The Role of Good Teaching in the Undergraduate Nursing Experience

Benchworks Research Note
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Introduction

In the post-COVID era, the educational landscape has significantly evolved. So, we wanted to explore the national data and see how things have changed. Pre-pandemic, insights from Benchworks shared that the strongest overall predictor of a student's experience in their nursing program was satisfaction with faculty and classroom instruction. We wanted to see if that held true in the current environment. Amidst the disruption, we found that still holds true.

This research note details findings from the 2022-2023 AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment of over 18,000 undergraduate students from 205 colleges and universities in the United States. The insights drawn from our recent data underscore the enduring power of connections within the educational environment. Faculty members play a pivotal role not only in imparting knowledge but also in fostering a supportive and engaging learning atmosphere. As we transition out of the pandemic, the importance of these relationships has only grown, highlighting the critical role of faculty in shaping positive student experiences.

Key Questions

1. How did graduating nursing students rate their classroom instruction?
2. How did satisfaction with classroom instruction differ across key populations?
3. How did the perceptions of classroom instruction relate to key nursing program outcomes?
   - Core Competencies
   - Professional Values
   - Overall Learning
   - Overall Satisfaction

How Did Graduating Nursing Students Rate Their Classroom Instruction?

Data from the AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Assessment indicates that the majority of graduating nursing students reported high satisfied with instructors in both their clinical and classroom nursing courses, as well as their broader classroom and clinic experiences that relate to teaching. Figure 1 displays the responses to questions in the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* survey factor.

Key findings from figure 1:
- Graduating nursing students gave "excellent" ratings in descending percentages to access to faculty (40% excellent), teaching (35% excellent) tied with faculty responsiveness (35% excellent), and feedback (31% excellent)
- More than 50% of the respondents gave only "fair" ratings to faculty in each of these four categories.

FIGURE 1.

Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction

Distribution of responses to survey questions in the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor

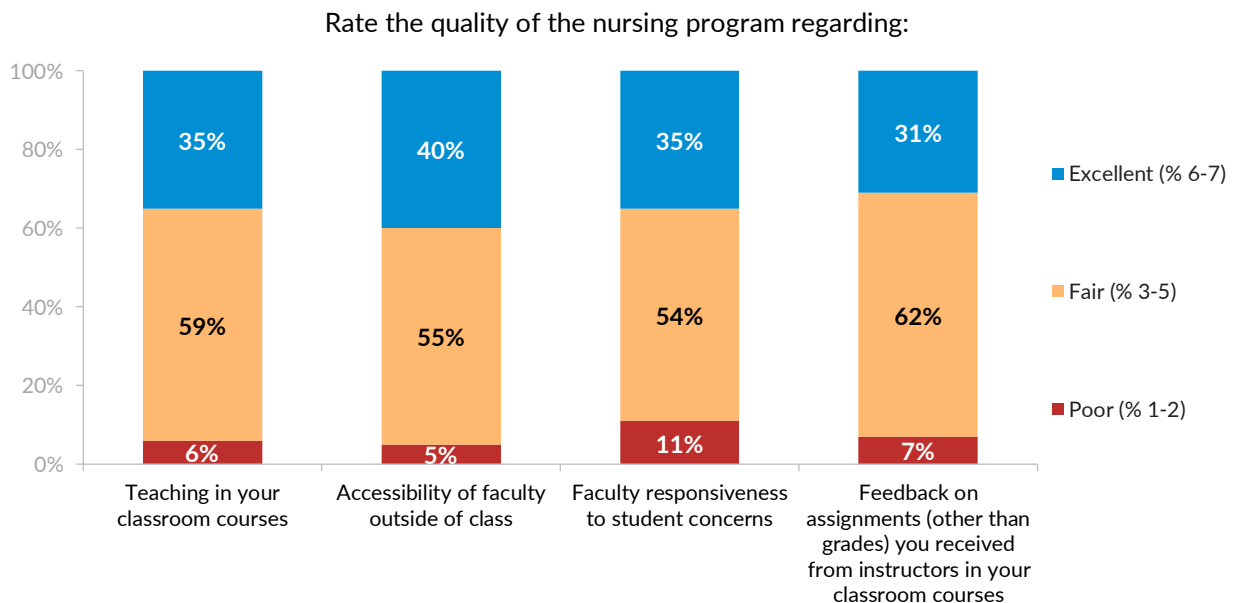### Rate the quality of the nursing program regarding:

Figure 2 displays the breakdown of the scores on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* survey factor. The factor score for each student is the mean score of all of a student's answers to each question in the factor. The scores were then grouped into the percent with a high factor score (6 or higher out of 7), those with a moderate score (between 3.0 and 6.9) and those with a low score (less than 3).

