

Two respondents completed the program and graduated in May of 2016, and the other 12 were currently enrolled. All students had a cumulative QPA above 3.25 and were in good standing. Upon further analysis of the reported start date of respondents, it was evident that four students began in 2013. Only two of these students graduated on time. However, two of the respondents did not complete the program because of academic failure or deceleration for other reasons (i.e. personal or financial). There was not enough information available to determine whether these students had the same experience as other students in their cohort, because these students would have had to sit out for a year before returning to coursework.

Online educational experience and technology questions focused on the respondents' motivation for choosing an online educational experience and the use of social technology. The results that correspond to program status questions 10, 13, and 14 on the Master's Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire are listed in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10. Online Educational Experience (N=14)

Online Educational Experience	n	Percentage (%)
Motivation for Choosing an Online Program		
Convenience	6	42.86
Comfort with Online	1	7.14
Reputation of the Program	3	21.43
Reputation of the School	1	7.14
Reputation of the University	0	0.00
Other	3	21.43
Previous Online Education Experience		
Enrolled in an Online Class		
Yes	9	64.29
No	5	35.71
Enrolled in a Hybrid/Blended Class		
Yes	9	64.29
No	5	35.71
Enrolled in an Online Program		
Yes	4	28.57
No	10	71.43

Convenience was the primary motivator for choosing an online program, followed by reputation of the program, comfort with online education, and reputation of the school. Three respondents chose “other” as their motivation and listed cost, no other option, and familiarity with the program due to a previous degree at Duquesne. While nearly two-thirds of the respondents had previously taken an online, hybrid, or blended course, only 29 percent (28.57%) had previously enrolled in online programs.

In addition to collecting data on students' motivation for choosing an online program and their previous experience with online education, I also collected data on their use of social

technology. My goal was to obtain a better understanding of the students' general comfort with social technology, what types of technology they had used and how often they used it. Table 11 outlines the results.

Table 11. Use of Social Technology (N=14)

	Frequency (%)				
	Never	Several Times a Semester	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
<u>Technology</u>					
Text Messaging	0 (0.00)	1 (7.14)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	13 (92.86)
Personal Email	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (28.57)	10 (71.43)
Professional Email	1 (7.14)	0 (0.00)	1 (7.14)	7 (50.00)	5 (35.71)
School Email	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (35.71)	9 (64.29)
Access to Blackboard	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (7.14)	13 (92.86)
Twitter	10 (71.53)	2 (14.29)	2 (14.29)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Facebook	2 (14.29)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (35.71)	7 (50.00)
Instagram	5 (35.71)	2 (14.29)	1 (7.14)	4 (28.57)	3 (21.43)
LinkedIn	7 (50.00)	3 (21.43)	2 (14.29)	2 (14.29)	0 (0.00)
YouTube	1 (7.14)	2 (14.29)	7 (50.00)	2 (14.29)	2 (14.29)

Data indicated that the majority of respondents texted daily; one student texted several times a semester. Responses about social media usage were mixed: Facebook had the highest usage rate and Twitter had the least reported usage. Overall, these results show that although students are in an online program and show a level of comfort with that format, they use email and Blackboard more than other selected social media outlets. Additionally, these results indicated that students are accessing Blackboard and their school email daily, if not weekly, patterns that are very important for students in an online program.

Overall, the demographic and background information gave a more comprehensive picture of the students that participated in the study. The gender, ethnicity, and race

demographics of this sample are consistent with the larger population of students invited to participate and with other students currently enrolled in the MSN FNP program.

5.2 CAMPUS RESIDENCY EXPERIENCE RESPONSES

As noted, students admitted to the MSN FNP program prior to the Summer 2016 semester were required to attend three campus residencies: Orientation, Physical Assessment Residency Week, and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I Residency Week. Question 15 of the Master’s Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire focused on the students’ campus residency experiences. Results about the campus residency experience (question 15) are illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12. Campus Residency Experiences

Experience	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
The on-campus program orientation provided me with opportunities to meet fellow students.	14	4.43	0.73
The on-campus program orientation provided me with opportunities to meet faculty.	14	3.93	1.10
The on-campus program orientation prepared me to begin the program.	14	3.57	1.29
The on-campus program orientation helped me to transition to my role as a graduate student.	14	3.57	1.24
The Physical Assessment campus visit provided opportunities for students to bond.	14	4.50	0.63
The Physical Assessment campus visit provided opportunities for students and faculty to bond.	14	4.14	0.74
The Physical Assessment campus visit provided an opportunity to develop my clinical skills as a nurse practitioner student.	14	4.07	1.03
The Physical Assessment campus visit helped me to transition to the nurse practitioner role.	14	4.07	0.96
The Clinical Diagnosis campus visit provided opportunities for students to bond.	3	4.33	0.47

Table 12 continued

The Clinical Diagnosis campus visit provided opportunities for students and faculty to bond.	3	4.00	0.82
The Clinical Diagnosis campus visit provided an opportunity to develop my clinical skills as a nurse practitioner student.	3	3.67	0.47
The Clinical Diagnosis campus visit helped me to transition to the nurse practitioner role.	3	3.67	0.47

This question used a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest.

The results for the orientation campus residencies ranged from a mean score of 3.57 to 4.43. The highest scoring statement revealed that students thought the orientation gave them an opportunity to meet fellow students (4.43), while in the two lowest statements (tied with a 3.57) students thought the orientation prepared them for the program and helped their transition to the graduate student role. The results for the Physical Assessment residency ranged from a 4.07 to 4.50. The highest scoring statement showed that students felt that the Physical Assessment residency gave them a chance to bond with fellow students (4.50), while the two lowest statements (tied with a 4.07) were students felt the Physical Assessment residency helped them to develop their clinical skills as nurse practitioner students and that students felt the Physical Assessment residency helped them transition to nurse practitioner roles.

The results for the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency range from a 3.67 to 4.33. The highest scoring statement was that students felt the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency gave them a chance to bond with fellow students (4.33), while the two lowest statements (tied with a 3.67) were that the students felt the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency helped them to develop their clinical skills as nurse practitioner students and that the students believed that the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency helped them transition to nurse practitioner roles. It is important to note that the number of respondents for the questions about the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I course were the three students who had completed

the residency at the time of data collection. Across the three residencies, the highest rated statements were consistently the ones referring to the helpfulness of the meeting and bonding with other students. Although the number of respondents was small (n=3), these results suggest that knowing their fellow students was one of the most important components of the residencies.

5.3 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE RESULTS

Questions 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 of the Master’s Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire focused on students’ personal experiences with faculty and students during their program. Question 16 used a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest. The results that corresponded to the students’ experiences of interactions with faculty and students (question 16) are listed in Table 13.

Table 13. Personal Experience of Interaction with Faculty and Students (N=14)

Interaction Experience	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
I have been given positive feedback from a faculty member.	4.57	0.49	4.00-5.00
I feel supported by other students.	4.29	0.80	3.00-5.00
I have shared experiences with other students.	4.21	0.86	2.00-5.00
In my conversations with faculty I consider myself to be more of a student than a professional.	4.07	0.80	3.00-5.00
The faculty see me as a serious student.	4.07	0.80	2.00-5.00
The faculty seem to treat each other as colleagues.	4.00	0.85	2.00-5.00
Other students are the best source of information about the academic requirements of this program.	3.79	0.86	2.00-5.00
Faculty encourage students to join professional organizations.	3.64	1.04	1.00-5.00
The faculty are aware of student problems and concerns.	3.50	1.12	1.00-5.00
I feel free to call on the faculty for academic help.	3.43	0.90	2.00-5.00
I can depend on the faculty to give me good academic advice.	3.38	1.15	1.00-5.00
I feel supported by the faculty.	3.36	1.04	1.00-5.00
I have a clear idea of what is expected of me as a student in this program.	3.21	1.42	1.00-5.00
The faculty are available for discussions outside of class.	3.14	1.12	1.00-5.00

Table 13 continued

I am treated as a colleague by the faculty.	3.14	1.19	1.00-5.00
My program offers sufficient enrichment activities (orientation, campus visits, social events, etc.) in addition to regular online classes.	3.07	1.10	1.00-5.00
I identify more with my professors than with my fellow students.	2.14	1.06	1.00-4.00

Note. Scores were obtained via a 5-point Likert scale with the lowest score = 1 and the highest score = 5.

The statement that received the highest mean score was that students had been given positive feedback from the faculty (4.57), while the statement that received the lowest mean score was that students identified more with the professors than other students (2.14). Scores that pertained to the statements about student interactions with their peers and feeling supported by other students were among the highest ranking at 4.29. Additionally, students ranked having shared experiences with other students at 4.21 and other students being the best way to obtain program information as 3.79.

Question 17 asked students about the advantages and disadvantages of their programs. Responses were based on a 3-point scale ranging from Not at All True to Very True. The results that correspond to the students' opinions on advantages and disadvantages of their academic program (question 17) are in Table 14.

Table 14. Advantages/Disadvantages of Academic Programs (N=14)

<u>Advantage/Disadvantage</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>		
	Not at all True	Somewhat True	Very True
An environment that promotes long-lasting friendships and associations among students.	0 (0.00)	7 (50.00)	7 (50.00)
An overemphasis on grades by the students.	3 (21.43)	5 (35.71)	6 (42.86)
An environment that promotes scholarly interchange between students and faculty.	1 (7.14)	8 (57.14)	5 (35.71)
An overemphasis on grades by the faculty.	3 (21.43)	6 (42.86)	5 (35.71)
An educational climate that encourages the scholarly aspirations of all students.	2 (14.29)	8 (57.14)	4 (28.57)
An environment that fosters and develops scholarly	5 (35.71)	6 (42.86)	3 (21.43)

Table 14 continued

self-confidence in students.			
Sufficient opportunities for students to collaborate with the faculty.	3 (21.43)	9 (64.29)	2 (14.29)
A competitive atmosphere among the students for grades.	5 (35.71)	7 (50.00)	2 (14.29)
A rivalry among students for the attention of faculty.	9 (64.29)	3 (21.43)	2 (14.29)

In their articulation of the advantages and disadvantages of the academic program, students focused on the environment and relationships between students and faculty and students and his or her peers. All 12 students indicated that it was somewhat true or very true that the program provided an environment that promoted long-lasting friendships and associations among students. Students agreed with this statement but at varying levels. Results showed that 85.71% of students indicated it was somewhat true or very true that the program provided an educational climate that encouraged the scholarly aspirations of all students. Respondents indicated that it was somewhat true (57.14%) or very true (35.71%) that the program provided an environment that promoted scholarly interchange between students and faculty. Additionally, 42.86% of students indicated that it was somewhat true or (21.43%) indicated it was very true that the environment fostered and developed scholarly self-confidence in students. A small percentage of students (14.29%) indicated that it was very true that there were sufficient opportunities to collaborate with faculty.

Interaction between a student and a faculty member(s) and a student and his or her peers is critical in online programs. As a result, questions 19 and 20 focused on the types of interactions that students had with their faculty and peers. These results of the Master's Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire are in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Student Interaction with their Professors

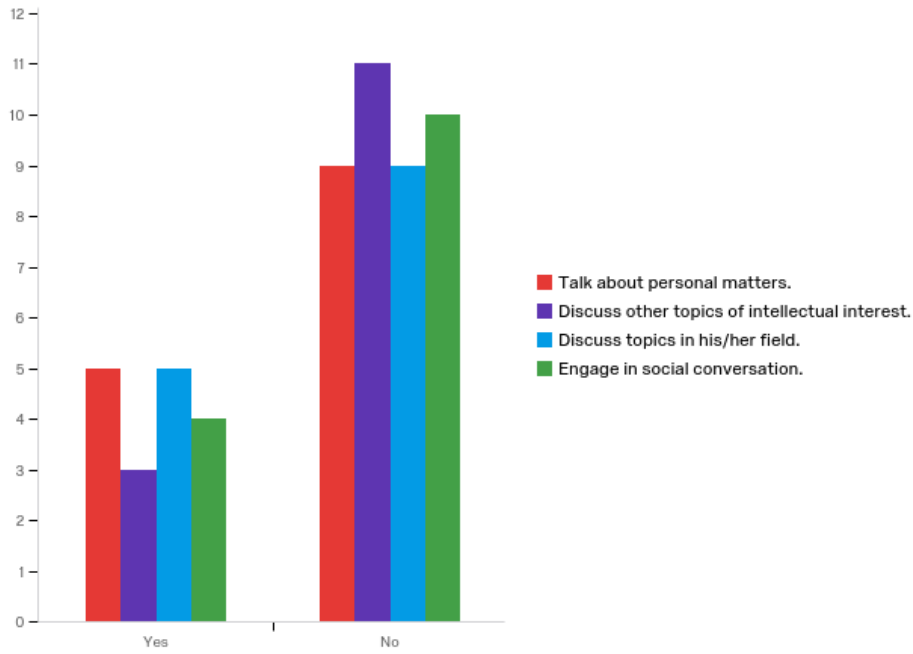


Figure 3. Student Interactions with their Professors

Student Interaction with their Peers

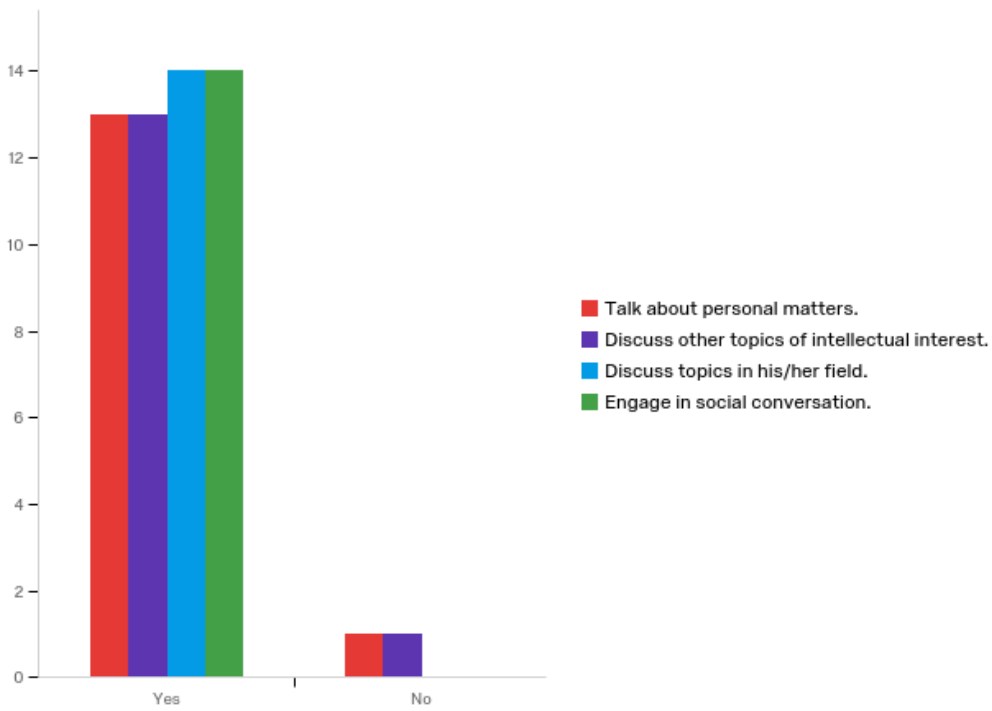


Figure 4. Student Interaction with their Peers

The distinction of the relationships between students and their faculty and students and their peers was very clear. The majority of respondents answered that they have not talked to faculty about personal matters (64.29%), intellectual topics (78.57%), topics within his/her field (64.29%), or engaged social conversations (71.43%). Conversely, respondents answered with an overwhelming majority (92.86% – 100%) that they did speak to fellow students about personal matters (92.86%), intellectual topics (92.86%), topics within his/her field (100.00%), or engaged in social conversations (100.00%).

Socialization to both the graduate student and nurse practitioner roles are crucial to student success and can be accomplished through a variety of ways including providing, seeking, and accepting critique or feedback, membership in professional organizations, or by engagement in professional organizations or conferences. Students were asked which of these activities they participated in while enrolled in the FNP program. Results from question 18 are in Table 15.

Table 15. Student Participation while enrolled in the MSN FNP program (N=14)

Student Participation	n	Percentage (%)
Asked a fellow student to critique your work	13	92.86
Been asked by a fellow student to critique his/her work	11	78.57
Hold membership in a professional organization	9	64.29
Attended a convention of a professional organization	4	28.57
Presented a paper at a conference or convention	1	7.14
None of these	0	0.00

Note. n=number of students that engaged in activities related to student participation.

A large number of students sought out fellow students to critique his or her work (92.86%) and have been asked by a fellow student to critique his or her work (78.57%). A moderate number of students (64.29%) hold membership in professional organizations. It is important to note that FNP faculty encourage students to join professional organizations to gain access to a network of nurse practitioners who are willing to serve as preceptors. This could have influenced the nine students who hold professional memberships. Additionally, the number of students who attended

a professional conference or presented at a professional conference was low (28.57% and 7.14% respectively).

Chapter 2 explained the importance of a student feeling supported while in his or her academic program, especially if the program is online. Questions 21 and 22 of the Master’s Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire concentrated on students’ feelings of support from the School and inquired if students would choose their current program (MSN FNP) again. Tables 16 and 17 provide the responses from the students.

Table 16. Student Feelings of Support from the School of Nursing (N=14)

Level of Support	n	%
Yes, definitely	4	28.57
Yes, somewhat	4	28.57
No, very little	5	35.71
No, definitely	1	7.14

Table 17. Students Responses to Choosing DUSON again (N=14)

Response	n	%
Yes, definitely	3	21.43
Probably Yes	5	35.71
Probably No	2	14.29
No, definitely	4	28.57

The results of questions 21 and 22 were similar in distribution. Fifty-seven percent (57.14%) of students felt somewhat or definitely supported by the School of Nursing while 42.86% felt very little or no support. Similarly, 57.14% of students indicated they would definitely or probably choose DUSON again while 42.86% indicated they probably or definitely would not.

