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NURSING STUDENTS AND TUCKMAN'S THEORY:
BUILDING COMMUNITY USING COHORT DEVELOPMENT

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Higher Education & Policy Studies Program
in the College of Education and Human Performance
at the University of Central Florida
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2013

Major Professor: Rosa Cintrón

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the phenomenon of first year students who lived in a nursing living learning community and their experiences during their first year. The researcher utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate the social and academic aspects that influenced these students as they worked to prepare to apply to the nursing program on their way to becoming nurses. Of the 68 students who lived in the community in the first two years, 12 were interviewed in a face-to-face setting.

The researcher used Tuckman's Stages of Group Development as the framework for this study, recognizing that groups go through several stages depending on the length of time that the group is together. The participants' experiences were examined on a group and individual level, in order to fully understand their experiences in the community, including their persistence through applying to and enrolling in the nursing program.

This study brought voice to the experiences of the students, helping to understand why they came together, how the community developed, and what lessons the students took away from living in this community. It was made clear during the interviews that the students chose to live in the community where they would be surrounded by students with the same goals. They also felt very strongly about academics taking a priority over social events, and believed that the community should have a second semester common course to keep the students working together throughout the duration of the first year.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father,
Laura Edith and Willard Frederick Austin, Sr.

Thank you

for constantly telling me to go to school,
providing endless faith and support,
and never failing to believe in me.

You may not have meant for me to go this far,
but once I started, I knew that I had to go all the way
to truly honor everything you have ever done for me.

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I want to acknowledge and say thank you to all of the students participating in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community, especially those who agreed to participate in this research study. Without all of you, none of this would have been possible. Many of you keep telling me that I am responsible for your success, but the truth is that we have supported each other, and I look forward to following your successes for many years.

My family is too big to name everyone without running the risk of leaving someone out, so I will just say thank you to all of my sons, daughters, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, and those friends (Jeff and Mary) who really should be family. Your constant encouragement and faith in my abilities has been more valuable than you will ever know.

Lastly, I owe my deepest appreciation to my wife, Jan. You have stood by me and supported me throughout this entire journey, even letting me run off to school right after we met and patiently waiting for me to come home. Nearly eight years later, I am truly coming home. You will always hold a special place in my heart. I love you.

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VIGNETTE

In 2009, during her senior year in high school, Laura showed up at a large southeastern University, excited to finally have the chance to learn how she would begin pursuing her career in nursing. She had known since she was 10 that she wanted to be a nurse, when she was in the hospital after having her appendix removed. Her nurses had made her as comfortable as they could, while making sure she did the things necessary to get healthy again. She was nervous about whether she would be smart enough, or if she could keep up with the pace of the nursing program. Some of her older friends had already been in the program and had told her it was difficult, and that she would have to work hard to be successful. Her first step was to attend an open house session where she could meet with a nursing advisor. During the open house, she learned how competitive nursing admissions are. This stirred her fears about not being smart enough, until she reminded herself that she knew how to work hard. In addition, she found out that there was a residential community on campus in which she could choose to live: Nursing@Nike, a living learning community for students who work together to prepare for nursing admissions. Still, Laura was more nervous than before. Now she would have other people living with her who were enrolled in the same program. What if she could not keep up with them in class? What if they did not get along? How would her mom react if she could not get along with her roommates and be successful in the classroom? What if she failed to be admitted to the nursing program? Then what would she do?

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

Nursing is a critical profession in modern day America. With an aging population and the impending retirement of the baby boomer generation, the need for quality health care professionals has never been higher (Smith, 2009). Much of the current leadership of the nursing profession was part of the baby boomer generation, creating a catch-22 situation for the profession. Nursing education is a critical component of the solution to this problem, yet there has been very little growth in these programs. There have been many reasons for the lack of growth (Allen, 2008; American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2005; Foxall, Megel, Grigsby, & Billings, 2009; Ganley & Sheets, 2009; Tanner, 2005; Yore, 2009), but most of them stem from lack of resources, especially in the current economic situation. As a result of this situation, it is critical that every student who wants to be a nurse is given the opportunity to successfully prepare for admission to a nursing education program.

Statement of the Problem

According to Yore (2009), there were 18,000 open nursing positions in 2010, and an expected 52,000 open positions by 2020, just in the state of Florida. The shortage was created by the increasing healthcare needs of the Baby Boomer generation along with retirements of nurses from the same

generation. Additionally, as aging nurses have retired, there have been fewer new nurses being educated to fill these vacant positions, leaving few experienced nurses in place to mentor those entering the profession (Yore, 2009).