Key findings from figure 2:
- Most graduating nursing students (70%) had a moderate factor score.
- About a quarter of graduating nursing students had a high factor score.

FIGURE 2.

Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction Factor Distributions
Percentage of nursing graduates averaging low (1.0-2.9), moderate (3.0 to 5.9), and high (6.0-7.0) on a seven-point scale on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor

6%	70%	24%

■ Low Factor Score (1.0 to 2.9)　　■ Moderate Factor Score (3.0 to 5.9)　　■ High Factor Score (6.0-7.0)
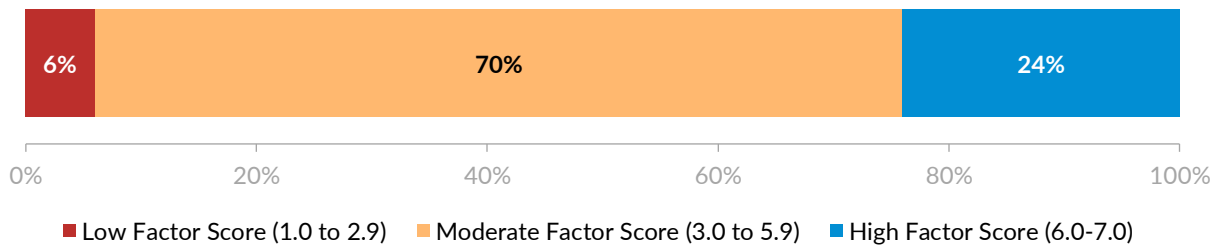
The remainder of this research note will explore the relationship between satisfaction with quality of nursing instructions and other aspects of the nursing student experience using those three groups above, either comparing the percent who scored high on the factor across different areas or exploring differences across those three groups.

How Did Satisfaction with Instruction Differ Across Key Populations?

Results from the AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment indicated differences in the percentage of nursing graduates scoring high on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor across key nursing-related populations.

Key findings from figure 3:

- **Degree Type:** Students who already held an RN and were adding a BSN to their credentials were the most satisfied; 46% of them scored high on their satisfaction. Traditional (21%) and accelerated (18%) BSN students were less satisfied.
- **Enrollment Status**: Parttime students (39%) were more satisfied than fulltime (23%) students.
- **Years of Health Care Experience:** Those with previous fulltime health-related work experience (26%) were more satisfied than those without that prior experience (22%).
- **Future Education Plans**: Those who planned to seek further education were more satisfied (26%) than those without those plans (22%). These percentages are the same as those reported based on years of health-related work experience.
- **Online Program Completion:** Those who completed all of their program online (45%) were the most likely to indicate satisfaction with the program itself.
- **Age:** Students who were more than 40 years old were more likely to be satisfied (39% high satisfaction) than were younger students. The younger the student, the less who reported high satisfaction. The youngest – 25 years old or less – were the least likely to report high satisfaction, 21%.

For further thought: The data reflect differences about instruction among graduating nursing students. How might nursing programs use student experience data to further craft instruction that best meets the needs of their students? How might instructional needs differ between these two groups:

- Part time, adult (40 years old or more) students who already have an RN, may already have fulltime health-related experience, and are pursuing a BSN (traditional or accelerated) as an additional credential and
- Full-time, younger (25 years old or less) students who may not have fulltime health-care experience, and are pursuing a BSN (traditional or accelerated).
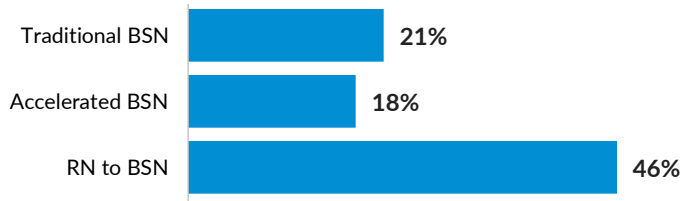
FIGURE 3.