5.4 INTERPRETATIONS OF SURVEY RESULTS

As previously explained, the response rate for the surveys was low, which was unusual in the SON. I identified potential reasons for the low response rate having to do with the timing of the surveys, students' focus on their academics and their hesitancy to participate in the study because of my roles as the researcher and in the SON. Despite low response rates, overall, most participants reported positive experiences in their program; however, some students indicated they were not completely pleased. While the survey responses provided important information and were able to inform the interviews, the limited number of responses affects the findings, implications and discussion. It is important to understand that the findings and resulting discussion are based on the small group of students surveyed and do not necessarily represent the larger population. The following sections review the survey findings more carefully.

5.4.1. Demographic and background information

The overall demographic and background profile of survey respondents was consistent with the FNP population enrolled in DUSON with regard to ethnicity, race, age, and gender. All students reported having good standing as graduate students and earning a 3.25 cumulative QPA. Twelve of 14 students were currently enrolled in the program; two students had graduated in May of 2016. The majority of students were familiar with online coursework, but only 30% had previous experience in an online program. The primary motivation for choosing the program was not comfort with online education, but rather convenience. Convenience is a common response for graduate nursing students as they balance 12 or 16-hour work shifts with family and military

obligations. Many students choose online programs to allow them to focus on school around their schedule (Halter, Kleiner & Hess, 2006).

In relationship to the use of social technology, survey results indicated that the majority of respondents texted daily; one student texted several times a semester. While this is not a surprising piece of information, it should be noted that FNP students were required to have Lexicomp or Epocrates software on their smart phones for use in clinical settings to assist with diagnoses and medication prescriptions. It was also common for the FNP faculty to give students their cell phone numbers so that students could reach them with clinical or educational questions. Results also showed that students accessed their school email and logged into Blackboard daily, or at least weekly. Frequent use of Blackboard is expected of students. Responses to social technology varied; Facebook was the most frequently used social media platform whereas Twitter was the least used form of social technology. Students used Instagram and YouTube inconsistently; very few students used LinkedIn. As students moved through their programs and began their job searches, use of LinkedIn may become important as a form of networking.

5.4.2. Campus residency experiences

The campus residency portion of the survey focused on students' experiences with each campus residency: Orientation, Physical Assessment, and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I. All students completed the Orientation and Physical Assessment residency; only three students completed three residencies. Data from each residency were generally favorable.

Mean scores for the Orientation ranged from 3.57 to 4.43 on a five point scale whereby one was the lowest and five the highest. The highest scoring area was the opportunity to meet other students. The lowest scoring comments centered on the Orientation's preparing students for

the program and aiding in their transition to the graduate student role. Overall, mean scores for the Physical Assessment residency were higher than the scores for the Orientation and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residencies, ranging from 4.07 to 4.50 and also rated on a five point scale. The opportunity to bond with fellow students received the highest scores, followed by the opportunity to bond with faculty and staff. Both statements, “the Physical Assessment residency helped to develop clinical skills” and “the Physical Assessment residency aided in the transition to the nurse practitioner role” scored the lowest although the mean score of 4.07 was favorable. Mean scores for the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency were slightly lower, ranging from 3.67 to 4.33. The opportunity to bond with peers again scored highest, followed by the opportunity to bond with faculty. Again, the statement, “the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency helped to develop clinical skills” and “the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency aided in the transition to the nurse practitioner role” scored the lowest at 3.67 and slightly below the same finding in the Physical Assessment residency.

When comparing results from the Physical Assessment and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residencies, it was evident that the Physical Assessment residency was rated more highly. Students scored the opportunity to develop clinical skills higher during the Physical Assessment residency (4.07) than the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I (3.67). One reason for the difference in mean scores could be that the Physical Assessment residency was typically the first time students were taught (in-person) how to conduct health assessments, perform head to toe examinations and health histories; they also had opportunities to practice these skills in a hands-on setting. These students had not begun clinical practice with preceptors. As a result their exposure to performing and practicing clinical skills would be limited.

Conversely, students who attended the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundation residency worked on skills such as suturing, writing prescriptions, and interpreting diagnostic tests. These students had completed over 300 clinical hours in advanced clinical courses with a variety of preceptors. It is possible that these students may have learned to perform these skills. However, because clinical practice experiences vary, the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency is an opportunity for the faculty to assure that all students learned these basic skills and were tested on their performance of them.

These findings are consistent with the formal stage of Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2001) theory of Graduate and Professional Socialization. In the formal stage, students receive formal instruction, are able to see growth through their course or clinical work, and participate in orientations or residencies. These activities help students to move into the informal stage of socialization. During the informal stage, students begin the transition from student to professional roles. Students have learned the role behaviors and group norms, and seek support systems and opportunities for bonding. Consistently, students gave the opportunity to meet or bond with their peers the highest score. The second highest scores for each of the residencies were received for the opportunity to meet or bond with faculty. Faculty and staff encourage students to talk with other students at the orientation, form study partners or groups, and build support systems to help them and prevent feelings of isolation. Peer interactions helped build a network of connections at the beginning of the program and encouraged group work throughout the program. It is evident from survey findings that building relationships and support systems were important to online students; these students valued the opportunity to do this in-person.

Students were also asked to score how campus residencies helped their transitions to the nurse practitioner roles. Although the scores were not terribly low, they were lower than I

expected (Orientation, 3.57; Physical Assessment, 4.07; and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I, 3.67). However, it is important to note that only three students completed all the residencies; mean scores for the third campus residency do not represent the entire sample. Another potential reason for these mean scores was that the majority of students were still in the transition process. Students were experiencing different stages in Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2001) model, and in some instances several stages at once; their responses could reflect this. While students may have been experiencing some informal stage qualities, they had not yet fully moved to the personal stage: internalization of the professional role, maturation, and the process of remaining part of the cohort but instead focusing on their personal future, image, practice and success. Even students who completed the third and final campus residency (3) or had recently graduated (2) were still transitioning to the professional nurse practitioner role. The responses to this line of inquiry were difficult to answer before full transition to their new advanced practice nurse role. This transition can take well into their first year of the new role or beyond. The responses may be different after students graduate and secure employment as nurse practitioners. It would be interesting and beneficial to further investigate how students' perceive that residencies could better assist with professional role transition.

5.4.3 Personal experiences

The Personal Experiences section of the survey focused on students' individual experiences during the program. Perhaps the most enlightening findings were around support systems and relationships that students developed. True to the informal stage of Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2001) model, students built and valued relationships and support systems with their peers. Students indicated that they felt supported by their peers (4.29 mean score) and that they had

shared experiences with their peers (4.21 mean score). Students also overwhelmingly indicated that they had talked to their peers about non-academic topics, seeking personal and professional advice: 92.86% reported talking about personal matters and 100% reported having social conversations with peers. It was also reported that students sought out their peers for program information (3.79 mean score). Additionally, students scored the statement, “My program offers sufficient enrichment activities (orientation, campus visits, social events, etc.) in addition to regular online classes” with a mid-range mean score of 3.07, indicating they thought that there could be increased opportunities for enrichment.

Faculty support and interaction data were also collected. Perhaps most interesting is that students ranked their relationships and support from peers higher than what they perceived or experienced from faculty. Students reported receiving positive feedback from faculty as the highest level of interaction (4.57 mean score). However, when asked explicitly if they felt supported by faculty, the mean score dropped to 3.36. The lack of clarity about how students perceived faculty support provides an opportunity for future research. Students also indicated that they rarely spoke to faculty members about non-academic topics, such as personal or professional advice. When they did, it was mostly focused on professional advice or around a topic in the faculty member’s field. The lowest scoring statement in the entire survey was, “I identify more with my professors than with my fellow students,” which had a 2.14 mean score. While faculty fulfill specific roles within the students’ experiences, it is evident that relationships and support systems that they sought to build were those with their peers.

Generally, students agreed with the advantage and disadvantage statements (very true and somewhat true) around the informal stage of Weidman, Twale and Stein’s (2001) theory, specifically interaction between students, faculty, or peers. Fifty percent of students indicated

that it was very true that they experienced an environment that promotes long-lasting friendships and associations among students; 50% of students indicated that it was somewhat true. Examples of such an environment are seen through the inclusion of campus residencies with opportunities for social interaction, promotion of interaction outside of the online course (study partners or groups), and occasional synchronous classes using GoToMeeting so that students can interact with each other in real time.

Results also showed that most students felt the climate encouraged scholarly aspirations of students, interaction with faculty, and opportunities to collaborate with faculty. This not only speaks to the rigor of the program and support for students in the program, but also to the relationships that students are able to build with faculty and opportunities to work together despite the online program format. These findings are consistent with the informal stage of Weidman, Twale, and Stein's (2001) model in which students set personal goals, seek feedback, and focus on their academics. Also noteworthy, 78.57% of students indicated it was somewhat true or very true that both faculty and students put an overemphasis on grades, while the overwhelming majority of students (85.71%) indicated it was not at all true or somewhat true that there was a competitive atmosphere for grades among students. While these results seemed contradictory, students know that they are working to earn their own grades; they also think that the environment is more supportive than competitive.

One portion of the personal experiences section focused on the students' participation in activities that support transitions to graduate student and professional roles. These results aligned with students transitioning from the formal and informal stages of Weidman, Twale, and Stein's (2001) theory to the personal stage. While students' participation varied, no student indicated that he/she had not participated in any activities. The overwhelming majority of students sought

feedback (13) or provided feedback to a peer (11). Nine of the students joined professional organizations, an activity highly recommended by faculty to increase network opportunities and meet potential preceptors. While a smaller number of students attended conferences (4) and only one presented a paper or poster at a conference, their activities seemed to be related to their tenure in the program.

Of the four students who attended professional conferences, one had graduated, two will graduate this May (2017) and one will graduate in May of 2018. Students who presented at a professional conference will graduate this May. These students were further along in their professional development. The student who will graduate in May of 2018 actually began the program in 2013 and seems to be on a decelerated plan, which could affect both the manner in which she complete her program and her experiences. Another reason that the attendance and presentation at professional conferences was limited could be related to the time demands on students. The time commitment of the program not only consisted of the course work of at least six credits, but the preparation and study time associated with the courses as well as the clinical hours required for the courses, which ranged from 75 to 225 hours per semester depending on the course.

At first glance, the results of questions about support from the School and questions asking if students would choose DUSON again were surprising. When asked if the student felt supported by the SON, 57.14% indicated either “Yes, somewhat” or “Yes, definitely.” Slightly more than half of the students felt supported by the School. Students indicated that they received positive feedback from their faculty (mean score of 4.57) and felt supported by the faculty (mean score of 3.36). Students also ranked approaching faculty for advice (mean score of 3.38) and feeling that they could call on faculty for help (mean score of 3.43) low on the scale. While these

scores are not terribly low, they paled in comparison to the scores for support from peers. This could be explained by the bonding experiences of students to their peers and their shared experiences as opposed to the faculty. In the students' eyes, faculty members correct the students' work, evaluate them, assign grades, and enforce policies. While the relationships between the students and faculty still seem generally positive, there is a clear difference in how students ranked both relationships.

Students were also asked if they would choose DUSON again. Results showed that only 57.14% of students would choose DUSON again. Three of the five students that indicated that they felt very little support from the School of Nursing, also indicated that they definitely would not choose DUSON again. Of the remaining two students (40%), one indicated that she would probably not choose DUSON again, while the other indicated that she probably would choose DUSON again. Additionally, one of the students who indicated that she "definitely did not feel supported" indicated that she "would definitely not choose DUSON again." These results are concerning and require further investigation of the development of ways to improve student experiences.

Generally, the students' personal experiences were positive but there were some areas that could be addressed and improved. This survey provided important information about students' experiences and socialization from graduate students to professional roles, however it only offers the perspective of 14 students. Consequently, more in-depth information is needed to gain further insight into these students and their experiences. For this purpose, I chose to also conduct interviews with students.

6.0 INTERVIEW PROCESS RESULTS

An email was sent by the Graduate Academic Advisor to 103 students meeting the inclusion criteria outlined in Chapter 3. Students enrolled full-time in the DUSON MSN FNP program were invited to participate in the interview portion of this study. The email message detailed the purpose and significance of the study and invited subjects to voluntarily consent to participate in the study by contacting the investigator to arrange convenient times for interviews. When contacted, I sent the student the Qualtrics link for the demographic and background form (Appendix E) that included the consent. Before the interviews began, I confirmed in Qualtrics that the student had completed the demographic and background information form and consent. The consent decision was then reviewed again before beginning the interview. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide (Appendix F), a basic script and series of questions that served as a starting point for the interview and were designed to allow participants to feel comfortable answering questions. The semi-structured interview guide was based on the dimensions of Weidman's DSSQ tool and modified questions from the Master's Level Nurse Practitioner Student Socialization Questionnaire. Duquesne University and University of Pittsburgh IRBs reviewed and approved the Interview Guide.

Fifteen of the 103 students invited to participate completed the survey for a 14.56% response rate; all students who started the interviews completed the interviews. Students were given the option to participate in the interview via telephone, GoToMeeting, or in person.

Thirteen of the fifteen students chose to participate in the interview via telephone and two chose in-person interviews. Of the two interviews that were conducted in person, one was conducted in the School of Nursing and the other at a private room in a local restaurant. With the students' permission, all interviews were audio recorded using the AudioNote Lite version 5.2 application on my iPad. I also took notes during the interviews to support the audio recordings and to assist in the management of follow up questions or ideas introduced during the interviews. Interviews ranged from 22 to 50 minutes with a mean of 36 minutes. Saturation was reached in the interviews.

After the interviews were transcribed using a professional transcription service (VerbalInk), I followed the data analysis plan for interviews outlined in Chapter 3, which included the use of QSR Nvivo 11. After all interviews were reviewed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the data, a summary of findings was written. A peer debriefer reviewed the interview transcripts and my summary to address potential subjectivity and assumptions. The results of the interviews were broken down into subsections that concentrated on demographic and background information, students' experiences, students' interactions with faculty, students' interactions with peers, socialization to graduate student and professional roles, sense of belonging, and words of wisdom for new online students.

6.1 INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A series of demographic and background information questions were asked of the participants were reported in the demographic and background information form (Appendix F). For ease of reporting, demographic and background information is presented in three tables: demographic information, age, race, ethnicity and gender of the respondents; program status and motivation,

academic background, program status, and number of credits completed to date; and usage of social technology. The results that correspond to demographic information are listed in Table 18.

Table 18. Interview Responses - Demographic Information (N=15)

Demographic Variable	n	Percentage (%)
Gender Identification		
Female	13	86.67
Male	2	13.33
Transgender	0	0.00
Other	0	0.00
Age		
20-29 years old	7	46.67
30-39 years old	6	40.00
40-49 years old	2	13.33
50 + years old	0	0.00
Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic or Latino	15	100.00
Hispanic or Latino	0	0.00
Race		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0.00
Asian	1	6.67
Black or African American	0	0.00
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0.00
White	14	93.33
Other	0	0.00

The demographic and background information of the interviewees was similar to that of the students who participated in the survey component of this study. The overwhelming majority of participants were non-Hispanic or Latino (100%), white (93.33%), and women (86.67%), which is consistent with the ethnicity, race, and gender makeup of the larger group of 103 students originally invited to participate (97.09% Non-Hispanic or Latino, 92.23% White, and 88.35% female) and the total current MSN FNP enrollment (95.90% Non-Hispanic or Latino, 88.52% White, and 87.70% female). The age range was 25-49 years old and the mean age was 33 years old, which is three years younger than respondents to the surveys.

Program status questions focused on the respondents' academic backgrounds, program status, and number of credits completed to date. The results that correspond to these questions are listed in Table 19.

Table 19. Interview Responses - Program Status and Motivation (N=15)

Program Status Variable	n	Percentage (%) of Sample
Started Program		
2013	3	20.00
2014	7	46.67
2015	5	33.33
Graduation/ Expected Graduation		
2016	2	13.33
2017	8	53.33
2018	5	33.33
Number of Credits Completed		
10-19	3	20.00
20-29	9	60.00
30-39	2	13.33
40 +	1	6.67
Student Self-Rating		
Among the Best	6	40.00
Above Average	2	13.33
About Average	7	46.67
Below Average	0	0.00
QPA (self-reported)		
3.75 – 4.00	11	73.33
3.50 – 3.74	2	13.33
3.25 – 3.49	2	13.33
3.00 – 3.24	0	0.00
Below 3.0	0	0.00

Two of the survey respondents completed the program and graduated in May of 2016; the other 13 were currently enrolled. Like the respondents to the surveys, all students had above a 3.25 cumulative QPA; however, 73.33% of students reported having a QPA of 3.75 or higher. Upon further analysis of the start date of respondents it was evident that of the three participants that started in 2013, only two of them had graduated on time in 2016. One of the respondents was out

of sequence because of academic failure in a previous course or deceleration of his or her program plan for some reason (i.e. personal or financial). This respondent may not have experienced campus visits or the program in the same manner as other respondents. However, there is not sufficient data to make any specific claims.

I also collected data on the students’ use of social technology. The primary reason for collecting these data was to gain a better understanding of the students’ general comfort with technology and to identify the types of social technology they used and their usage patterns.

Table 20 outlines the results.