The biggest challenge to solving the shortage of nurses has been the ability to educate new nurses. Yore (2009) stated that nursing programs in the state declined more than 12,000 qualified applicants, more than half of all applicants. The reasons for this include the lack of available clinical sites for training, lack of funding to hire faculty, and lack of qualified applicants for faculty positions that are funded. Nursing education programs have also lost faculty, causing the average number of students per full-time faculty member to increase by three in the last three years across the country. Enrollment in nurse educator tracks decreased by 5%, and Ph.D. programs in nursing dropped almost 52% during the same period (Yore, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

At the time of the present study, there was a critical nursing shortage in the United States (Allen, 2008, Goodin, 2003; Smith, 2009; Tanner, 2002; Welhan & Benfield, 2008; Yore, 2009), and the problem was getting worse. With a limited number of seats in most nursing programs, ranging from 36 seats to as many as 200 in any given semester, it is essential to get the best prepared students into those seats. Students who enter the university as nurse-pending

are often unaware of the challenges that they are facing to successfully prepare for admission to the nursing program which include prerequisite courses, that are also taken by students preparing for medical school, and an entrance exam (Perin, 2006).

Although admission requirements vary by state and institution, there are several courses that are generally required for admission to a nursing program. In just four semesters, students are required to take five science classes: biology, chemistry, microbiology, anatomy, and physiology. Two of these, anatomy and physiology, are courses usually taken in the third year, yet are being taken by students in their first year to prepare for submitting their applications to the nursing program. In addition, four other courses are required to be completed for admission: psychology, developmental psychology, statistics, and nutrition. All of these are usually second-year classes, and nutrition is a third-year class. Most of these classes must be taken in the first year in order to be on track. Students who are dedicated but not necessarily academically prepared run the risk of spending these four semesters preparing for admission to the college and then not being admitted to the nursing program, leaving them with the possibility of starting over on a new career and losing the time already invested. Admission requirements for comparable universities are displayed in Appendix A.

In a phenomenological study, Beck (2000) attempted to describe the reasons why students choose nursing as a career. In various other studies

mentioned in Beck's article, students reported various reasons for choosing nursing, including wanting to help people, nurturance, emotional needs, financial reasons, family influence, and previous experience in health care employment. Beck asked 27 students in a nursing research course to write all "thoughts, feelings, and perceptions" about their decision to become a nurse until they could write nothing more. After collecting the writings, Beck evaluated the data to extract significant statements, formulating means of the statements, and organizing them into themes. There were 107 significant statements which categorized into eight themes: (a) an intense desire and genuine love of helping others, (b) a profession in which both patient and nurses reap benefits, (c) prior work experiences and hands on caring for family and friends, (d) exposure to family and friends in health care professions, (e) observing nurses in action had a potent and lasting influence, (f) sensing something was missing from their original career choice, (g) profession of nursing was not first choice (backup), (h) fascination with science and the human body. These themes help to explain what is meant by a student needing to have passion to pursue a degree in nursing. This passion might be developed by watching other nurses in action, or it may come as students realize that their first choice of career was lacking something, or they were not successful in their first choice of career (Beck, 2000).

According to the Rosseter (2011), in 2010 alone, more than 67,000 students were turned away from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs

in the United States simply because there were not enough seats available. Typically, there have been five applicants for every seat in a nursing program. These situations are generally a result of low funding, a nursing faculty shortage, and limited clinical site availability (2011).

Significance of the Study

This study has the potential to be significant by adding to the understanding of how students who have decided on a career in nursing can use cooperative and collaborative techniques to work together to prepare for admission to the nursing program. Nursing admissions are typically competitive, with applicants having about a one in five chance of selection. Nursing programs that are not competitive have usually had up to a two-year waiting list, something that most students will avoid if possible. In 2005, it was reported that the nursing field had shortages in every state. Nationally, there were up to almost one million positions unfilled (AACN, 2005). As the national population has grown and aged, and with the baby boomer generation retiring, nurses at all levels have been in high demand. As senior nurses have retired, there have been fewer nurses ready to take their place in leadership and management positions. As nursing faculty have retired, the gap has been worsened by fewer seats being available in nursing programs to educate the nurses needed to fill the empty positions (AACN, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

Gusfield (1976) explained community as a natural outcome of appeal made by people to one another. Gusfield determined that preexisting conditions do not cause people to come together as a community. Rather, the process of interacting is what drives them together. He determined that the realization of similarity emerges from the shared contribution in both cooperative and conflict situations. What emerges is a version of community that is composed of a wide variety of groups, associations, and social networks, all of which the individual can choose to interact with or not depending on the situation (Gusfield, 1976).