Instruction Satisfaction Across Nursing Program Populations

Percent of graduating nursing students scoring high on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing* Instruction factor across various nursing-related populations.

Degree Type

Traditional BSN	21%
Accelerated BSN	18%
RN to BSN	46%

Enrollment Status While Completing Nursing Degree

Full-Time	23%
Part-Time	39%

Previous Full-Time, Health-Related Work Experience

No	22%
Yes	26%

Plan to Seek Additional Educational

No	22%
Yes	26%

Program Completed Online

None	28%
Some	20%
All	45%

Age

25 years old or younger	21%
26 to 30 years old	23%
31 to 40 years old	30%
More than 40 years old	39%
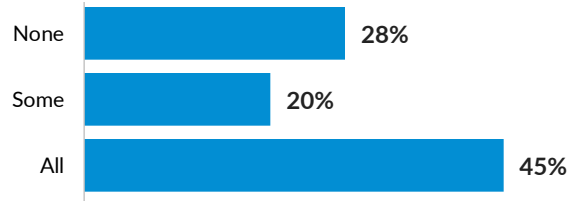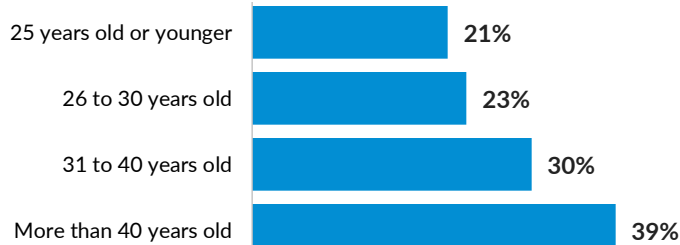
0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

How Did Perceptions of Classroom Instruction Relate to Key Nursing Program Outcomes?

Do nursing students who report higher satisfaction with classroom instruction also report higher outcomes on key program outcomes? Are those who report less satisfaction also likely to report less confidence in these learning outcomes?

To explore this question, we'll examine the relationship between the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor and the following topics addressed on the AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment:

- **Learning Outcomes: Core Knowledge:** Questions measuring the degree to which nursing programs contributed to learning outcomes related to academic success, such as assessing predictive factors that influence the health of patients, applying an ethical decision-making framework to a clinical situation, and using appropriate technologies to assess patients.
- **Learning Outcomes: Professional Values:** Questions measuring the degree to which nursing programs contributed to learning outcomes related to academic success, such as acting as an advocate for vulnerable patients, demonstrating accountability for your actions, and providing culturally competent care.
- **Overall Learning:** Questions measuring the degree to which graduating nursing students reported they were challenged to do their best academic work, motivated to do their best academic work, and the information learned was applicable to future work.
- **Overall Satisfaction:** Questions measuring the degree to which graduating nursing students believed the program offered a positive academic experience, would recommend the program to a close friend, and would rate the value of their investment in the nursing program as high.

Each section contains a figure visualizing the relationship between those five topics and *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor:

- Each **colored bar** represents a group based on their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor:
  - Those who scored low (mean score less than 3 on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor), visualized in red
    Those who scored in the middle (mean score between 3 and 5.9 on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor), visualized in orange
  - Those who scored high (mean score 6 or higher on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor), visualized in blue
- The **percentage** represent the percent of that group that scored high (i.e., answered "6" or "7" on a seven-point scale, "7" being labeled "Highly satisfied" or "Extremely") on that survey question.

Learning Outcomes: Core Knowledge

Results from the AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment showed that graduating nursing students were more likely to indicate their nursing program contributed to learning on outcomes related to core nursing knowledge if their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor was high.

Key findings from figure 4:

- Nursing students who were extremely satisfied with their instruction were more likely to believe they could assess predictive factors that influence the health of patients (95%), apply ethical decision-making to a clinical situation (96%) , and use appropriate technologies to assess patients (93%).
- Nursing students who scored in the middle in their instructional satisfaction were less confident in the above three areas.

FIGURE 4.