Table 20. Interview Responses - Use of Social Technology (N=15)

	Frequency (%)				
	Never	Several Times a Semester	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
<u>Technology</u>					
Text Messaging	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (20.00)	12 (80.00)
Personal Email	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (6.67)	4 (26.67)	10 (66.67)
Professional Email	1 (6.67)	0 (0.00)	1 (6.67)	6 (40.00)	7 (46.67)
School Email	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (33.33)	10 (66.67)
Access Blackboard	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	15 (100.00)
Twitter	13 (86.67)	0 (0.00)	2 (13.33)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Facebook	1 (6.67)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (26.67)	10 (66.67)
Instagram	8 (53.33)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (13.33)	5 (33.33)
LinkedIn	9 (60.00)	5 (33.33)	1 (6.67)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
YouTube	0 (0.00)	5 (33.33)	1 (6.67)	7 (46.67)	2 (13.33)

A majority of respondents indicate that they text daily or weekly. Responses particular to social media usage were mixed, with Facebook having the highest response rate utilization and Twitter and LinkedIn having the least amount of usage. These results suggested that although students were in an online program and showed a level of comfort with that format, they favored email

and Blackboard over most of the selected social media. Additionally, these results showed that 100% of students were accessing Blackboard daily, and their school emails daily or at least weekly. The overwhelming majority of students who were interviewed indicated that they used their personal (93.34%) and professional emails (86.67%) daily or weekly.

6.2 INTERVIEW RESULTS

Discussion of the results of the interviews are areas based on the focus areas of the questions. These areas included: student experience and perception of online education, student experience with DUSON, student experience with faculty, student experience with their peers, socialization to graduate and professional roles, sense of belonging, and words of wisdom.

6.2.1 Student experience and perception of online education

The majority of students (12 out of 15) stated that they had previous experience with online education before entering the MSN FNP program. Most of the students with previous online educational experience had taken online coursework, a small number completed an online program. The overwhelming majority of participants credited the flexibility of online programs with their motivation to pursue their MSN online. The participants that said flexibility was their primary motivator for choosing an online program had similar reasons for needing the flexibility, either continuing working, family, or military service. One student said, “I selected that because I would have been – I'm paying for this program myself so I needed to be able to continue to work” (Student #4). Similarly, another student explained their motivation:

Just having the autonomy to not have to be at a class at a certain time. Being able to do it from home or just with my military background, I travel a lot, so knowing that I could still take courses and not have to be in a classroom setting made it an easier decision.

(Student #6)

Two students said that they chose to pursue their MSN online because they were familiar with the program or someone recommended the program to them. One student chose an online program because she felt it suited her learning style better.

Participants were asked about their perceptions of the differences between an online program and a face-to-face program. Often students provided answers that focused on online education being more demanding, requiring students to be more structured, disciplined, and engaged in order to be successful. One student explained, “You learn what you put into it” (Student #4). Another student added:

I think you have to be more dedicated and disciplined, you have to be more willing to look things up if you don't understand something. You don't have somebody right in front of you to explain it to you or ask a question so you have to really do your research.

(Student #10)

Similarly, one student talked about the focus required in an online program:

I think it's mostly just accountability. If you're working trying to do schoolwork in your home, you have a lot of distractions whereas if you were going to class one day a week, you're at class. That's what you're focusing on. (Student #15)

Students talked about mentally preparing to be a graduate student, the first student said:

Probably to just be mentally ready to fully be a student again...be 100% sure that this is what you want to do. Because it is a lot of time and effort in the program and you kind of need to be 100 percent prepared and willing to put forth the effort. (Student #4)

Another student provided advice that she received at her Orientation:

One of the professors at orientation said, "You have to change your mindset that you're no longer going to work fulltime and you're going to school. You have to change your mentality that 'I am a graduate student and maybe I'm still gonna work, or maybe I'm working full time or part time or whatever.' But your identity has to be graduate student and that comes first. (Student #3)

Several students talked about organization, discipline and planning as keys to success, "You really need to be self-sufficient and have a good work ethic and be organized" (Student #1). One student added:

Just because it's online doesn't mean you're not accountable. You need to really plan out time each week that you're going to work on schoolwork otherwise you are gonna get caught up in other things in your life and it's just not gonna get done. (Student #15)

Another student offered similar comments about balancing school with other obligations, "So going into it, just know that you have to put time in for your studies. Life, work, military, that stuff is it's really important, but if you want to get through this program, you have to stay disciplined" (Student #6).

Entering into a graduate program can be exciting and overwhelming. Two students talked about the management of feelings of being overwhelmed. The first student suggested planning ahead to help manage such feelings:

If you don't have a plan and you're not regimented with your time, you're gonna find that the whole online program is just gonna get very overwhelming for you and you might not be as successful as you thought you should be. (Student #11)

A second student explained that feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed are normal and offered advice on how to reduce these feelings:

The anxiety about the program it's completely normal. It is very overwhelming, it's going to be overwhelming no matter how experienced you are. If there's any way they could cut back on their work hours, especially when clinicals start that that would be very helpful. (Student #10)

Students felt that the difference between online and face-to-face education was the flexibility or convenience of online education. One student explained, "I have kids. I am still somewhat working and I'm able to fit things into a schedule where I don't feel that I'm missing out on things that my kids are doing or family events" (Student #13). Another student explained:

You still have assignments that are due at certain times, but you have the flexibility to maybe focus your couple days off. I think a lot of online learners take them because they still have jobs, still have a family life and they can work around those for the online class. So if it's working in the evening or if it's first thing in the morning or you have a few days off, that's a lot easier than getting scheduled and going to a class. (Student #6)

Students also discussed feelings of not knowing anyone and feeling isolated. One student stated, "you don't have that connection with other students or with faculty, so you have to find ways to make it happen" (Student #2).

Several students suggested making connections with other students to be successful, "Make a lot of connections for clinical. So also make some friends at the orientation because

they'll really carry you through the program" (Student #9). Another student offered similar comments:

I mean I would absolutely say to make some connections and don't be afraid to reach out for help from other students because even if you get confused about the technology and what not, like somebody will be there that knows what they're talking about and will help you. (Student #8)

One student suggested looking for students that seem to have a similar work ethic to find a common bond:

Look at the people in your discussion boards. Look at the people in your groups in your workgroup. See who has the same work ethic as you or who you maybe connect with because of their introduction. And don't be afraid to send out an email and say, "Hey, do you want to work together? Do you want to bounce ideas off you? Do you mind if we talk?" because that's how it happened for me. (Student 2)

Students recommended seeking out other students as support. One student offered, "Have personal connections with one or two students that you can relate to and always ask for help when you feel like you're sinking" (Student #12). A second student added, "Reach out to the other students, start from online forums separate from the classroom where they could just convene and talk to each other about personal issues and school and stuff like that" (Student #10).

6.2.2 Student experience with the DUSON

Overall, the majority of students talked positively about their experiences in the DUSON. In 2015, the long-time Director of the FNP program retired and was replaced by a new Director and

Chair of the Advanced Practice Programs. After one year, this director resigned for personal reasons and a former FNP program faculty member was hired. Additionally, the University President retired in 2016 and was replaced by a new President. Three students mentioned their concern about the changes in leadership over the last two years in both the University and the School of Nursing. Student comments included, “There has been some inconsistency with the program chair...does it mean something is wrong with the program or, you know, is it just attrition?” (Student #6). However, the same student went on to say, “as a student, you’re, you know, concerned and worried, but as far as faculty is supportive, definitely, 100 percent” (Student #6). Another student expressed her concern, “this has been an interesting year for Duquesne, so I think there’s been a lot of – you know with the President changing and things like that, it’s been different” (Student #1). The third student said, “So, despite the feeling and having some reservations about the changes in faculty and whatever’s going on, I’m still proud to be a student there” (Student #2).

Several students expressed that they had faced technical issues in the program. These issues were determined to be minor as the students were able to overcome them, often with the help of their faculty or the University Computing and Technology Services Help Desk. A small number of students stated that they faced academic challenges specifically around finding clinical preceptors. Student #8 stated, “I think part of the problems is just like the traditional FNP programs making you find your own clinical preceptors in a saturated Pittsburgh market I don't think that is specific to Duquesne.” Student #14 added, “Sometimes finding preceptors has obviously been challenging.” While only a few students identified an academic challenge, one student (Student #5) identified herself as having failed a course in the program. No students reported having social challenges in the program; however, three students indicated that they did

face challenges in balancing their work, school, and life. These students also indicated that they were able to work through these challenges to persist in the program. One example is the response from Student #11:

I have faced a lot of challenges in the past two years. I have – other than health problems and personal problems; I think the biggest thing is to try to fit it in to a schedule that works for you and trying to take time out of your day for the Master's Degree program.

(Student #11)

Another student expressed an academic challenge, “I kind of got burned out in the spring but that was my own doing trying to take on too much but obviously there is a level of work that you do have to put into the online program” (Student #9).

Students talked about the resources and opportunities that are made available to them while enrolled in DUSON, specifically about the teaching opportunities. The majority of students, talked about the benefit of having opportunities and resources available to them. One of the opportunities students have is the ability to teach for DUSON. Students enrolled in the program had the opportunity to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA) or to teach clinical at the undergraduate level. These students received tuition discounts up to 50% for their additional roles. Five students said that they taught clinically for DUSON and one said that she served as a TA. All six students indicated that the additional roles helped either financially or in feeling connected to DUSON. One student said, “The big thing with the school that helped me out was being able to teach, and then having that tuition discount” (Student #1). Another student expressed how teaching clinically helped him: “teaching as an adjunct faculty also kinda helped me to think differently to try to bring out what I have in my knowledge and also to pass on to other students as well” (Student #11). The student who serves as a TA talked about her decision

to strategically seek out this position to help her in the program, “I filled out the application for the TA because I wanted to try and make sure that I have some connection with the faculty because I think that’s important in an online program” (Student #2).

Students welcomed the opportunity to discuss what it meant to be an online student at Duquesne and their associated feelings. Several students talked about what qualities are necessary, including, “very self-sufficient and self-motivated” (Student #1), “determined and hardworking” (Student #7), and “disciplined, dedicated, and motivated” (Student #10). Other students talked about honor, pride, or a sense of accomplishment and referred to the reputation of the school and its rankings. One student specifically talked about the University’s religious values and talked about the possibility of his daughter coming here in a few years (Student #6). Of the six students that stated that they were honored or proud to be online students at Duquesne, three of them expressed the need to either hide or defend the fact that the program is online. One student gave an example:

I was very proud to tell people I would go to Duquesne. And then I often didn't mention that it was online; I think it's just because there's like a stigma still attached to online learning. So if someone knew that it was online, they'd be like, "Oh, that's the online one." I'd be like, "Yeah, it's really hard. It's much harder than being in a regular classroom." I found myself like defending the rigor of the program, and I was really proud of the program, so I wanted people to understand that it's not easy just because it's online. (Student #3)

Similarly, another student stated, “It means to reach a certain level of accomplishment and competence that you can be proud of because it is quite demanding” (Student #12).

Students talked specifically about community when asked what it means to be an online student at Duquesne. One student said:

I think to me it means that you're still part of a community although it's different than being an in-person student. You're still like, we are still all Duquesne students although it may not feel like that because we're not actually going onto campus, but it definitely is different. (Student #7)

Another student added similar comments:

All the faculty and all the staff and everybody are just like so happy that you're there, so happy to meet you and put a face to it that you kinda feel that way, but at the same time you do feel like you're part of the community at Duquesne and that kinda goes with me when I'm on clinical or I tell somebody I got to Duquesne. I still have that pride that I go to that school. (Student #11)

Only two students had negative responses to this question. Student #14 stated, "I guess it means that I am still a student there, but I'm very much not a traditional student." Another student added:

I thought there would be more guidance than there is. We were told at the campus week in the fall that basically the online student is supposed to be self-taught. And we had too many expectations and we should be doing more on our own is what she made it sound like. (Student #5)

Overall, student responses were positive with regard to their relationship with DUSON.

Students were asked to talk about their experience and if they felt prepared to begin the program, every student interviewed talked about their on-campus orientation and the role it has played in their program. The most common responses centered on the "takeaways" of the

orientation and the opportunities to meet and interact with faculty, staff, and students. Many of the students spoke about the orientation in terms of what they learned or were able to take away, such as the expectations of the program, the program plan, and a foundation for moving forward in the program. For example, one student said, “I think they tried to give you a good understanding of what was to come” (Student #13). A second student added, “I felt like it kind of put me in the mindset that I needed to be in” (Student #3). A third student talked about the advice that presenters gave to the students:

I think a lot of it had to do with the first two days we had of orientation where they did give you expectations of how the next three years of your life would go and gave you tips on how to get back into the swing of school and how to balance life. (Student #15)

In addition to the takeaways from the orientation, eight students spoke about the importance of meeting and interacting with the faculty, staff, and their fellow students. Student #12 expressed feelings of professionalism and what it was like to be a part of the group at orientation:

I was really impressed with the group that I was in. You know, most of these ladies and men were professional. I was really impressed with the teachers of what they have already accomplished. So it was a great feeling to be among professionals. (Student #12)

One student shared her feelings of fear entering orientation, “Well, at orientation I knew absolutely nobody. And I went into the big orientation room with all these people and, scared out of my wits. Then we met people and got to know them” (Student #5). Another student talked about the relationships she built that started at orientation, “I mean, the biggest thing for me, for that orientation was making friends, everything else was a blur” (Student #9). Two students specifically discussed that having an orientation for the program was important, especially to why it was beneficial to have an on-campus orientation instead of online. Student #2 stated:

But the students that this summer started didn't have the orientation. And I really liked it. And I think they kind of missed out not having that because you did get that initial connection with other people in your class. You realized you weren't alone. You felt a part of something and you got to see all the faculty and you got to put the names to face. (Student #2)

A second student echoed the first student's comments by saying:

I just heard about it now being not on campus. And I actually think that, I don't know if it's negative, but I think having that interaction meeting everyone face-to-face, that's more personable. You already know the program's gonna be online, so you know that you're not gonna meet folks. (Student #6)

Overall, students provided positive feedback about their orientation experiences and its influence on the rest of their program.

Students were also asked to discuss how Duquesne supports them as online students and their relationship with Duquesne. Fourteen of the 15 students provided positive responses to both questions; one student provided negative responses to both questions. The students that responded positively talked primarily about support from faculty and staff and resources to support the students' learning. For example, Student #2 talked about the difference between her undergraduate experience and her graduate experience:

I think they've been very supportive. They want us to succeed. In undergrad it was kind of like the faculty eats the young and you may not pass nursing school, but I don't feel like I have that in this program. I feel like we're very well supported. (Student #2)

Student #12's response focused on her communication and support from the faculty:

I think that they do their best. Being that it is an online program, you know, the professors are very open. They offer to answer any questions. I don't often speak to them online, I mean on the phone, but e-mailing them with my problems, they are very prompt at e-mailing back. So you know, they are very supportive and they – I feel that – I mean I am convinced that they do want me to do well and to succeed. And so if I – but they are limited to what they can do. The learning part I still need to do on my own, and I do understand that...I'm amazed when the teacher offers a cell phone number. (Student #12)

Similarly, both Student #2 and Student #12 spoke about the support that they received from their academic advisor, the clinical coordinator, and the graduate program administrative assistant. One student stated, “Duquesne does a really good job of making people approachable and making us feel like we are in a classroom setting even though we're not” (Student #15). Three students talked about the support that they received from the school during major life events: deployment, open-heart surgery in the middle of the semester, and the birth of a child (Student #6, Student #11 and Student #13). Student #1 added, “I don't feel like I'm a number” (Student #1).

Another way that students discussed feeling supported was through the resources available to online students. These resources included the Gumberg Library, access to University facilities, supplemental software and technology, and the University Computing and Technology Services Help Desk. Several students (n=4) talked about the Gumberg Library and the services provided by the Library staff as helpful. One student talked about the databases available to students: “I don't think I would have realized the resources available, all the different databases if I hadn't had that part of the orientation” (Student #2). Another student spoke about the ILLiad services offered through the Library, “the ILLiad, I've borrowed a bunch of books through

ILLiad throughout the semesters. That's really helpful” (Student #1). A fellow student also indicated that online students (if they live locally or when they are on-campus) have access to fitness facilities. Student #2 also stated, “I’ve used the other resources there, the help desk, the library, the financial aid office, you know, they’re all there and available when needed” (Student #2). Student #4 and Student #7 specifically talked about supplemental resources Lexicomp, Shadow Health, and GoToMeeting. Lexicomp is a clinical management tool used to support the nurse practitioners’ in decision-making in clinical settings. Shadow Health is a program that allows the student to use a digital patient to practice diagnostic skills. GoToMeeting is a technology platform which allows individuals to attend meetings in real time; all participants are able to not only hear and speak but can see each other and the presentation as well. Several faculty members use this during the semester to offer live classes or reviews. Additionally, students have moved to using it themselves to hold study group sessions.

One student provided negative responses about feelings of support from Duquesne and her relationship with the School. Student #5 discussed not feeling supported by the school and having a minimal relationship with the school or her faculty:

I don't really feel supported at all 'cause I feel like we're literally teaching ourself and it's the blind leading the blind. When we do talk between the students on the discussion boards and stuff it's, "Where are you at? Do you feel lost? Yeah I feel lost. What do you think with this" and different things like that... I don't know – like there's not always a lot of good feedback from the instructors. (Student #5)

I also asked her to talk about her relationship with Duquesne as an online student:

I just feel like I'm floating through it. I hope I have enough knowledge when I'm done to know what I'm doing. I feel like I'm lost 90 percent the time and when you do get

something that comes together and it's like, "Oh I get this now." I feel like I've had more experiences with my clinical and my preceptor. (Student #5)

Although Student #5 reported other students discussing feeling lost and having similar overall negative feelings, she was the only student who openly reported them to me. Other students made comments about things they did not like or ways to improve the program. Examples of such comments are, "there could be a lot better communication between faculty and students" (Student #1), or improvements to orientation, "the only adjustment I would make is maybe do like a couple smaller group sessions to have smaller group discussions" (Student #4), and "finding of the clinical rotations has been difficult" (Student #8). However, when these three students, as well as the rest of the participants were asked if they felt supported by Duquesne, 14 out of 15 answered affirmatively.

6.2.3 Student experience with faculty

Students consistently reported faculty as responsive, supportive, and accessible. For example, one student stated, "I would say that I feel more engaged with the professor online than I ever did in the classroom setting just because their availability just seemed to be – they made themselves more available" (Student #11). Other students also said, "they've all been really quick to respond and help us out as much as possible" (Student #14) and, "they seem to really enjoy what they do. I've had very positive interactions with them" (Student #15). One student who was deployed to Afghanistan during the program described his interactions with a particular faculty member in a holistic manner:

She was wonderful. Like she sent me e-mails asking how I was doing, not just worried about, "Hey, how are you doing in the class." She was asking how my well-being was doing. And that, that was, you know, that being personal was touching. (Student #6)

Other students talked about the motivation their faculty members provided, "I've had very good faculty members. They really pushed me. They really challenged me" (Student #8), another student said:

I've had some professors or some faculty members that take the time to email me and reassure me that I'm like on track and I'm doing everything on time and to remind me like, oh, these papers are due by this date; make sure that you get them in. And they are very personal emails. I know that they're not just being sent to every single person. (Student #7)

Although the program is online, faculty are able to create a supportive environment for students.

Students also spoke about their experiences with faculty in a collegial or professional way: "I felt more like they were treating us more as professionals and really helping us to develop into our role" (Student #3), "they are receptive and willing to work with us" (Student #4). When asked how a student would describe her interaction with faculty, she said, "I would say down to earth. They don't want you to feel inferior. They want you to feel as comfortable as you can without making it that, "I am the professor. You are the student. I am above you"" (Student #13). I also asked the students if they discuss non-academic topics with faculty such as personal or professional concerns. Nine students indicated that they did talk to faculty about non-academic topics. Five of the nine spoke to faculty about personal topics while the remaining four spoke to faculty about professional issues. Examples that were given of discussions related to personal topics included: surgery, military deployment, family matters, death of a family

member, and childbirth. Professional topics included post-graduation plans and future employment.

6.2.4 Student experience with peers

Students were asked about communication and interaction with their peers, specifically focusing on the discussion of topics outside of school on a professional or personal level. Of the 15 students who were interviewed, 12 of them stated they talked to their peers about personal topics or sought advice, and four of them talked to their peers about professional topics or advice. When asked about what types of personal topics or advice they discussed, one student explained:

Yeah, the two friends that I made during the first orientation...we have the running texts of anything from, I don't know, guys we're dating to school questions to the one just got married so she was sending us information about the wedding, stuff like that. (Student #9)

Another student went on to explain:

There's probably two of them that we talk I would say a daily to every other day basis. Whether or not it's about kids, about our current work situation. I would feel that it's more of a friendship than it is just a classmate relationship. (Student #13)

Additionally, the overwhelming majority students indicated that they have met their peers in person outside of the campus visit requirements for both professional and personal reasons. A significant number of students developed study groups with their peers to help prepare for exams. Almost all of the students reported using study groups in some format to review content with their peers. In some instances, students met in person, if it were geographically feasible, for

example at a coffee shop or via GoToMeeting for those at a distance. One student explained that what started as a study group emerged into a social group:

That study group kind of spurred off into, "Hey, let's just go have dinner." And we would go and, you know, just do – you know, have dinner, have social events, just general friendship things. Sometimes we would talk about the program, sometimes not. (Student #5)

Similarly, other students discussed getting together with their peers to celebrate, “we tend to get drinks after each semester to celebrate another semester down” (Student #9), and, “they would always text me and say, ‘Hey, we're going out to whatever.’ And even now there's been dinners or whatever for drug reps or whatever. I've gone out with them for those” (Student #5). Seven students indicated that they speak to their fellow students on the phone or text, “we talked a lot by phone the first few semesters” (Student #3) and “I had worked with a couple other people that I had talked to on the phone or I text messaged, and – so there is a socialization in that respect” (Student #11). Student #12 added, “So a lot of it is relating to each other's challenges and knowing that everybody is on the same boat. And so we support each other” (Student #12).

Almost all of the students indicated that their respective cohort or group has a Facebook page (student managed) that they use frequently. The Facebook pages seemed to give students the opportunity to communicate as a group instead of on the course discussion board. Students mentioned using the Facebook pages to ask questions, get clarification, socialize, and vent to each other. For example:

Like how we started the Facebook group we all came together that way and it was like our own little classroom outside of the classroom where we could discuss issues, concerns, questions, we could reach out to each other outside of the classroom and just go

over things that way... It was extremely beneficial, therapeutic and necessary I think to be a part of that Facebook group. (Student #10)

Student #11 added similar comments:

We started a Facebook page so we could talk to each other and it's not just about school, it's about things that are happening in nursing, if you're unsure of something, if you don't understand something. It's like kind of an open forum. If you want to like tell how you – where you got your books at, how much you paid for 'em. So I think that actually helped us a lot to socialize a little bit better and interact with each other in a different manner than just online but just discussion board. (Student #11)

Student #9 talked about the informal nature of the Facebook group page, “the Facebook group that we have going first is a little bit more relaxed where you can vent or you can help each other out with various things” (Student #9). She went on to add, “I think it does help a lot with the camaraderie between classmates” (Student #9). Another student explained the influence the Facebook page had on her feelings of inclusion: “I definitely feel included in my cohort simply by being part of the Facebook group, being Facebook friends with certain people in my program and things like that” (Student #14).

The Physical Assessment and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I campus residencies have also played an important role in the relationships and interactions with other students. One way the campus residencies helped was by removing the distance between students: “When you’re working with these people you know, you get on blackboard, you kind of have a face, but you finally get to see somebody in their entirety face to face when you’re on campus” (Student #13).

Another student added:

There's just something about working with the people that you normally see online. Working with them face-to-face I just think is so beneficial, but also just to use the equipment or the simulators. Some people don't get that experience at work. They might not get it in clinical practice. I think it's pretty pivotal for the program. (Student #15)

Student #4 expressed that it allowed for an immersion into the program that was helpful:

I think that was a huge benefit to having to come to campus and you kind of like just focus on that. You don't have to worry about your other extracurricular, your home life, or your work life you kind of just focus on that school for that week. And it just kind of seemed everything kind of made more sense being like in person and just on campus for that whole week. So that was a huge benefit to it but I would hope that there could be potentially more of those in the future. (Student #4)

It is evident that the campus residencies were beneficial to students in addition to the academic portion of the week. It also provided students with opportunities to bond as a group.

Like students #15 and #4, many students discussed the role of the Physical Assessment residency as being a pivotal point in the program because of the experience they shared. One student stated:

We had campus week last year and that was actually a really good week. It was a lot of work compiled into one week so it's pretty stressful, but by the end of the week I felt like I learned so much and everybody worked together, studied together to get through the week. (Student #7)

Similarly, students #8 and #4 discussed the emotions of the week and the feelings that the campus residency conjured:

I mean I guess the on campus week when you're frantic with the health assessment I think that was probably when I really started to feel like I belonged because it's a pretty stressful week. Like you learn these skills and then you get tested on them in a week and it's all pretty stressful for everyone. You kind of go into it together and you get the sense of belonging and the faculty that I interacted with on that week was very like ready to teach and gave you feedback and really made you feel like you belonged. So I would say like that week was really important. (Student #8)

Also, that week we also got really close as a class...we kind of went through like hell together and a very, very stressful week and a very exhausting week. But it kind of like brought us all together to kind of be like well we're all get through it together and we all made kind of friendships through that week, which has continued to this day because we still kind of communicate. (Student #4)

Several students discussed a feeling of bonding and unity during the campus residencies: “so I think it really brought us together, we were all trying to help each other learn” (Student #9) and “Yeah, it was mostly the campus week where we sat down and said, ‘Ok, we're all on the same page, we're all in this together’” (Student #5). Student #10 added, “there was definitely more of a sense of community after the campus visit” (Student #10). While most students referred to the influence of the Physical Assessment residency, one student stated that the Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residency had more of an influence on her:

I feel like the second campus visit was when I became really comfortable and realized that I knew what I was doing and when I graduated and had to take Board I felt like I knew what I needed to know. (Student #10)

Student responses indicated the value of the campus residencies and how they support the facilitation of student success.

Students identified the terms “friends” and “friendships” organically in the interview when discussing interactions with other students. A significant number of students spoke about the friendships that had developed, as seen in the comment provided by Student #8:

I actually have made better friends with this program than I did with my traditional nursing program. I don't know why that is. I don't know if it's just that we're in a different place in our lives or what, but I definitely was surprised by the friendships that I formed.
(Student #8)

One student explained the need for the support and relationships among the students, “we need to vent I think sometimes and your family doesn't always understand” (Student #2). Two students discussed these relationships being lasting: “I feel that I have truly made friendships that are going to last beyond Duquesne” (Student #13) and “I would say that definitely, it's become a friendship and there are definitely people that I'm going to talk to beyond the program” (Student #7). These relationships were often pleasant surprises: “I was expecting to do my discussion board work and be done and log off. And I'm glad that I've formed friendships through it. It wasn't something that I had necessarily signed up for” (Student #3). Another student expressed similar thoughts saying, “It's kinda' surprising, but again, not really just because we're all on the same kind of journey and we all went through this nursing together so we all have the same questions and fears and joys that we're all sharing” (Student #15).

One student talked about some personal challenges and experiences that she faced during the program and how her classmates helped her to be able to get through the difficult time. The student's father had passed away at the beginning of the semester and she questioned continuing

in the program. She had let her classmates know of her loss and her thoughts of not finishing the program. The student goes on to explain what happened next:

A couple of days later I came home, and one of the classmates that lives local to Pittsburgh had delivered a package to my house with gift cards and cards and just sentiments and things. And I just was like I had no idea that this many people in my class cared. Like I looked on the names on the card; I'm like "It's like all the names on my discussion board, and I didn't even realize – like, oh, my gosh. These people really care."

And I made it through the end of that semester. (Student #3)

Although this level of support and interaction may not be common in all online programs, it illustrates the ability for students to bond and support one another in an online program.

6.2.5 Socialization to the graduate student and professional roles

Several students talked about their growth in terms of skill development. Student # 1 said:

I think I learned to use my resources a lot better, so you learn 'em as a – use 'em as a student to finish assignments, but now I understand how to use them as a professional to – for – to diagnose a case or to – for a patient. Like, that's – I've grown in that. I feel like I've gotten a lot better with the professionalism and – like in writing– writing essays and things like that because we've had to communicate strictly online, you know, just being able to know what words – how to conduct a professional e-mail to send. (Student #1)

Another student provided a similar answer:

I feel like this program has really shown me how to buckle down, organize, time management, beforehand with Penn State it was kind of a fly by the seat of your pants, just get things done when needed to. But I feel like this program has really shown me

how I have to manage my time between test and assignments and studying, I really had to learn to how to really buckle down my time and organize, organize, organize. (Student #13)

Other students talked about growth in terms of insight into their own learning: “I think that I became more mature and more aware of my weaknesses and my strengths. As the program went on I realized what I needed to do to be successful” (Student #10). Another student offered an example of growth around increased confidence and her eagerness to seek out learning opportunities:

I think I’ve become more confident in myself. I seek out more learning opportunities. I’m reading more apps or journals or things so I can make myself into a good NP. I definitely think Duquesne has a role in that. I also think the students have as well. If a student finds an app that they find is really good they pass it along or books that they’ve liked. I think we all bounce ideas off of each other. So I know the professors told us about certain organizations that we can become a part of, which has helped us find preceptors and things like that, which I am very grateful for, but I think the students’ interaction with each other has actually really helped me the most. (Student #15)

All students said they had had experienced growth in some way, some students talked more specifically about their transition to the FNP role.

Several students discussed their transition to the FNP role, specifically citing a change in their clinical skills and “putting the pieces together” (Student #13). Student #6 explained, “I’ve been blessed. So I’ve had great preceptors and when I got at the end of the semester, I felt very confident” (Student #6). One student answered:

As each semester goes on I feel like I'm becoming more independent and better at determining the diagnosis and the plan of action with patients and putting what was learned in our core classes and the book actually into clinical practice and using evidence-based practice to manage the patients. (Student #7)

Another student talked about the influence this transition had on her in her current nursing position:

It just definitely made me take a more critical eye to everything to see and so in that aspect I've definitely grown. I'm much more inclined to hop on board with new things and try to get other people to hop on board with new things if I know they'll improve patient outcomes or improve like patient safety or satisfaction. And then I think that I've grown into a better understanding where what orders are being placed and I just have like a better understanding of being a clinician, which I never had before. (Student #8)

A fellow student offered similar comments about how his current role has been affected and how others that he works with perceive his transition:

I do feel like I have been transitioning into that professional role. Doctors that know that I'm in that role, they try to get my input more so sometimes other nurses bounce questions off of me more frequently, I feel, 'cause I'm coming into the nurse practitioner role. And I do feel that in the sense when I'm in clinical, especially with nurse practitioners. They're trying to make it that I understand and that I am getting ready to transition into that role to be the nurse practitioner. (Student #11)

One student specifically talked about the structured professional development assignments that students complete as part of their curriculum:

I don't know if that's something that just naturally happens at this time period or what, but I really feel like I grew as a professional just immensely. And then, the last couple of semesters, they did a lot with professional development as far as the FNP role and talking to us about what it's like to be out as a professional and things. But they had us do a lot of research on our own as far as what it takes to be credentialed and just professional practice things. And I think searching for that information and seeing what I could find on my own was helpful as well. It really helped to boost my confidence as far as, you know, once I left Duquesne I felt like, okay, I could be able to find this information and do this without having someone necessarily hold my hand. (Student #3)

Overall, students answered positively about their own growth as students and their experiences transitioning to the FNP role in an online program.

Students were also asked to talk about how they experience socialization in the program. Many students talked about their interaction with faculty, staff, and fellow classmates through emails, discussion boards, phone calls, and texts. Thirteen students talked about their socialization on Facebook as critical because it was a non-academic platform for students to discuss and share. One student explained why she felt Facebook was a successful way for students to socialize as a group of graduate students:

Like how we started the Facebook group we all came together that way and it was like our own little classroom outside of the classroom where we could discuss issues, concerns, questions, we could reach out to each other outside of the classroom and just go over things that way. (Student #10)

Several students indicated that the campus residencies were the most helpful in transitioning to the FNP role, "I think the orientation helped with that and campus week this fall really helped

with that” (Student #15). Another student added similar comments, “I definitely think the campus week helped tremendously especially we did a lot of physical assessment stuff in campus week and that has really helped with the clinical portion” (Student #4).

One student talked about experiencing the transition to the FNP role in clinical, with her preceptor:

Kind of throughout this first rotation, working with an FNP and learning you know, putting the pieces together from pharm and assessment and you’re watching this FNP and she’s, for the first couple days I just sat back and observed. But in the back of my mind I’m thinking, OK. She’s seeing this patient. This patient has AB and C symptoms. What do I think it is? Or how does what I maybe think of... what types of methods of medicine do I think that she would maybe prescribe? And when you start thinking of those in the back of your mind, and you hear your preceptor and she’s saying the same thing that you’re thinking, OK, it’s clicking. I’m getting it. (Student #13)

While many students were able to talk about the transition to the FNP role in specifics, one student provided talked about it terms of a process that has multiple steps:

I don't think it happened just like that. I think it's over a period of time. Like each day with each clinical experience and when I learned more I became more confident in what I was doing. And like passing the tests that's kind of affirmation like you know the knowledge. You have that base of information to go off of to make decisions. (Student #7)

While the socialization experience may be different for each student, analysis of students’ responses have indicated that socialization to both the graduate student and professional FNP role can be achieved in an online program.

6.2.6 Sense of belonging

Students discussed how important a sense of belonging was for an online student. Twelve of the students indicated that sense of belonging was important and three students did not feel it was important. Students provided a variety of reasons why a sense of belonging was important for online students: feelings of belonging to something bigger; the collaborative nature of healthcare; shared experience of the group; and, the professional nature of the program. Examples of these responses are, “I think it's pretty important just because it makes you feel more comfortable and more determined and more like a cohesive group” (Student #7) and “I think it was really important but I don't think I realized how important it was until that first campus visit. I think that can make or break the success of the students” (Student #10). One student specifically talked about the larger context of the collaborative nature of healthcare:

I think it's pretty important. I think that especially in this kind of – I think in nursing and in healthcare, there's so much that's collaborative; if you are going through your whole entire studies and don't ever feel like there's some camaraderie, then it's not – you're gonna have a harder time, so I think it's really important that people, yeah, feel like they belong, if not to the university or the class, to one group of students or something.
(Student #1)

Another student spoke about her reflection on sense of belonging after she graduated:

I think it's very important. At first I didn't think it was important at all, but now, having been through the program, I think it's very important because, really, I think if it wasn't for my study group that we had, or if it wasn't for the relationships that I made socially online with the group, I probably would not have made it through the program with the

personal challenges that I had. It was very important to motivate me to keep going and to know that I was supported by my peers. (Student #3)

One student explained the importance of having a shared experience as a group and the motivation that it provided for her:

I think it's very important. I think there have been times where I've kind of almost given up and been like I can't – this is like not how I want to live my life in my 20s. Like I just feel like I'm so exhausted, so never have a break, and then you kind of communicate with your classmates and they're all kind of feeling the same way. And it's so much easier to get through when you have 50 other people going through it with you. (Student #4)

Finally, a student expressed why sense of belonging was important in context of the professional role:

I would say in undergrad it wasn't a big deal. It didn't matter. I think with this program it is important. And I don't know if it had been another graduate program I don't know if it would be as important either because I think we're going into a role where we would have to perform. We have to have knowledge. We have to have skills. And in an online program you don't always have that validation. So that's why the MSN week was important. That's why the clinicals are really important. (Student #2)

Although the majority of students felt that sense of belonging was important to online students, not all students agreed.