High Perceptions of Learning on Core Knowledge Outcomes by Satisfaction with Instruction

Percent of nursing graduates responding "Extremely" (% 6 or 7) on learning outcomes related to core nursing knowledge by their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor

To what degree did the nursing program teach you to:

Score on Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction factor
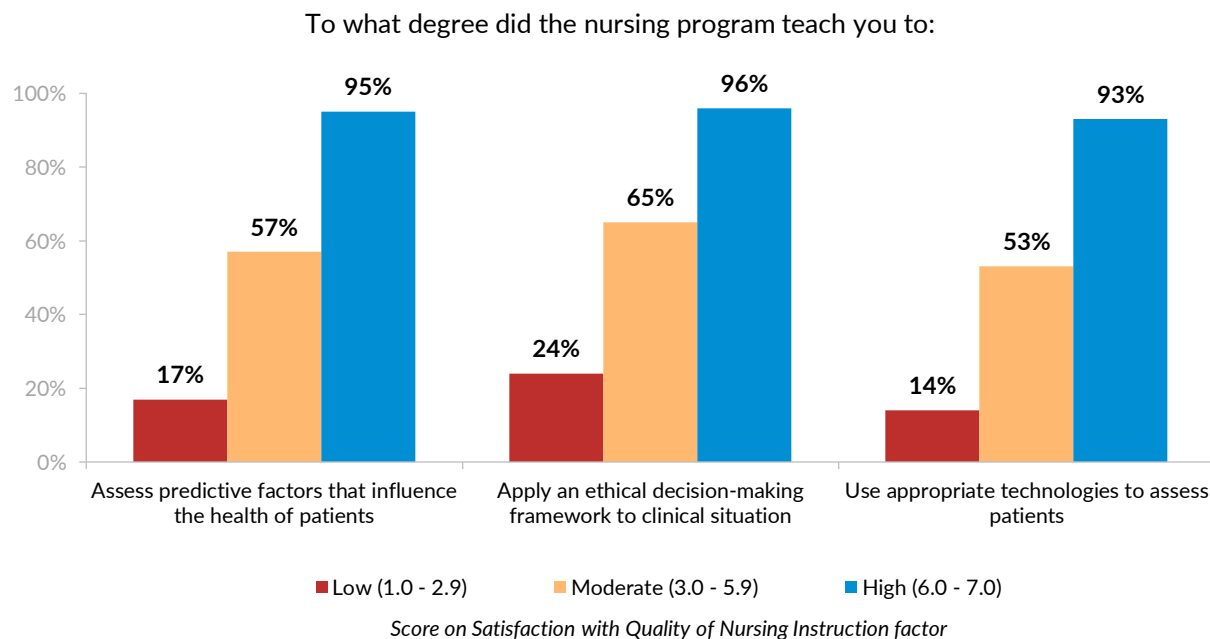
For further thought: For those nursing students who scored in the middle of their instructional satisfaction, the nursing teaching does not appear to fully build their confidence in the key clinical skills named above. What aspects of the teaching could be improved for these students? Do they need more examples of applied work, more practice using those skills, or better feedback from faculty?