Three students expressed that although a sense of belonging is nice to have, is not necessary to be successful in the program. While all three students indicated that they felt it was not necessary to be successful, they all did express feelings of sense of belonging to their cohort, program, or School as evidenced:

I mean, I feel like I belong. But I don't, to me, I don't think for this program it's important to feel belonging, you know. I think when I come here, like, *[laughs]* that's when I get that. When you see the school and when I drove up today, some of the banners have, like, the ring, like, for graduation. And that, yeah, that kind of puts a spark, like, "Oh, this is pretty cool. Yeah. I am in my last two semesters." (Student #6)

One student said, "I'm not sure, because I don't think it's all that important because I think I would still get through without a sense of belonging, but it's been like a nice surprise" (Student #8), and another added, "I think I would have been okay if I didn't have this group of people, but I'm happy I do" (Student #15).

Every student indicated varying feelings of a sense of belonging to either a group of students, their cohort, the program, or the University. Student #15 provided one example of this:

I do feel that sense of belonging and not just with that little group of people. I was mentioning earlier about the discussion boards. When you're going back and forth with people, we all really do try to support one another and we feed off of each other's ideas. No one ever puts anybody down. So I don't feel like an outsider. (Student #15)

Another student offered similar comments:

Yes, because I meet some of them in my job. I've met a couple that we were working and I didn't even know that was them, and you know, you kinda have that relationship of being online with school that you feel like a group that you're all going through this at the same time and you're all trying to become nurse practitioners. We all feel like we're a tight-knit group, where we might not even meet each other for months or even a year. (Student #11)

One student explained that she did not feel like she belonged to the School of Nursing because of the distance and lack of a physical, on-campus presence, but that in clinical she did feel more of a connection because she represented Duquesne:

Some days I don't feel like belong to the School of Nursing because it's not like you're showing up every day or anything like that so it's a little bit different. But I think the sense of belonging... I think it is important because when you show up to clinical, you're representing the School of Nursing at Duquesne, so I think it's very important to feel like you're a part of it and not just an island. (Student #9)

Another student talked about belonging, but identified more to the NP program, "I am a Duquesne student, but it feels more just like a nurse practitioner student" (Student #14).

Students indicated that there were a variety of roles, moments, or events that gave them a sense of belonging. One student said that she had these feelings as early in the program as orientation:

I do. I mean I definitely feel like I'm part of the group. At the orientation, I look ahead, I saw people that have already gone ahead of me and listen to what the teachers have done. You know, talking to my group of – the people that are near me, what they are hoping to accomplish from the program. I look forward and I felt like I am a nurse, I am – I belong to a professional group. I definitely felt that. (Student #12)

One student identified feeling a sense of belonging through teaching for the School in her formal adjunct clinical faculty status:

I mean, I get the biggest sense of belonging to the school or university through the opportunity to teach, so I feel like because I'm also a professor, it helps – I feel more part

of the school because I feel like I do more things with the school in that role than I do as a student. (Student #1)

Another student identified feeling a sense of belonging through her teaching assistantship and even informal mentoring to other students in the program:

I think I do have a sense of belonging to my class and to the school. And it kind of is more as a TA because talking to new students coming in, I have had a couple phone conversations with new students because initially you do have that overwhelming, what's going on? What am I doing... And I have had like three conversations with three different students about what my experience was to kind of help them de-stress a little bit or point them in the right direction. And I don't know if I really had that sense of belonging until I had those conversations, because every semester I said I wasn't going to make it, if that makes sense. Now that we only have, I have my final this week and then we only have two classes left and I do feel, after that second MSN week there is, I had that validation and I do feel like I belong now. (Student #2)

Similarly, one student expressed her campus visit as the event that created feelings of belonging to her peers:

From day one or I guess I didn't feel like I belonged in the beginning, but as I got to know people I feel like I belong. I feel like everyone belongs. No one has really left anyone out or anything. And everyone is willing to kind of help each other out and talk to each other. I think it was our campus week that was like the moment where I felt like I belonged where you have like a group of people that you sat and ate lunch with and like you kind of felt like you – I felt like I made friends there. (Student #7)

Another student identified her induction into the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society as the moment/event that she felt a sense of belonging:

I do feel like I definitely belong and I feel like I'm a student and I feel like everyone kind of looks out for you and makes sure you're going in the right path and have enough resources to get you there. The moment probably was just this past spring. I was at the International Honor Society induction service and that's probably when I like kind of felt like I truly belonged because they spoke very highly of all their students and how proud they were of like how hard we worked and how we got into this organization and whatnot. And that's probably when I, like that was probably the moment that I felt like I truly like belonged. (Student #4)

Most of the moments that students identified as triggering a sense of belonging for them were part of a formal, scheduled activity, or event.

6.3 EMERGENT THEMES FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews allowed me to collect a wealth of rich data about the FNP student experiences. Each interview provided new and interesting information that helped to develop the story of the FNP student experience with socialization and sense of belonging. Five themes emerged from interview data including: the role of campus residencies; moving from “I” to “we;” finding ways to connect to their peers; socialization and role transition; and, a sense of belonging. These themes are addressed in the following sections.

6.3.1 The role of the campus residencies

Each of the three campus residencies had a specific purpose and was intentionally placed in the students' program: at the beginning of the program (Orientation); the beginning of clinicals (Physical Assessment); and the semester before graduation (Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I). It was evident in the interviews that students felt all three of the campus visits were beneficial to them both academically and socially. These findings are consistent with the formal and informal stages of the Weidman, Twale and Stein (2001) model as students begin to transition into roles of graduate students and then to the professional roles. Specifically, students expressed that all three residencies helped with skill development, cohort bonding, socialization, role transition, building community, and sense of belonging.

Overall, students articulated that they felt the Orientation helped to create the mindset of "graduate students." It also set expectations for the program and helped students to plan for the next three years. One of the most common responses was that the Orientation gave students an opportunity to meet DUSON faculty, staff, and their peers. Students seemed to feel that this was important to avoid feelings of isolation and to make the program easier to manage. A few students also discussed DUSON's decision to move to the online format for Orientation and believed that the students would miss opportunities to connect with others in-person, an experience they perceived as critical to their success as online students. Although DUSON moved to an online format for its Orientation, it has no plans to move away from the in-person Physical Assessment and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I campus residencies.

Of the three campus residencies, the overwhelming majority of students expressed that the Physical Assessment campus residency was the most pivotal. Student responses focused on the high expectations around the residency, the volume of information and the stress of the

clinical skill development, practice, and evaluation. Students indicated that they gained a tremendous amount of clinical knowledge in that week, but also that the residency helped them bond with their peers and begin their transition to the nurse practitioner role. Several students provided responses about “overcoming” the residency as a group or having experienced the residency as a group and the effect that it had in bringing them closer. One stated, “There was definitely more of a sense of community after the campus visit” (Student #10). Since students did not begin their clinical hours until after the Physical Assessment residency, during this time students were also able to talk with the faculty and peers about preparing for the first day of clinicals, professionalism in the clinical setting, and any questions, concerns, or fears.

The third campus residency, Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I, was far less stressful for students and was only mentioned by a few students without prompting. A few students relayed that this residency was focused on professional development and helping students prepare for the next steps of their career. While students found this residency helpful, it was not reported as having the same influence academically or socially as the previous residencies. Only one student stated this residency was a pivotal point in her program. The socialization to graduate and professional roles, and the social interactions that allow students to build support systems happen during these campus residencies. It cannot be duplicated online. Many online programs do not have campus residencies, but it is evident in the interviews that not only do the students value them, but they also have a positive influence on the students’ overall experiences in the program.

6.3.2 Moving from “I” to “we”

Early on in the interview process, I wrote in my notes the phrase “moving from I to we” in reference to what the students were saying. Students began their interviews using the words “I

did,” “I thought,” or “I am,” but ended the interviews using the words, “we did,” “we had,” and “we talked.” There seemed to be a transition in the language that reflected a group mentality, whether it was done consciously or subconsciously. Students also used phrases like “we all came together” and “tight-knit group” to describe their cohort. One of the reasons that this program lent itself to building bonds among students was that the program admits students as a cohort; students progress and achieve milestones together. Students were able to work and bond with their peers as they progressed through the coursework and especially during the three campus residencies. Consistent with the informal stage of Weidman, Twale and Stein’s (2001) theory, the students’ shared experiences brought them together as a group.

Students talked about two types of shared experience as stimuli for relationship building and bonding: academic and personal. The shared academic experiences that students described pertained to having gone through the same courses, clinicals, campus residencies, milestones, and general ups and downs of graduate study. One student referred to the Physical Assessment campus residency experience as having, “gone through like hell together” (Student #4) while others talked about how stressful it was and how students bonded over experiencing and overcoming stress together. Several students mentioned the phrase “we are all in the same boat” and one student explained that it gave her comfort knowing that “50 other people are going through it with you” (Student #4). Graduate school can be a difficult time and students found comfort in building support systems among their peers over shared experiences.

The students discussed a second type of shared experience: personal. Students talked about bonding and sharing with students whom they related to and finding support in this way. Some of these smaller groups were single women with no children, working parents, nurses who worked in the same hospital, cousins, and roommates. One student explained that she talks to her

group about dating; one of the students in her group was getting married and was sending them information about the wedding. Eight of the 15 students reported that they were parents; two students disclosed that they were single mothers. These parents discussed balancing work, school, and family with other students. One student offered:

I think that there is definitely a sense of relating to each other's challenges. Both of these ladies that I have regular contact with are mothers, just like me. Their children are younger than mine. They do have spouses. And you know, we're all going through the same thing...providing the needs for the kids so that we don't feel guilty about neglecting them. Taking care of household. So a lot of it is relating to each other's challenges and knowing that everybody is on the same boat. And so we support each other. (Student #12)

Other students talked about the importance of connecting with peers and how it has helped them to continue in the program. This is evidence that online students are able to build their support systems and relationships because of their shared experience in both their academic and personal lives.

While building strong bonds among the group is very beneficial to student success, it could also have negative effects on a student that falls out of the group due to deceleration in his/her program. If a student decelerated for academic or personal reasons early in the program (during core courses), that student had the opportunity to return to the same pathway as his/her group; however, if the student decelerated during clinical coursework, because of sequencing and course offerings, students often had to join the next cohort. One student disclosed that she decelerated, but did not give a reason. She talked about her relationships with other students in her original cohort, how the group would get together for dinner or drinks several times a year,

the support that the group offered, and her feelings of belonging to that cohort. She also talked about the struggles that she faced in being part of a new cohort. While the new group tried to include her and invited her to study, work together or meet in-person, she often declined because she did not feel part of the group. Although it happens infrequently, students decelerate from time to time and it is important to consider how a deceleration could affect a student's support systems, social interactions with others and overall success in the program.

6.3.3 Finding ways to connect to their peers

The DUSON began online graduate programs in 1997. Over the last 20 years, it has improved technology and programming for students to facilitate their success. Faculty, staff, and alumni offer advice at Orientation about how to study, how to organize their schedule, and how to connect with others, hoping that students will use the advice. While the DUSON encourages students to connect through the discussion boards, at campus residencies, in synchronous classes on GoToMeeting, and in study groups, students have sought out and developed their own ways to connect to their peers. As mentioned previously, 13 of the 15 students talked about their cohort's Facebook page. Students use this page for both academic and social interaction: asking questions, clarifying answers for one another, sharing news, and even venting to one another. The DUSON did not create nor does it access or manage these Facebook pages. Students have a place where they can have unmonitored conversations among themselves outside of discussion boards.

Another example of students finding ways to connect is through their self-created study groups. While faculty encouraged study partners or study groups at Orientation, students have become more sophisticated in their organization. Study groups are more than just a few students

getting together to study or students emailing or texting questions to each other. Students are using available technology (GoToMeeting) to connect with each other. One student explained that her study group breaks up the study guides given by the faculty members and each person becomes the “expert” in their section of the study guide. The students then present to each other, field questions, and clarify concepts. While some groups use technology, several groups still hold study sessions in-person when it is geographically feasible.

Several students also talked about arranging opportunities for students to get together in-person for meetings with pharmaceutical company representatives to hear about new drugs on the market, to celebrate the end of a semester or a milestone, and to socialize in the evenings during the on-campus residencies. Although the DUSON encourages bonding with peers, these are all activities that students have arranged to connect with and support one another while enrolled in their program.

6.3.4 Socialization and role transition

This study focused on students’ experiences in the program after matriculation or after the anticipatory stage. As shown in previous sections, students have described specific activities, behaviors, and events that they experienced in the FNP program. These align with formal and informal stages, and some to the personal stage of Weidman, Twale and Stein’s (2001) theory of Graduate and Professional Student Socialization. As previously mentioned, students were asked to discuss their experience with socialization to the graduate student and the FNP roles. Early in the interviews, it was apparent that students were not certain what I meant by the phrase “socialization to the role” so I revised the question to ask about their growth and experience in

transitioning to the graduate student and FNP roles. Students had a clearer understanding of these questions and were able to answer them more easily.

Students talked about the flexibility of online programs as both an advantage and a disadvantage. While an online program was flexible with work schedules and other obligations, it was also more difficult than many had realized. Students mentioned the qualities that online students need in order to be successful: discipline; a good work ethic; strong organizational skills; and focus. Additionally, several students talked about the knowledge and clinical skills that they had developed through their course and clinical work. As the students moved along in the program, they were able to draw on what they had learned for more advanced coursework and in clinical settings. Another change that students mentioned was that they had become more open to projects going on at work, were more critical when reviewing articles, and were thinking at a different level. Several students also talked about learning to use the available resources and reaching out to others for help or support.

Students were asked to discuss their socialization or transition to the FNP role. The students who were interviewed were at different points in their program; two students graduated within two months of their interviews. Therefore, it should be noted that all students (including the two alumni) had not completed their socialization processes but were able to provide answers for specific periods. The majority of students talked about an increase in their confidence levels especially in clinical settings. Students credited their own growth, the coursework and campus residencies for this increase. Examples of how students felt they had transitioned toward the FNP role included: seeking out NP journals and apps and sharing them with other students; seeking out other NPs to talk with or get advice from; membership in professional organizations; and focusing on the next steps of their career through professional development opportunities at the

Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I campus residency. Students also began to internalize the FNP role and expectations of them after graduation, one student said, “It’s definitely become a reality of how much responsibility I’m gonna have in a year and a half” (Student #14).

Another interesting finding was that when students discussed their overall experiences, most responses centered around interaction with the School, faculty, staff, preceptors, and other students as compared to their academic program or learning. This does not mean that students overlooked their coursework or the rigor of the program, but they did include comments about a responsive faculty member, helpful staff member, challenging preceptor, or supportive peers. One reason for this could be that the students were experiencing the informal stage of their socialization and these relationships were most salient to them. Another possible reason was that these interactions with others were important to the students because of the online format of the program. Students also discussed building trust with peers, forming friendships, and having relationships with their peers that would last beyond their program. As explained earlier in this study, isolation is common for students enrolled in online programs. The development of relationships and support systems and the opportunities to bond decreased feelings of isolation and positively influenced their overall experiences.

6.3.5 A sense of belonging

One of the most insightful parts of the interviews, and the study itself, was the discussion about students’ sense of belonging. Twelve students relayed the importance of feeling a sense of belonging as online students. Students offered explanations about why a sense of belonging was important in an online program: motivation to continue in the program; support; demands of professional roles; and the collaborative nature of healthcare professionals. Three students did

not feel that sense of belonging would facilitate success in the program. However, all students indicated that they felt a sense of belonging. The object of their belonging varied. For some it was related to pride about being a Duquesne University or SON student. For others, it was to achieve the nurse practitioner role. Most frequently students identified a strong sense of belonging to their cohort. Students offered accounts of friendships that were built, gestures of support, examples of their shared experiences, and how those expressions influenced their overall experience.

Several reasons contributed to students' sense of belonging. Among these were: the general environment; the three campus residencies; and finding ways to connect with students in their cohorts. Students indicated that the general environment in the online program was professional and respectful, faculty members were approachable and responsive, and everyone was willing to help students. One student added, "I think that it's an environment where it's based on academics but there's also that social aspect and I think it creates a good foundation for students, maybe who haven't done the online program" (Student #2). Students also overwhelmingly credited the campus residencies, specifically the Physical Assessment residency, with contributing to their sense of belonging, particularly to their cohort. Finally, students discussed the many ways that they found to connect with each other beyond what DUSON offered: Facebook pages, study groups, pharmaceutical company representative meetings, and social get-togethers for dinner or drinks.

Upon further analysis, I identified another reason why it was important that the FNP students, who experienced a strong group bond, supported one another: they are all nurses. One student identified the importance of sense of belonging specifically to the nurse practitioner program, "I think it's really important for this program. If it had been something else you know,

like chemistry or something I don't know that it would be that big a deal” (Student #2). As professional nurses, they have shared the experience of undergraduate nursing programs, clinical experiences, shift work, patients and families, and working in high-pressure situations. They have their own language and jargon. They are familiar with team approaches because of their work in healthcare settings. They also understood the responsibility that they have as practicing nurses and will have as nurse practitioners; they take their programs seriously. The students have a strong foundation of shared experience, common goals, and the ability to relate and support one another, which has proved to be invaluable. It was clear in the interviews that these online students were able to develop a sense of belonging to the School, to their roles, and perhaps most importantly to their peers.