Learning Outcomes: Professional Values

Results from the AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment showed that graduating nursing students were more likely to indicate their nursing program contributed to learning on outcomes related to professional values if their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor was high.
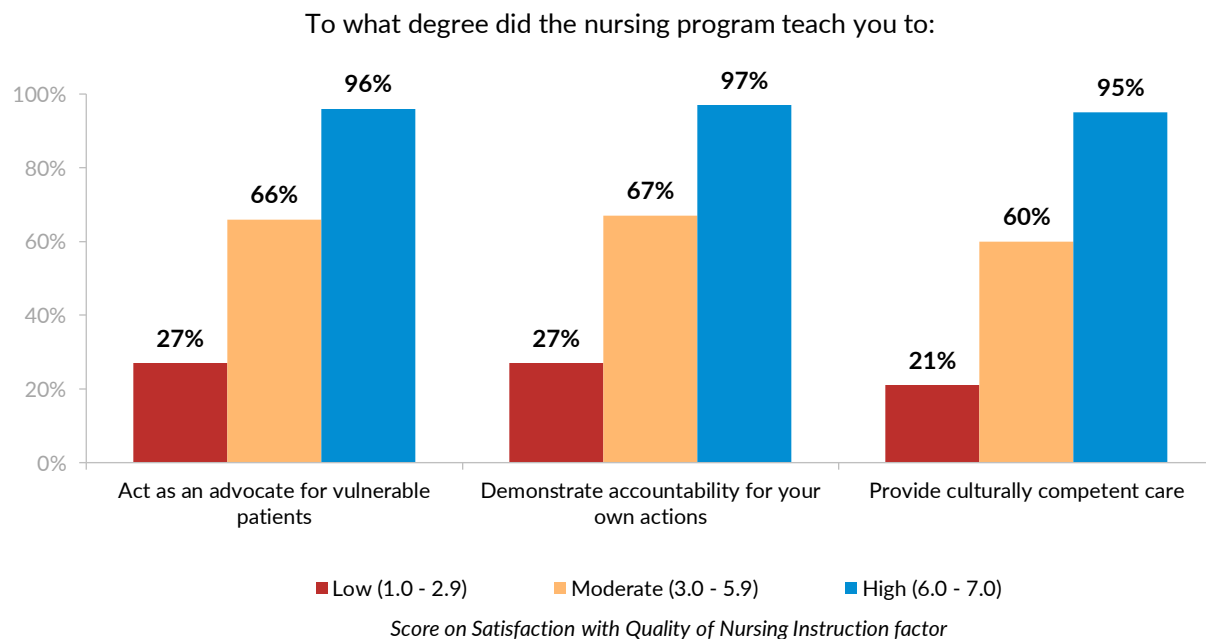
Key findings from figure 5:

- Those who reported high satisfaction with the nursing program were also likely to report over 90% success in acting as an advocate for vulnerable patients, demonstrating accountability for their actions, and providing culturally competent care.
- At least 20% of nursing students who reported low satisfaction also reported low confidence that the nursing program had equipped them to demonstrate these three Professional Values.

FIGURE 5.

High Perceptions of Learning on Professional Values Outcomes by Satisfaction with Instruction
Percent of nursing graduates responding "Extremely" (% 6 or 7) on learning outcomes related to professional values by their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor

To what degree did the nursing program teach you to:

Score on Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction factor

- Low (1.0 - 2.9)
- Moderate (3.0 - 5.9)
- High (6.0 - 7.0)

For further thought: It may be helpful to consider the data in greater depth to learn the characteristics of those who feel less confident in these outcomes. It may also be helpful to learn more about how students gauge their ability in these outcomes and the manner and frequency with which the curriculum helps students build this and other Professional Values.

Overall Learning

Results from the AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment showed that graduating nursing students were more likely to indicate their nursing program contributed to their overall learning if their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor was high.
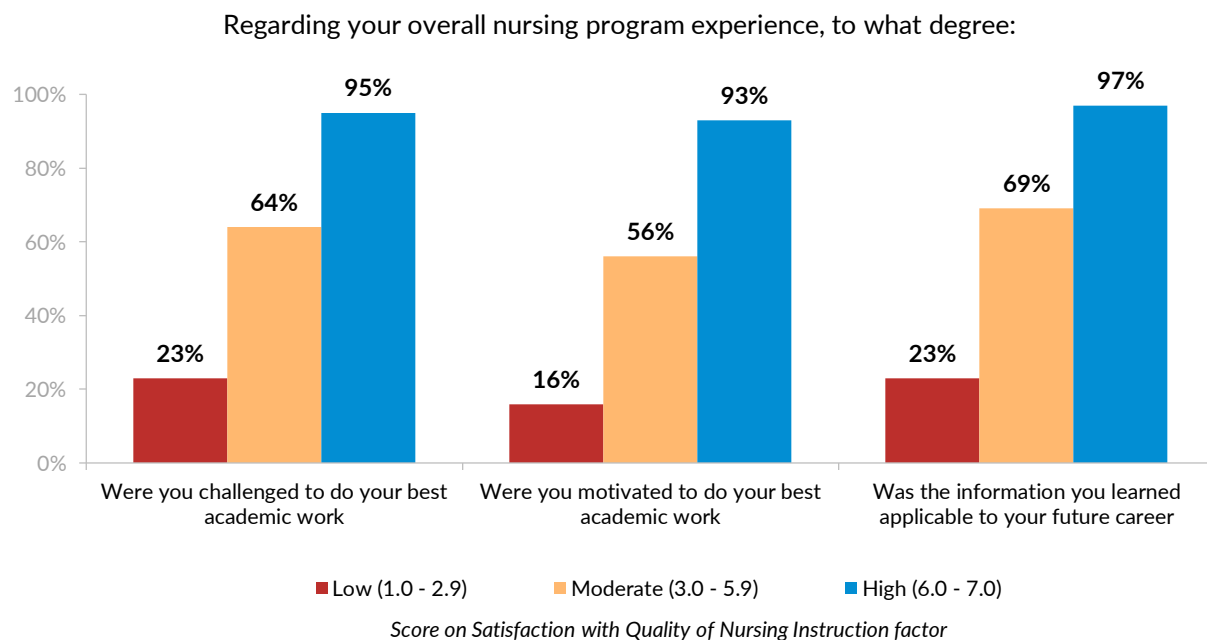
Key findings from figure 6:

- Graduating nursing students who were highly satisfied with their nursing program were also more likely to report they were challenged (95%) and motivated (93%) to do their best academic work and that the information received was applicable to their professional work (97%).
- Of all the overall learning scores, motivation to do one's best academic work showed lower percentages overall across those who showed high, medium, and low satisfaction with the nursing program.

FIGURE 6.

High Perceptions of Overall Learning Outcomes by Satisfaction with Instruction

Percent of nursing graduates responding "Extremely" (% 6 or 7) on overall nursing program learning outcomes by their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor

Regarding your overall nursing program experience, to what degree:

■ Low (1.0 - 2.9)   ■ Moderate (3.0 - 5.9)   ■ High (6.0 - 7.0)

Score on Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction factor

For further thought: Would a higher degree of faculty responsiveness and a larger amount of feedback result in greater motivation for nursing students? Would these enhancements also lead to students feeling more challenged to do their best?

Overall Satisfaction

Results from the AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment showed that graduating nursing students were more likely to indicate high satisfaction with their nursing program experience overall if their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor was high.

Key findings from figure 7:

- Those who were highly satisfied with the nursing program believed it was a positive academic experience (93%), would recommend the program to a close friend (92%), and would rate the value of their investment in the nursing degree as high (86%).
- There was a rather large difference in opinion – often close to 50 percentage points - between those who were highly satisfied and those who were moderately, the largest difference in those two groups across all of the topics.

High Satisfaction with Overall Nursing Program Experience by Satisfaction with Instruction
Percent of nursing graduates responding "Extremely" (% 6 or 7) on questions related to satisfaction with their overall nursing program experience by their score on the *Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction* factor

Regarding your overall nursing program experience, to what degree:

Score on Satisfaction with Quality of Nursing Instruction factor
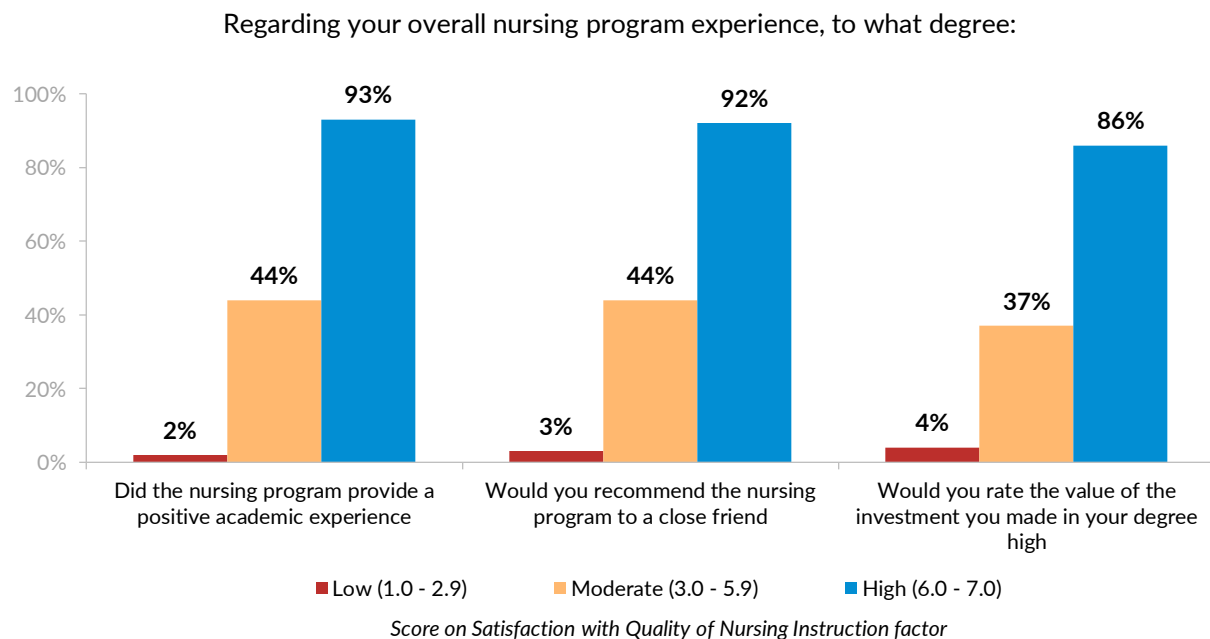
For further thought: What are the characteristics of those who indicated only a moderate amount of satisfaction with the nursing program? To what degree do faculty accessibility, feedback, and other out-of-class experiences influence student perceptions of a positive academic experience? What other experiences might also contribute to this overall positive academic experience?

Conclusion

Graduating nursing students who were highly satisfied with their nursing program showed satisfaction across all topics measured in this Nursing Exit Assessment. Those who were highly satisfied scored higher on Core Knowledge, Professional Values, Overall Learning, and Overall Satisfaction with the program. Those who indicated moderate satisfaction reported lower scores in these same topical areas.

Students enter the program from a variety of backgrounds. Some already have health-related professional experience; some have completed an RN and are now seeking a BSN as an additional credential. Others have less experience and perhaps different expectations that those for whom the nursing program is a continuation of their professional journey. Likewise, some students are older than 40, others are in their mid-20s. Some complete the program completely online, others favor in person options.

Different student demographic groups may have different needs as well as different expectations. Technology can be a daunting area, even for those who may be younger and perhaps more savvy users of technology in general. Those with previous health-related experience may already be familiar with much of the technology but need help understanding advanced functionality, particularly as AI may enter health technology.

In addition, faculty out-of-classroom interactions are an essential part of the overall learning environment including faculty accessibility, frequency and amount of feedback given to students, and responsiveness to student concerns. Out-of-class interactions may also influence the degree to which students feel challenged and motivated to do their best work. Student expectations and faculty resources may both warrant further examination for the degree of compatibility across both areas. Cooperative conversations and clear communication about both possibilities and limits may increase satisfaction across both groups.

Providing culturally competent care – a Professional Value – is especially important not only in general but particularly considering the health disparities made more visible by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the three Professional Values studied – advocating for those who are vulnerable, demonstrating accountability, and providing culturally competent care – those who were moderately satisfied with the nursing program were least confident of their abilities in cultural competence. An important opportunity for improvement may lie in these findings.

Survey

The AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment provides nursing programs with valuable insights into the experiences of nursing students and overall program outcomes. Designed in partnership with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), the survey addresses satisfaction with various components of the nursing program, including instruction, faculty, course interactions, facilities, and services. The survey also measures how well nursing students believe their program contributed to a broad range of nursing-specific learning outcomes, including core competencies, core knowledge, role development, professional values, and technical skills. The assessment is tightly linked to and results are mapped to AACN's Essentials of Baccalaureate Education.

Dataset

The findings in this research note are based on aggregate analysis from the 2022-2023 academic year administration of the AACN/Benchworks Undergraduate Nursing Exit Assessment. In total, 18,057 students from 205 institutions in the United States completed the assessment. Institutions could choose whether to administer online or via paper; 204 institutions administered online using the Benchworks survey system and one administered via paper surveys. The national online response rate was 49%.

Analysis

The insights shared in this research note were developed based on a wide range of statistical analyses, including descriptive analysis (frequencies, means, standard deviations), correlational analysis and cross-tabulations with chi-square analysis, and regression models. The findings in this report are presented as descriptive analysis, specifically percentages. Results do not indicate whether differences between groups are statistically significant. All figures reflect the number of responses to a question and do not include missing data. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent; therefore, some totals may not exactly equal 100.

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