6.4 DISCUSSION OF ALL RESULTS

Results of the document review, survey data, and interviews were described earlier in this chapter. The document review provided an understanding of the students’ perspective when they access the graduate student handbooks, the FNP Student site, and receive information about the Orientation, Physical Assessment, and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I residencies. It was evident that significant work has been done in the development of policies, processes, and procedures to give students an abundance of information. It was also clear that the campus residencies (Orientation, Physical Assessment and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I) were planned to support the students’ learning needs and to assist them in their transition to the graduate student and then to an advanced practice nurse role. The findings of the document review supported the process of Graduate and Professional Socialization identified by Weidman,

Twale and Stein (2001). Additionally, these findings also supported the work of Nepal and Lawrence (2009) and Bumbaluskas (2009), who found that on-campus orientations or residencies for online students helped them to develop relationships with the faculty and their peers, a factor in combatting feelings of isolation and improved retention.

In spite of a low response rate to the surveys, the results did show that the students that completed the survey valued the orientation and campus residencies. There were important data collected from the surveys that informed the interviews and the results were consistent with the literature, specifically Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2001) model. The statements that consistently ranked highest asked about students' opportunities to bond with each other. Furthermore, when students were asked about their interactions with faculty and their peers, they indicated that they had positive interactions with both. Students also responded that they talked about non-academic topics to their classmates more than to faculty. Additionally, students scored support from both faculty and peers as high. These findings were consistent with the informal stage of Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2001) model, in which students develop relationships and support systems with and among their peers. The majority of students indicated that they held membership in professional organizations. They also reported that they critiqued other students' work and sought out others to critique their work. These findings were consistent with the informal stage of Weidman, Twale, and Stein's (2001) model in which students set personal goals, seek feedback, and focus on their academic work. The data collected from the survey portion of this study provide evidence that students not only experience the informal and formal stages of the Weidman, Twale, and Stein's (2001) model, but that some of the activities, on-campus residencies and relationships assisted them in their transition to the advanced role as well.

Fifteen students participated in the interview portion of the study at which point saturation was reached. The interviews provided in depth information on the perceptions and experiences of students in the MSN FNP program. Overall, the responses were positive. Students indicated that the orientation assisted in setting the expectations of the program and allowed them to meet the faculty and other students. Students went on to offer similar comments about the Physical Assessment and Clinical Diagnosis/Foundations I campus residencies. Students also found the campus residencies to be very influential in developing bonds with their cohorts and a pivotal time in the program for students as they transition to their new advanced practice roles. Students provided positive feedback about their relationships with DUSON, citing a supportive environment that provides students with resources and opportunities to be successful. Although students indicated a positive relationship with faculty, they spoke of stronger bonds with their fellow students.

These findings support earlier studies such as those by Nepal and Lawrence (2009), Bumblauskas (2009) and also the Weidman, Twale, and Stein's (2001) model of Graduate and Professional Socialization. Nepal and Lawrence (2009) and Bumblauskas (2009) supported on-campus residencies for online students to build rapport with students and faculty, develop relationships and decrease the perceived distance of being online. Similarly, Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) theorized that relationship development and the establishment of a peer support group were not only paramount to the informal stage of socialization but to the overall socialization experience of the student. Additionally, I was able to identify two important aspects to the socialization and sense of belonging for an online MSN FNP student: the role of the on-campus orientations and residencies; and the role of collegiality and building a peer support network. While these two aspects are important in any educational program, they stood

out as particularly salient to the students and their experiences as online students in an advanced practice nursing program. These findings can inform educators and practitioners in the design and development of online advanced practice nursing programs and the recruitment and retention strategies used as well.

Additionally, students spoke about the growth that they observed in themselves as students and in the transition to the FNP role. Students were also asked to discuss the importance of and their experience with a sense of belonging to their cohort, the program, and the School. Overall, students expressed that a sense of belonging was very important to online students and that they had all experienced this sense of belonging in the program. Students also offered advice to new online students to facilitate success. These results align with formal, informal and personal stages of Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2001) theory of graduate and professional student socialization. Although students struggled early on in the interviews to understand what was meant by "socialization," students were able to recognize their own transition to the professional role and the importance of their faculty, preceptors and peers in that transition. Students even saw themselves transition from a new student to a seasoned student who was comfortable offering advice and mentoring to newer students in the program to learn about the program, the role and the expectations. These findings also align with the literature on the role of sense of belonging in a student's educational experience, specifically Goodenow (1993) and Strayhorn (2012), who explained how critical the development of a sense of belonging is to the student experience in terms of retention, success, and satisfaction.

There is limited research in the areas of socialization and the process of developing a sense of belonging in nursing literature. This study has enabled me to advance the knowledge about socialization and sense of belonging for online masters level family nurse practitioner

students, a field that has not been studied before. With the expected growth in demand for nurse practitioners in the near future, I am hopeful that this study can lead the way for others to study this important subpopulation of students so that they can respond to their needs in an evidence-based manner and enhance the online MSN FNP student experience.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

When I began the study I expected that online FNP students had experienced some of Weidman, Twale and Stein's (2001) stages of socialization (post matriculation). The primary reason was that I had seen the growth and transformation of students in my work with them over the years, so I was aware that socialization to both the graduate student and professional roles were possible in online professional programs. Through the course of this study, I was surprised to learn how students had experienced the formal, informal, and personal stages, and at what points in their program they experienced them. In this online program, students are socialized to both graduate student roles and their professional FNP roles, while also balancing their work and other obligations such as family, military, or personal. Although I had worked with online graduate students, I did not recognize the complexity of the FNP student role in an online program or understand the student experience as deeply as I do now.

Among the major findings of this study were the confirmations that socialization to the graduate student and professional (nurse practitioner) roles and sense of belonging were possible for students to experience in an online program. Strategies used in the traditional classroom may not be appropriate in online settings, but with minor revisions to adjust to the format and audience, students can be helped to transition through the socialization process and feel a sense of belonging. The role of cohort bonding and its influence on the students' experiences was the most critical of the study's findings.

Cohort bonding and the building of relationships and support systems were important to the students, to their individual experiences, and to DUSON as well. This was identified in the finding ways to connect and moving from “I” to “We” themes. This kind of social interaction allowed students to connect to their peers, enhanced their learning by sharing different perspectives, and helped students feel supported as they progressed through the program. Several students said the friendships built in the program would last after graduation. These friendships also helped students as they transitioned fully into their professional roles. They had peers with whom to discuss job searches, interviews, open positions, and develop their own professional network. These student relationships are also important to DUSON because it provides evidence that not only does the school focus on the students’ learning, but on the student as a whole by providing environments that support students’ development and facilitate their movement through the socialization process. Additionally, students who have a positive MSN experience are more likely to return to the doctoral program, be satisfied alumni, and provide word of mouth recommendations for the program to fellow nurses.

Overall, experiences of students’ were positive and this study provided a more in depth look at the online nurse practitioner student experience. Two other important findings came from this study: there is room for improvements in the program and the support services available for students, and the MSN FNP population is worthy of additional research. The results of my study will be shared with the faculty and administration at DUSON. This communication will address low scoring areas and concerns of students and implement some of the ideas and suggestions offered by students during the interviews.

Also noteworthy, was the responses during interviews were generally more positive than those collected in the survey. One possible explanation is that during interviews it was possible

to ask for clarifications or follow up with another question. The survey used closed ended questions that were ranked by Likert scales. Additionally, I recognize the potential for my role as Assistant Dean of Student Affairs to influence the students' responses. As previously explained, I did everything in my power to limit my interaction with this group of students prior to the beginning of study. I also wrote all of my assumptions prior to starting data collection, had all recruitment communication sent by a graduate academic advisor, and used a peer-debriefer to review de-identified interviews and my summary of findings to ensure my subjectivity did not influence my findings.

This study provided an enhanced understanding of the DUSON MSN FNP student experience from the students' perspectives. Through this study I was able to answer the research questions that guided and focused the study: the general experience of MSN FNP students, their socialization experience, and their sense of belonging. Students discussed what it meant to be an online graduate nursing student in the DUSON MSN FNP program in terms of pride and sense of accomplishment, the qualities that were required to be successful, and the sense of community that they felt. Students explained that their socialization to the graduate and professional roles were not only possible as online students, but supported by the campus residencies. Students were able to experience growth as students and nurse practitioners, which significantly increased their confidence and success. Finally, students experienced sense of belonging most often to their cohort through the bonding, shared experiences, relationship, and support systems that were built during their time in the program. However, some students indicated that their sense of belonging to DUSON was a result of their ability to serve as adjunct clinical faculty or a teaching assistant. I was also able to explore the nuances and complexities of graduate students and their

experiences. This has allowed me to share their story so that future online nurse practitioner students can benefit from their experiences.

7.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study have significant implications for higher education practice, specifically for online education, as well as DUSON. As evidenced in the survey responses of students and in the interviews, the three campus residencies played an important role in the students' socialization and sense of belonging experiences. The orientation provided the students an opportunity to learn the program expectations, acquire system navigation skills, and to meet their faculty and peers in person and begin to develop working relationships. While the two additional campus residencies focused on skill building and professional development, they also provided students another opportunity for social interaction as a group or cohort. Students talked about these campus visits as "pivotal" and "critical" in their programs. These residencies were valuable in the facilitation of the students' transitions in both the graduate student and professional roles. Although many online programs do not have on-campus residency requirements, it was a beneficial way to engage students, combat feelings of isolation, and offer opportunities for students to bond in an online program. When on-campus residencies are not possible, schools or programs should creatively create modes of engagement providing opportunities for interaction among students to facilitate their success and sense of belonging.

Students that participated in the interviews talked extensively about the ways in which they created opportunities for engagement on their own through social media, study groups (in-person and online), meetings with pharmaceutical company representatives, and meetings for

celebratory drinks or dinners. Faculty and staff encouraged students to find study partners, develop study groups, and to connect with other students at the Orientation. However, students took it upon themselves to create private Facebook pages and arrange meetings or dinners. The students have created their own spaces for sharing and supporting one another outside of school, experiences that are invaluable to many students as evidenced in their interview comments. Although DUSON did not formally develop or manage these activities, it did create an environment where such interactions were promoted through dedicated time for cohort bonding during campus residencies and the availability of technology (GoToMeeting) for students to utilize.

Another opportunity to engage students with their peers was through peer mentoring programs. One student mentioned in her interview about informally mentoring three students who were newer to the program and how it helped the new students to navigate the system and feel a sense of belonging. These strategies can be easily introduced and implemented in other programs and schools to further support student success.

Finally, several students mentioned their role as adjunct clinical faculty members or teaching assistants as significant to their success, transition to graduate student and professional roles, and their sense of belonging. Although these positions are not required of students, they provided another opportunity for students to connect with faculty and the school. The addition of opportunities for students to collaborate with faculty whether in a formalized role, on a scholarly project, or in clinical settings strengthens the bond between students and faculty and provides mentorship opportunities which are important to students' growth and professional development.

While these findings support the efforts that DUSON has been making for its students, they also support the continuation of on-campus campus residencies, adjunct clinical faculty

position for students, and the promotion of a culture of connectedness, it also offers the opportunity to strengthen and expand such services and resources. DUSON does not currently have a peer mentoring program, but it could be beneficial to develop one to support student success.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was limited in scope to those student participants enrolled in the DUSON MSN FNP program. The findings were informative and beneficial, however further research on this population is important as enrollments in nurse practitioner programs are expected to grow in the next five to ten years.

This study opened avenues for additional research with specific subpopulations. While interviewing students, one student specifically spoke about military deployment while in the program and its effect on his program and interaction with the School, faculty, and students. While there are only a few students in the MSN FNP program with active military status, across the entire Master's level program, there are 10 active duty military students who have been or may be deployed. The proposed research should focus on multiple programs. With an expected increase in military and veteran students seeking educational opportunities, the experience of military students in online programs needs to be better understood and developed.

Another opportunity for future research could focus on the experience of male students in online programs. The participants in both the survey and interview portions of this study were predominantly female; two survey and two interview participants were male. In the interviews with the male students, some responses led me to believe that their experiences were different

from those of female students. This was especially evident in the level of communication and interaction with other students and their expectations and thoughts about a sense of belonging. I think the male experience would be an especially important area for future qualitative research in professions or professional programs that are predominantly female.

A third opportunity for future research is the experience of ethnically and racially diverse students. The current enrollment of the MSN FNP program is 95.90% Non-Hispanic or Latino and 88.52% white. Only two students of color participated in the study; one student that identified as Black or African American participated in the survey and one student that identified as Asian participated in the interview. There was not enough evidence to imply that their experiences were different from that of the other students. However, the exploration of students' experiences through the lens of diversity was not the focus of this study. It should be considered in future research to understand the experience of ethnically and racially underrepresented populations in online professional nursing programs.

A final area for future research is to examine a national sample of online MSN nurse practitioner programs and the role of campus residencies on performance, retention, and graduation rates. Significant growth in advanced practice nursing programs is expected in the next 5-10 years, specifically in nurse practitioner programs across the country. This growth provides an opportunity to study this complex group of students and develop programs and services to help the students be successful.

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION FROM THE DUSON DEAN



OFFICE OF THE DEAN
Mary Ellen Glasgow, PhD, RN, ANEF, FAAN
Dean

Fisher Hall | 600 Forbes Avenue | Pittsburgh, PA 15282
412.396.6553 | 412.396.5974 (fax)
glasgowm@duq.edu | duq.edu/nursing

April 11, 2016

Dear IRB Committee Members:

I would like to provide my enthusiastic support for Kate DeLuca, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at Duquesne University School of Nursing and a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh to conduct her study "Socialization and Sense of Belonging in an Online Nurse Practitioner Program: A Case Study" in the MSN FNP program in the School of Nursing. The study will include a voluntary online survey and voluntary interviews with students to collect data with respect to MSN student's socialization experience in the School of Nursing and their perceptions of sense of belonging.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Mary Ellen Glasgow'.

Mary Ellen Glasgow, PhD, RN, ANEF, FAAN
Dean and Professor

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL WITH LINK TO SURVEY

Dear MSN FNP Student,

My name is Catherine (Kate) DeLuca and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. I am asking for your help in completing an assessment of the experiences of current MSN FNP students. The purpose of this study is to examine the socialization experience of students who are enrolled in an online master's level nurse practitioner program. This study will serve two goals: 1) to examine the experience of the students in this specific professional program so to gain an in-depth perspective of a socialization experience of online MSN FNP students and, 2) to allow the results to contribute to student affairs practice in professional education.

This survey is made up of 22 questions that focus on students' personal experiences and interactions with faculty, peers and the nurse practitioner profession. Please respond to each question to the best of your ability by choosing the most appropriate responses.

Confidentiality and anonymity in any study reporting will be assured. Voluntary consent and participation will be indicated by completing and submitting the survey via a secure online data collection site called Qualtrics. Aggregate data will be included in my dissertation and shared with the Duquesne University School of Nursing administration for programming such as improvements to orientation, and development of additional support programs and services. Participation in this study will not have an impact on your status in the Duquesne University School of Nursing. Qualtrics will also serve as an honest broker and strip the data of identifying IP addresses prior to the researchers' access to the data collected. The survey will take approximately 15 – 20 minutes to complete.

By submitting the completed survey, you are voluntarily consenting to participate in this study.

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for this study via Duquesne University Pittsburgh, PA, USA. If you have any questions, please contact, the Principle Investigator, Ms. Catherine (Kate) DeLuca at 412-396-6551 or at deluca899@duq.edu or the Chair of the University IRB, Dr. Linda Goodfellow at 412-396-6548 or goodfellow@duq.edu.

The link below will link you to a cover letter on Qualtrics that will further explain the study, emphasize anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9RC88vWKCXnKnch

Thank you for your assistance.

Kate DeLuca,
Principal Investigator
Assistant Dean, Student Affairs,
Duquesne University School of Nursing and doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh

APPENDIX C

MASTER'S LEVEL NURSE PRACTITIONER STUDENT SOCIALIZATION QUESTIONNAIRE

This tool was used and modified (including the title of the survey) with permission of the authors.

Directions:

The purpose of this study is to assess the experience of MSN Family Nurse Practitioner students in the Duquesne University School of Nursing. When answering the questions, please consider your reactions toward your experience as a whole and not about isolated incidents.

The survey is made up of three sections.

- Part 1. Demographic and Background Information.
- Part 2. Campus Residency Experiences
- Part 3. Personal Experiences

Part 1. Demographic and Background Information Questions

1. To which gender do you identify? ___ Male ___ Female
2. What is your age? _____
3. **To which ethnic group(s) do you *most* identify?**
 ___ **Hispanic or Latino**
 ___ **Not Hispanic or Latino**
4. To which racial group(s) do you *most* identify?
 ___ American Indian or Alaska Native
 ___ Asian
 ___ Black or African American
 ___ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

- White
- Other, please specify

5. When did you begin graduate study at Duquesne University?
Month _____ Year _____
6. Approximately how many credits have you earned since you began graduate study at Duquesne University? _____ Credits
7. Have you successfully completed the Clinical Qualifying Examination?
 Yes No Not applicable
8. Have you successfully completed the Comprehensive Examination?
 Yes No Not applicable
9. In what year do you expect to complete the degree for which you are now working?
20_____
10. What is your primary reason for choosing this online program?
 - Convenience
 - Comfort with online format
 - Reputation of program
 - Reputation of school
 - Reputation of university
 - Other (please explain)
11. How do you rate yourself academically among the students in your program?
 - among the best
 - above average
 - about average
 - below average
12. My cumulative quality point average at Duquesne University is:
 - 3.75-4.00
 - 3.50-3.74
 - 3.25-3.49
 - 3.00-3.24

____ Below 3.00

13. Please answer the following questions about your experiences prior to entering this program.	Yes	No
a. Have you ever taken an online course?		
b. Did you complete the course?		
c. Have you ever taken a hybrid or blended course? (combination of online and face to face)		
d. Did you complete the course?		
e. Have you ever been enrolled in another online program?		
f. Did you complete the program?		

14. Please respond to the following items based on the frequency of your usage of technology					
How often do you:	Never	Several Times a Semester	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
a. Text					
b. Email using your personal account					
c. Email using your professional/work account					
d. Email using your school account					
e. Access your Blackboard course site					
f. Use Twitter					
g. Use Facebook					
h. Use Instagram					
i. Use LinkedIn					
j. Use YouTube					

Part 2: Campus Residency Experiences

15. Please answer the following statements about your experiences during the MSN FNP campus residencies. Choose the number on the scale that most nearly expresses your level of agreement: 1 = Lowest; 5 = Highest. If you did not participate in a specific campus residency, please choose Not Applicable (N/A).						
	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
a. The on-campus program orientation prepared me to begin the program.						

b. The on-campus program orientation provided me with opportunities to meet the faculty.						
c. The on-campus program orientation provided me with opportunities to meet fellow students.						
d. The on-campus orientation helped me to transition to my role as a graduate student.						
e. The Physical Assessment campus visit provided an opportunity to develop my clinical skills as a nurse practitioner student.						
f. The Physical Assessment campus visit provided opportunities for students to bond.						
g. The Physical Assessment campus visit helped me to transition to the nurse practitioner role.						
h. The Clinical Diagnosis campus visit provided an opportunity to develop my clinical skills as a nurse practitioner student.						
i. The Clinical Diagnosis campus visit provided opportunities for students to bond.						
j. The Clinical Diagnosis campus visit provided opportunities for students and faculty to bond.						
k. The Clinical Diagnosis campus visit helped me to transition to the nurse practitioner role.						

Part 3: Personal Experiences

16. Please answer the following statements about your experiences during the MSN FNP program. Choose the number on the scale that most nearly expresses your level of agreement; 1 = Lowest; 5 = Highest.	1	2	3	4	5
a. I can depend on the faculty to give me good academic advice.					
b. My program offers sufficient enrichment activities (orientation, campus visits, social events, etc.) in addition to regular online classes.					
c. I feel free to call on the faculty for academic help.					
d. The faculty are aware of student problems and concerns.					
e. The faculty are accessible for discussions outside of class.					
f. I am treated as a colleague by the faculty.					
g. In my conversation with faculty I consider myself to be more of a student than a professional.					
h. The faculty see me as a serious student.					
i. I have been given positive feedback from a faculty member.					
j. I feel supported by faculty.					
k. I have a clear idea of what is expected of me as a student in this program.					
l. Other students are the best source of information about the academic					

requirements of this program.					
m. The faculty seem to treat each other as colleagues.					
n. Faculty encourage students to join professional organizations.					
o. I identify more with my professors than with my fellow students.					
p. I have shared experiences with other students.					
q. I feel supported by other students.					

17. The following is a list of advantages and disadvantages of academic programs. Please indicate how true each one is (or seems to be) in the MSN FNP program at Duquesne University School of Nursing			
	Not At All True	Somewhat True	Very True
a. An environment that promotes long-lasting friendships and associations among students.			
b. An educational climate that encourages the scholarly aspirations of all students.			
c. An environment that promotes scholarly interchange between students and faculty.			
d. An overemphasis on grades by the students.			
e. An overemphasis of grades by the faculty.			
f. An environment that fosters and develops scholarly self-confidence in students.			
g. Sufficient opportunities for students to collaborate the faculty.			
h. A competitive atmosphere among the students for grades.			
i. A rivalry among students for the attention of faculty.			

18. Check any of the following activities in which you are involved while enrolled as a student in the MSN FNP program.

- Hold membership in a professional organization.
- Attended a convention of a professional organization.
- Presented a paper at a conference or convention.
- Asked a fellow student to critique your work.
- Been asked by a fellow student to critique his/her work.
- None of these.

Please respond to each item with Yes or No:		
	Yes	No
19. Is there any professor in your program with whom you:		

a. Talk about personal matters.		
b. Discuss other topics of intellectual interest		
c. Discuss topics in his/her field.		
d. Engage in social conversation.		
20. Is there another student in your program with whom you:		
a. Talk about personal matters.		
b. Discuss other topics of intellectual interest.		
c. Discuss topics in his/her field.		
d. Engage in social conversation.		

As an online graduate nursing student, do you feel supported by the **School of Nursing?**

- a. ___ Yes, definitely
 - b. ___ Yes, somewhat
 - c. ___ No, very little
 - d. ___ No, definitely
21. If you could start over, would you choose Duquesne University School of Nursing again?
- a. ___ Yes, definitely
 - b. ___ Probably yes
 - c. ___ Probably no
 - d. ___ No, definitely

Thank you for participating in part one of my study.

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR INTERVIEW

Dear MSN FNP Student and Alumni,

My name is Catherine (Kate) DeLuca and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. I am asking for your help in completing an assessment of the experiences of current MSN FNP students. The purpose of this study is to examine the socialization experience of students who are enrolled in an online master's level nurse practitioner program. This study will serve two goals: 1) to examine the experience of the students in this specific professional program so to gain an in-depth perspective of a socialization experience of online MSN FNP students and, 2) to allow the results to contribute to student affairs practice in professional education.

I will be interviewing MSN FNP students to gain insight in to their experience, specifically focusing on socialization, as an online student in the Duquesne University School of Nursing. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. Students have the option to complete the interview in-person, via telephone or via GoToMeeting. All interviews will be video recorded for transcription; however each student's interview will be coded to assure confidentiality and anonymity in any study reporting. Voluntary consent and participation will be indicated by completing a consent form prior to the interview. Additionally you will be asked to complete a consent and demographic form prior to the interview that consists of 11 questions and takes 5-10 minutes to complete.

Aggregate data will be included in my dissertation and shared with the Duquesne University School of Nursing administration for programming such as improvements to orientation, and development of additional support programs and services. Participation in this study will not have an impact on your status in the Duquesne University School of Nursing.

All students that complete an interview will be given a \$25 gift card in appreciation for their participation.

If you are interested in participating in an interview, please contact me at deluca899@duq.edu to set up a date and time that is convenient for you.

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for this study via Duquesne University Pittsburgh, PA, USA. If you have any questions, please contact, the Principle Investigator, Ms. Catherine (Kate) DeLuca at 412-396-6551 or at deluca899@duq.edu; the Chair of the Duquesne University IRB, Dr. David Delmonico at 412-396-4032 or irb@duq.edu or [the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office at irb@pitt.edu or 412-383-1480](#).

Thank you for your assistance.

Kate DeLuca
Principal Investigator, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Pittsburgh

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

1. To which gender do you identify? Male Female Transgender Other
2. What is your age? _____
3. **To which ethnic group(s) do you *most* identify?**
 Hispanic or Latino
 Not Hispanic or Latino
4. To which racial group(s) do you *most* identify?
 American Indian or Alaska Native
 Asian
 Black or African American
 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 White
 Other, please specify
5. When did you begin graduate study at Duquesne University?
 - a. Month _____ Year _____
6. Approximately how many credits have you earned since you began graduate study at Duquesne University? _____ Credits
7. In what year do you expect to complete the degree for which you are now working? 20_____
8. What is your primary reason for choosing this online program?
 - a. Convenience
 - b. Comfort with online format
 - c. Reputation of program
 - d. Reputation of school
 - e. Reputation of university
 - f. Other (please explain)
9. How do you rate yourself academically among the students in your program?

- a. ____ among the best
- b. ____ above average
- c. ____ about average
- d. ____ below average

10. My cumulative quality point average at Duquesne University is:

- a. ____ 3.75-4.00
- b. ____ 3.50-3.74
- c. ____ 3.25-3.49
- d. ____ 3.00-3.24
- e. ____ Below 3.00

11. Please answer the following questions based on the frequency of you usage of technology					
How often do you:	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Several Times a Semester	Never
a. Text					
b. Email using your personal account					
c. Email using your professional/work account					
d. Email using your school account					
e. Access your Blackboard course site					
f. Use Twitter					
g. Use Facebook					
h. Use Instagram					
i. Use LinkedIn					
j. Use YouTube					

Thank you for this information.

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

- **Welcome and Introduction**
 - Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Kate DeLuca and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh in the Higher Education Management EdD program. My dissertation focuses on the socialization and sense of belonging experience of students enrolled in the MSN FNP program. This interview is to help me to gain insight in to your experience as a student.

- **Review of Consent**
 - As a participant in this interview I have sent you a consent form to be signed and returned. I would also like to review the consent with you at this time. I would like to remind you that the interview can be stopped at any point without penalty. This interview has no influence on your status in the Duquesne University School of Nursing. Do you have any questions at this time?

- **Demographic Form**
 - I have also given you a demographic form to complete so that I have background on you and your experience with distance education. Please take a few minutes to complete it and return it to me.

- **Explanation of Interview Procedure**
 - I am going to go over the interview procedure so that you are aware of the next steps. I will be focusing on your experience in the MSN FNP program. If you would like to skip a question just indicate that you would like to do so and you can skip the question. There is no penalty for skipping questions. Toward the end of the interview I will also give you an opportunity to provide any additional information that you think should be included in your interview responses. Upon completion of this interview, you will be mailed a \$25 gift card in appreciation for

your participation. If you stop the interview before completion you will not receive the \$25 gift card. Do you have any questions at this time? Are you ready to begin?

- **Interview Questions**

Grand Tour Questions	Probes	Follow Up Questions
1. Prior to your enrollment in the online graduate nursing program, what is your experience with distance education?		1. If he/she has experience – what made you decide to pursue your MSN FNP online? 2. If he/she doesn't have experience – What were your thoughts about distance education? What were any concerns you may have had?
2. Tell me about your experience at Duquesne University.		
3. In your experience, what are some of the differences in being an online student in comparison to a traditional face-to face student?		
4. What types of interaction did you experience with the school prior to starting the program?		a. Did you feel prepared to start an online program? b. How could this have been improved? c. What type of support did you feel during this time, if any? d. What was your experience during the on-campus orientation?
5. Tell me about your experience with faculty.	Positive or negative?	a. In what ways do you interact with faculty?
6. Do you talk to faculty about non-classroom topics?	Personal advice? Professional advice?	a. How would you describe the faculty members with whom you have interacted?
7. Tell me about your experience with other	Positive or negative? Is it what you expected?	a. In what ways do you interact with other

students?		students?
8. Do you talk to other students about non-classroom topics?	Personal advice? Professional advice?	a. How would you describe your interaction with the other students in the program?
9. What does it mean to be an online student at Duquesne University?		a. In the School of Nursing?
10. How does Duquesne University support you as an online student?		a. How does the School of Nursing support you as an online student?
11. How would you describe your relationship with Duquesne?		a. To the School of Nursing? b. To the faculty? c. To other students?
12. What challenges have you faced as an online student?	Technical? Academic? Social?	
13. In your experience, how would you describe the environment at Duquesne?	Professional? Scholarly? Supportive? Friendly?	a. In the School of Nursing? b. In your program?
14. What has been your experience transitioning to a graduate student? FNP?		a. How did you prepare for this role? b. How did you engage in this role?
15. What does socialization as a student in the DUSON MSN FNP program mean to you?		
16. How do you experience socialization in your program?		
17. How important is a sense of belonging for an online student?		
18. What has you're your experience in the program in terms of feelings or a sense of belonging? Have you experienced a sense of belonging?	As a graduate student? As an FNP student?	a. If yes - Was there a moment? b. How did you know? c. What does that mean for you? d. If no – what would make you feel a sense of belonging? e. From the school?

		f. From your faculty? g. From your advisors/ h. How will you know?
19. What advice would you give to a new online student in the Duquesne University School of Nursing?		
20. Is there any additional information that you feel would be important to include in this study?		

- **Closing**

- Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses will be kept confidential. In fact, your interview will be given a pseudonym so that you will not be identified. All pseudonyms will be indexed and the information will be kept separate from the transcripts of the interviews. Can you please provide me with a mailing address for me to send the gift card to? If you have any additional questions about the study, please feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX G

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL



To: Catherine DeLuca
From: Linda Goodfellow, IRB Chair
Subject: Protocol #2016/04/14 - Approval Notification
Date: 05/10/2016

The protocol **Socialization and Sense of Belonging in an Online Nurse Practitioner Program: A Case Study** has been approved by the IRB Acting Chair under the rules for expedited review on **05/10/2016**.

The consent forms, protocol summary and instruments for data collection are stamped with IRB approval and one year expiration date. You should use the stamped forms as originals for copies that you distribute or display.

The approval of your study is valid through 05/09/2017, by which time you must submit an annual report either closing the protocol or requesting permission to continue the protocol for another year. Please submit your report by **04/11/2017** so that the IRB has time to review and approve your report if you wish to continue it for another year.

If, prior to the annual review, you propose any changes in your procedure or consent process, you must complete an amendment form of those changes and submit it to the IRB Chair for approval. Please wait for the approval before implementing any changes to the original protocol. In addition, if any unanticipated problems or adverse effects on subjects are discovered before the annual review, you must immediately report them to the IRB Chair before proceeding with the study.

When the study is complete, please terminate the study via Mentor by completing the form under the Continual Renewal tab at the bottom of your protocol page and clicking on terminate. Please keep a copy of your research records, other than those you have agreed to destroy for confidentiality, over a period of five years after the study's completion.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Dr. James Phillips
Acting IRB Chair
phillips@duq.edu

Attachments:

- Protocol 2016-04-14 protocol summary form 5-5-16 approved.pdf
- Protocol 2016-04-14 Survey consent form 5-5-16 approved.pdf
- Protocol 2016-04-4 interview consent form 5-5-16 approved.pdf

APPENDIX H

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH IRB APPROVAL



University of Pittsburgh *Institutional Review Board*

3500 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 383-1480
(412) 383-1508 (fax)
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

Memorandum

To: Catherine DeLuca
From: IRB Office
Date: 6/7/2016
IRB#: [PRO16060036](#)
Subject: Socialization and Sense of Belonging in an Online Nurse Practitioner Program: A Case Study

The University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the above referenced study by the expedited review procedure authorized under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Your research study was approved under:

45 CFR 46.110.(6)

45 CFR 46.110.(7)

The risk level designation is Minimal Risk.

Approval Date: 6/7/2016

Expiration Date: 6/6/2017

For studies being conducted in UPMC facilities, no clinical activities can be undertaken by investigators until they have received approval from the UPMC Fiscal Review Office.

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to report to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others [see 45 CFR 46.103(b)(5) and 21 CFR 56.108(b)]. Refer to the IRB Policy and Procedure Manual regarding the reporting requirements for unanticipated problems which include, but are not limited to, adverse events. If you have any questions about this process, please contact the Adverse Events Coordinator at 412-383-1480.

The protocol and consent forms, along with a brief progress report must be resubmitted at least one month prior to the renewal date noted above as required by FWA00006790 (University of Pittsburgh), FWA00006735 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center), FWA00000600 (Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh), FWA00003567 (Magee-Womens Health Corporation), FWA00003338 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Cancer Institute).

Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ali, R., & Leeds, E. (2009). The impact of face-to-face orientation on online retention: A pilot study. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 12(4).
- Ali, A., & Smith, D. T. (2015). Comparing social isolation effects on students' attrition in online versus face-to-face courses in computer literacy. *Issues in Informing Science & Information Technology*, 12, 11-21.
- Allen, I., & Seaman, J. (2015). Grade level: Tracking online education in the United States. *Babson Survey Research Group*.
- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners. (2013). 2013 NP factsheet. Retrieved from <https://www.aanp.org/images/documents/about-nps/npfacts2013.pdf>
- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners. (2015). 2015 NP factsheet. Retrieved from <https://www.aanp.org/images/documents/about-nps/npfacts.pdf>
- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners. (2016a). What is an NP? Retrieved from <https://www.aanp.org/all-about-nps/what-is-an-np>
- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners. (2016b). Preceptor Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.aanp.org/education/education-toolkits/preceptor>
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (1996). The essentials of master's education for advanced practice nursing. Retrieved from <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/MasEssentials96.pdf>
- Anderman, L. H. (2003). Academic and social perceptions as predictors of change in middle school students' sense of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 72(1), 5-22.
- Anglin, D. M., & Wade, J. C. (2007). Racial socialization, racial identity, and Black students' adjustment to college. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 13(3), 207.
- Auburn University. (2015). Master of Accounting Program - Online. Accessed on 25 Jun 2015. <http://harbert.auburn.edu/academics/online-programs/master-of-accountancy-online/>

- Austin, J., Cameron, T., Glass, M., Kosko, K., Marsh, F., Abdelmagid, R., & Burge, P. (2009). First semester experiences of professionals transitioning to full-time doctoral study. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 27(2), 194.
- Babbie, E. R. (1998). *The practice of social research* (Vol. 112). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth publishing company.
- Baker, V. L., & Griffin, K. A. (2010). Beyond mentoring and advising: Toward understanding the role of faculty “developers” in student success. *About Campus*, 14(6), 2-8.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological bulletin*, 117(3), 497.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The qualitative report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of educational Research*, 55(4), 485-540.
- Berman, R., & Ames, C. (2015). Private online workspaces for doctoral learners – Enhanced communication and reduced isolation. *Proceedings of Informing Science & IT Education Conference (InSITE) 2015*, 101-112. Retrieved from <http://Proceedings.InformingScience.org/InSITE2015/InSITE15p101-112Berman1773.pdf>
- Billings, D.M. (2000). A framework for assessing outcomes and practices in Web-based courses in nursing. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 39, 41-52.
- Boling, E. C., Hough, M., Krinsky, H., Saleem, H., & Stevens, M. (2012). Cutting the distance in distance education: Perspectives on what promotes positive, online learning experiences. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 15(2), 118-126.
- Boston, W. E., Ice, P., & Gibson, A. M. (2011). Comprehensive assessment of student retention in online learning environments. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 14(1).
- Bowden, J. L. H. (2011). Engaging the student as a customer: A relationship marketing approach. *Marketing Education Review*, 21(3), 211-228.
- Boyle, F., Kwon, J., Ross, C., & Simpson, O. (2010). Student–student mentoring for retention and engagement in distance education. *Open Learning*, 25(2), 115-130.
- Broome, M.E., Halstead, J.A., Pesut, D.J., Rawl, S.M., & Boland, D.L. (2011). Evaluating the outcomes of a distance-accessible PhD program. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 27, 69-77. doi:10.1016/j.profnurs.2010.09.011

- Bumblauskas, D. Online Distance Education: Hybrid Coursework & Research Methods. Link to pdf: <https://www.asee.org/documents/sections/midwest/2009/Bumblauskas-7.pdf>
- Carson, L. R. (2009). "I Am because We Are:" Collectivism as a Foundational Characteristic of African American College Student Identity and Academic Achievement. *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal*, 12(3), 327-344.
- Chakiris, H. (2014). Academic advising: A link to a quality experience for students. In K. Shattuck (Eds.), *Assuring Quality in Online Education* (184-196). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Chaney, D., Chaney, E., & Eddy, J. M. (2010). The context of distance learning programs in higher education: Five enabling assumptions. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 13(4).
- Charalambos, V., Michalinos, Z., & Chamberlain, R. (2004). The design of online learning communities: Critical issues. *Educational Media International*, 41(2), 135-143.
- Cole, D., & Griffin, K. A. (2013). Advancing the study of student–faculty interaction: A focus on diverse students and faculty. In M. A. Paulsen (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, 28, 561–611. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Crafter, S., & Maunder, R. (2012). Understanding transitions using a sociocultural framework. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29(1), 10-18.
- Crawley, A. (2012). *Supporting online students: A practical guide to planning, implementing, and evaluating services*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Crawley, A., & Fetzner, M. (2013). Providing Service Innovations to Students inside and outside of the Online Classroom: Focusing on Student Success. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 17(1), 7-12.
- Crisp, G., & Cruz, I. (2009). Mentoring college students: A critical review of the literature between 1990 and 2007. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(6), 525-545.
- Del Valle, R., & Duffy, T. (2009). Online learning: Learner characteristics and their approaches to managing learning. *Instructional Science*, 37(2), 129-149. doi:10.1007/s11251-007-9039-0
- Donley, R., Flaherty, M., Sarsfield, E., Burkhard, A., O'Brien, S., & Anderson, K. (2014). Graduate clinical nurse preceptors: Implications for improved intra-professional collaboration. *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 19(3).
- Drouin, M., & Vartanian, L. R. (2010). Students' feelings of and desire for sense of community in face-to-face and online courses. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 11(3), 147-159.

- Dunn, S. M. (2005). A place of transition: Directors' experiences of providing counseling and advising to distance students. *Journal of Distance Education, 20*(2), 40-57.
- Duquesne University. (2015). Academic advisement. Accessed on 25 Jun 2015. <http://www.duq.edu/academics/resources-and-technology/advisement>
- Duquesne University. (2016). Duquesne university mission statement. Accessed on 2 Jan 2016. <http://www.duq.edu/about/mission-and-identity/mission-statement>
- Duquesne University School of Nursing. (2016). Mission statements. Accessed on 4 Jan 2016. <http://www.duq.edu/academics/schools/nursing/about-the-school/nursing-mission-statement>
- Elliott, K. M., & Shin, D. (2002). Student satisfaction: An alternative approach to assessing this important concept. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 24*(2), 197-209.
- Erdil, K. M. (2007). Student Support Services and Student Satisfaction in Online Education. *Online Submission*.
- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 75*(3), 203-220.
- Gallagher-Lepak, S., Reilly, J., & M Killion, C. (2009). Nursing student perceptions of community in online learning. *Contemporary Nurse, 32*(1-2), 133-146.
- Gansemer-Topf, A. M., Ross, L. E., & Johnson, R. M. (2006). Graduate and professional student development and student affairs. *New Directions for Student Services, 2006*(115), 19-30.
- Gardner, S. K., Jansujwicz, J. S., Hutchins, K., Cline, B., & Levesque, V. (2014). Socialization to interdisciplinarity: Faculty and student perspectives. *Higher Education, 67*, 255-271.
- Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2003). A theory of critical inquiry in online distance education. *Handbook of distance education, 1*, 113-127.
- Gazza, E. A., & Hunker, D. F. (2014). Facilitating student retention in online graduate nursing education programs: A review of the literature. *Nurse education today, 34*(7), 1125-1129.
- Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students' relationships to motivation and achievement. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 13*(1), 21-43.
- Goodfellow, L. M. (2014). Professional socialization of students enrolled in an online doctor of philosophy program in nursing. *Journal of Nursing Education, 53*(10), 595-599.

- Hadfield, J. (2003). Recruiting and retaining adult students. *New directions for student services*, 2003(102), 17-26.
- Hagerty, B. M., Lynch-Sauer, J., Patusky, K. L., Bouwsema, M., & Collier, P. (1992). Sense of belonging: A vital mental health concept. *Archives of psychiatric nursing*, 6(3), 172-177.
- Hagerty, B. M., Williams, R. A., Coyne, J. C., & Early, M. R. (1996). Sense of belonging and indicators of social and psychological functioning. *Archives of psychiatric nursing*, 10(4), 235-244.
- Halter, M.J., Kleiner, C., & Hess, R.F. (2005). The experience of nursing students in an online doctoral program in nursing: A phenomenological study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 43, 99-105. doi:10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2005.03.001
- Halter, M. J., Kleiner, C., & Hess, R. F. (2006). The experience of nursing students in an online doctoral program in nursing: A phenomenological study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 43(1), 99-105.
- Harrell, I. (2008). Increasing the success of online students. *Inquiry*, 13(1), 36-44.
- Harrison, L. M., & Risler, L. (2015). The role consumerism plays in student learning. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 16(1), 67-76.
- Hart, C. (2012). Factors associated with student persistence in an online program of study: A review of the literature. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 11(1), 19-42.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Hayes, E. F. (2005). Approaches to mentoring: how to mentor and be mentored. *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, 17(11), 442-445.
- Hemwall, M. K. (2008). Advising delivery: Faculty advising. In N. Gordon, W. Habley, T. Grites (Ed.), *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook* (253-266). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002). Investigating “sense of belonging” in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 4(3), 227-256.
- Holley, K. A., & Taylor, B. J. (2009). Undergraduate student socialization and learning in an online professional curriculum. *Innovative Higher Education*, 33(4), 257-269.
- Irwin, C., & Berge, Z. (2006). Socialization in the online classroom. *E-Journal of Instructional Science and Technology*, 9(1), n1.

- Ivankova, N. V., & Stick, S. L. (2007). Students' persistence in a distributed doctoral program in educational leadership in higher education: A mixed methods study. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(1), 93-135.
- Janson, A., Howard, L., and Schoenberger-Orgad, M. (2004). The odyssey of Ph.D. students becoming a community of practice. *Business Quarterly, 67*(2): 168-181
- Jeffreys, M. R. (2012). *Nursing student retention: Understanding the process and making a difference*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.
- Jenkins, R. (2011). Why are so many students still failing online? *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 22*.
- Katz, J., & Hartnett, R. T. (1976). *Scholars in the Making: The Development of Graduate and Professional Students*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Pub. Co.
- Kember, D. (1995). *Open learning courses for adults: A model of student progress*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., & Whitt, E. J. (2011). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kumar, S., Johnson, M., & Hardemon, T. (2013). Dissertations at a distance: Students' perceptions of online mentoring in a doctoral program. *International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education, 27*(1).
- Kunjufu, J. (1997). *Black College Student Survival Guide*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.
- Lambert, N. M., Stillman, T. F., Hicks, J. A., Kamble, S., Baumeister, R. F., & Fincham, F. D. (2013). To belong is to matter sense of belonging enhances meaning in life. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 39*(11), 1418-1427.
- LaPadula, M. (2003). A comprehensive look at online student support services for distance learners. *The American Journal of Distance Education, 17*(2), 119-128.
- Lehman, R. M., & Conceição, S. C. (2010). *Creating a sense of presence in online teaching: How to "be there" for distance learners* (Vol. 18). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lehman, R. M., & Conceição, S. C. (2013). *Motivating and retaining online students: Research-based strategies that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Leners, D. W., Wilson, V. W., & Sitzman, K. L. (2007). Twenty-first century doctoral education: Online with a focus on nursing education. *Nursing Education Perspectives, 28*(6), 332-336.

- Lightweis, S. (2014). The Challenges, Persistence, and Success of White, Working-Class, First-Generation College Students. *College Student Journal*, 48(3), 461-467.
- Link, D. G. (2009). The teaching-coaching role of the APN. *The Journal of perinatal & neonatal nursing*, 23(3), 279-283.
- Liu, X., Magjuka, R. J., Bonk, C. J., & Lee, S. H. (2007). Does sense of community matter. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 8(1), 9-24.
- MacLellan, L., Levett-Jones, T., & Higgins, I. (2015). Nurse practitioner role transition: A concept analysis. *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners*, 27(7), 389-397.
- Magolda, M. B. B., & King, P. M. (2004). *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York, NY: Harper.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. New York, NY: Von Nostrand Co.
- McDonnell, R. P., Soricone, L., & Sheen, M. (2014). Promoting persistence through comprehensive student supports. *Jobs for the Future*. Retrieved from: http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/Promoting-Persistence-Through-Comprehensive-Student-Supports%20_031814.pdf
- McGivney, R. J. (2009). Adult student persistence in online education: Developing a model to understand the factors that affect adult student persistence in a course. *Open Access Dissertations*, 17.
- McKay, V. C., & Estrella, J. (2008). First-Generation student success: The role of faculty interaction in service learning courses. *Communication Education*, 57(3), 356-372.
- McMillan, D. (1976). *Sense of community: An attempt at definition*. George Peabody College for Teachers.
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of community psychology*, 14(1), 6-23.
- Melé, D. (2012). The firm as a "community of persons": A pillar of humanistic business ethos. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 106(1), 89-101. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1051-2>
- Mertens, D. M. (2010). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Mills, M. J., Knight, P. A., Kraiger, K., Mayer, W. F., & LaFontana, K. (2011). Developing and Managing IO Online: What's Behind the Virtual Classroom? Retrieved from: http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=psych_fac
- Moore, J. C. and K. Shelton. (2014). The Sloan Consortium pillars and quality scorecard. In K. Shattuck (Eds.), *Assuring Quality in Online Education* (40-49). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Munich, K. (2014). Social support for online learning: Perspectives of nursing students. *International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education*, 29(2).
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). *Distance education fast facts*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014023.pdf>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *Glossary*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/index.asp?id=713>
- National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF). (2010). Clinical education issues in preparing nurse practitioner students for independent practice: An ongoing series of papers. Retrieved from <https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.nonpf.org/resource/resmgr/imported/clinicaleducationissuespprfinalapril2010.pdf>
- Nepal, B. P., & Lawrence, F. B. AC 2011-517: PROJECT-BASED RESIDENCY COURSE FOR ONLINE GRADUATE PROGRAM.
- Newberry, R., & DeLuca, C. (2013). Building a foundation for success through student services for online learners. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 17(4).
- O'Banion, T. (2009). An academic advising model. *NaCADA Journal*, 29(1), 83-89.
- O'Meara, K., Knudsen, K., & Jones, J. (2013). The role of emotional competencies in faculty–doctoral student relationships. *The Review of Higher Education*, 36, 315–347.
- Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of educational research*, 70(3), 323-367.
- Ozdemir, Z. D., & Abrevaya, J. (2007). Adoption of technology-mediated distance education: A longitudinal analysis. *Information & Management*, 44(5), 467-479.
- Park, J. H., & Choi, H. J. (2009). Factors influencing adult learners' decision to drop out or persist in online learning. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 12(4), 207-217.
- Penn State University World Campus. (2015). How Online Learning Works. Accessed on 27 Jun 2015. <http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/how-online-learning-works>

- Petty, T. (2014). Motivating first-generation students to academic success and college completion. *College Student Journal*, 48(2), 257-264.
- Picciano, A. G. (2015). Models of Survey Research. *Conducting Research in Online and Blended Learning Environments: New Pedagogical Frontiers*, 55.
- Pizzolato, J. E. (2008). Advisor, teacher, partner: Using the learning partnerships model to reshape academic advising. *About campus*, 13(1), 18-25.
- Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2010). Generalization in quantitative and qualitative research: Myths and strategies. *International journal of nursing studies*, 47(11), 1451-1458.
- Polit, D., & Beck, C. (2012). Essentials of nursing research. *Ethics*, 23(2).
- Porto, S.C. (2014). Cost, access and quality: Breaking the iron triangle through disruptive technology-based innovations. In K. Shattuck (Eds.), *Assuring Quality in Online Education* (40-49). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Power, T. M., & Morven-Gould, A. (2011). Head of gold, feet of clay: The online learning paradox. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 12(2), 19-39.
- Purdue University. (2015). Program Residencies. Accessed 25 Jun 2015. <http://agribusiness.purdue.edu/residencies>
- QSR International. (2015). QSR Nvivo11. Accessed on 15 Dec 2015. <http://www.qsrinternational.com/what-is-nvivo>
- Ramsey, K., & Peale, C. (2010). First-generation college students stay the course. *USA Today*.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2016). *Reason & rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Reilly, J. E. R., & Fitzpatrick, J. J. (2009). Perceived stress and sense of belonging in doctor of nursing practice students. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 25(2), 81-86.
- Restauri, S. L. (2004). Creating an effective online distance education program using targeted support factors. *TechTrends*, 48(6), 32-39.
- Rhoads, R. A., Camacho, M. S., Toven-Lindsey, B., & Lozano, J. B. (2015). The Massive Open Online Course Movement, xMOOCs, and Faculty Labor. *The Review of Higher Education*, 38(3), 397-424.
- Rovai, A. P. (2002). Building sense of community at a distance. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 3(1).

- Rovai, A. P., Wighting, M. J., & Jing, L. (2005). School climate. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 6(4), 361-374.
- Russell, J. A. (2015). Rolling with the punches: Examining the socialization experiences of kinesiology doctoral students. *Research quarterly for exercise and sport*, 86(2), 140-151.
- Russo-Gleicher, R. J. (2013). Qualitative Insights into Faculty Use of Student Support Services with Online Students at Risk: Implications for Student Retention. *Journal of Educators Online*, 10(1), n1.
- Scagnoli, N. I. (2001). Student orientation for online programs. *Journal of Research On Technology in Education*, 34(1), 19-27.
- Schaeffer, C. E., & Konetes, G. D. (2010). Impact of learner engagement on attrition rates and student success in online learning. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 7(5), 3-9.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2015). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sedgwick, M. (2013). Comparison of Second-Degree and Traditional Undergraduate Nursing Students' Sense of Belonging During Clinical Placements. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 52(11), 657.
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers college press.
- Senge, P.M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Shackelford, J. L., & Maxwell, M. (2012). Sense of community in graduate online education: Contribution of learner to learner interaction. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 13(4), 228-249.
- Shea, P., & Bidjerano, T. (2014). Does online learning impede degree completion? A national study of community college students. *Computers & Education*, 75, 103-111.
- Shieh, R. S., Gummer, E., & Niess, M. (2008). The quality of a web-based course: Perspectives of the instructor and the students. *Techtrends: Linking Research and Practice to Improve Learning*, 52(6), 61-68.
- Shields, N. (2002). Anticipatory socialization, adjustment to university life, and perceived stress: Generational and sibling effects. *Social Psychology of Education*, 5(4), 365-392.
- Silvers, P., O'Connell, J., & Fewell, M. (2007). Strategies for creating community in a graduate education online program. *Journal of Computing in Teacher Education*, 23(3), 81-87.

- Simpson, O. (2004). The impact on retention of interventions to support distance learning students. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 19(1), 79-95.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Stuber, J. M. (2011). Integrated, marginal, and resilient: race, class, and the diverse experiences of white first-generation college students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(1), 117-136.
- Sull, E. C. (2013, January 31). Student engagement in the online classroom. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Student-Engagement-in-the/136897/?cid=ja&utm_source=ja&utm_medium=en
- Swan, K. (2002). Building learning communities in online courses: The importance of interaction. *Education, Communication & Information*, 2(1), 23-49.
- Sweitzer, V. B. (2009). Towards a theory of doctoral student professional identity development: A developmental networks approach. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(1), 1-33.
- Szanton, S. L., Mihaly, L. K., Alhusen, J., & Becker, K. L. (2010). Taking charge of the challenge: Factors to consider in taking your first nurse practitioner job. *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, 22(7), 356-360.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are All of the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher education*, 37(1), 1-22.
- Thornton, R., & Nardi, P. M. (1975). The dynamics of role acquisition. *American Journal of Sociology*, 870-885.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of educational research*, 89-125.
- Tinto, V. (1993). Building Community. *Liberal Education*, 79(4), 16-21.
- Tinto, V. (2004). Student Retention and Graduation: Facing the Truth, Living with the Consequences. Occasional Paper 1. *Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*.

United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). Nurse Practitioner Primary Care Competencies in Specialty Areas: Adult, Family, Gerontological, Pediatric and Women's Health. Retrieved from <https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.nonpf.org/resource/resmgr/competencies/primarycarecomps02.pdf>

United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2015). Affordable care act: Read about the law. Retrieved from <http://www.hhs.gov/healthcare/about-the-law/read-the-law/index.html>

Waugaman, W. R., & Lohrer, D. J. (2000). From nurse to nurse anesthetist: The influence of age and gender on professional socialization and career commitment of advanced practice nurses. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 16*(1), 47-56.

Weidman, J. C., & Stein, E. L. (2003). Socialization of doctoral students to academic norms. *Research in higher education, 44*(6), 641-656.

Weidman, J. C., Twale, D. J., & Stein, E. L. (2001). Socialization of graduate and professional students in higher education: A perilous passage? ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report,

Wiggins, J. (2011). Faculty and first-generation college students: Bridging the classroom gap together. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 2011*(127), 1-4.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.