The process of the group becoming a community is best explained by Tuckman's (1965) five stages of group development. The five stages are forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. It is possible that some groups will never proceed to adjourning, as the intent and population of the group changes often enough to stay current and needed. Additionally, the duration of group life would be expected to influence the amount and rate of development. The shorter duration of the life of the group, the more rapidly the stages will be processed, if not skipped altogether, in groups that have a short lifespan (Tuckman, 1965). It should be noted that these relationships are usually represented linearly, as individual stages that have separation, and are typically drawn with separately, connected by arrows, as shown in Figure 1. It is the researcher's contention that these stages intermingle, overlapping in a non-linear format, and eventually restarting from the beginning as the needs and purpose of

the group evolve. As shown in Figure 2, the stages are not independent of each other and often overlap as the group progresses through its development. Additionally, as the group moves on to a new objective, the group will start the process over again in the forming stage.

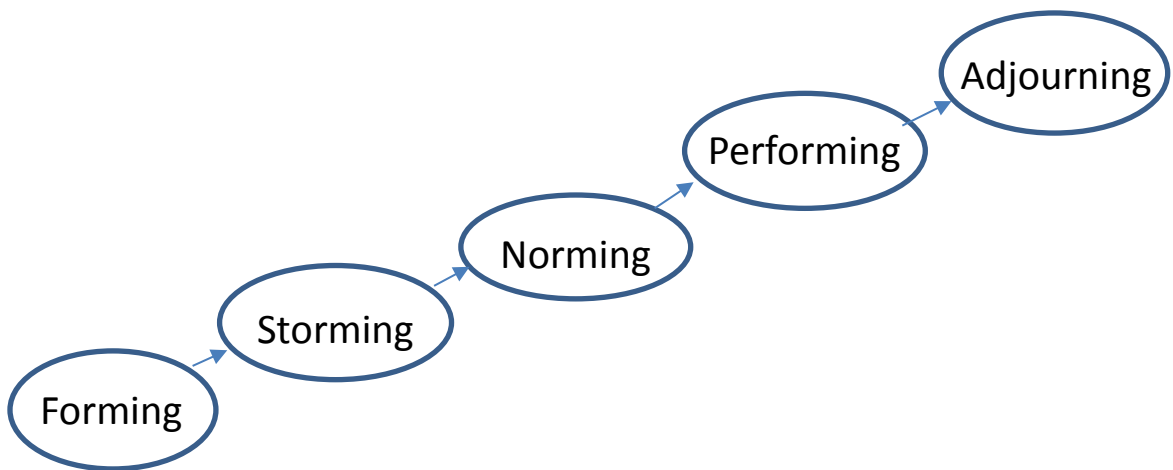
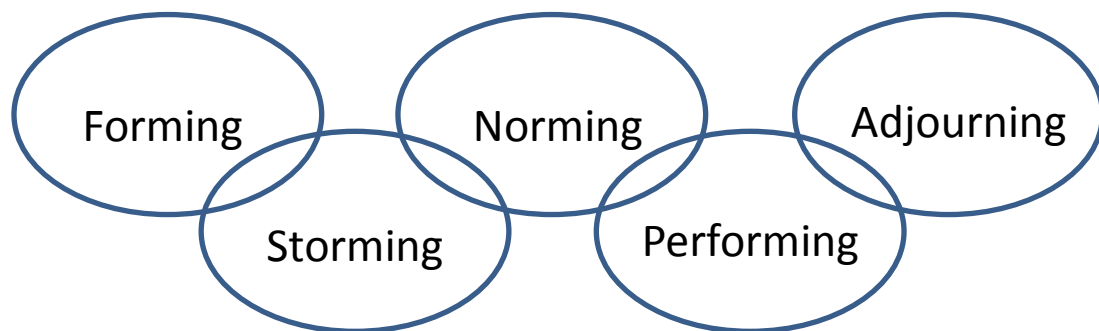


Figure 1. Traditional Stages of Group Development



© Alton Austin: *Interacting Stages of Group Development*

Figure 2. Interacting Stages of Group Development

Research Questions

This study was guided by two research questions:

1. How do Nursing@Nike students make sense of their experiences with the community?
2. How did membership in the community impact the progress of the Nursing@Nike students beyond the first year?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were offered to clarify terms used in the proposed study:

ADN: Associates Degree in Nursing.

ASN: Associates of Science in Nursing.

BSN: Bachelors of Science in Nursing.

Clinical site: location for nursing students to experience practical application of nursing.

Cohort: a small group of learners who complete a program of study as a single unit.

First generation student: student whose parents did not attend college.

FTIC: First-time-in-college student who has never earned any college credit at another institution.

Generation X: generation of students born between 1965 and 1979.

Generation Y: generation of students born after 1979.

NCLEX-RN: National Certification Licensing Exam-RN, required in all states to be licensed as a registered nurse.

Nurse Educator: graduate degree nurse that is skilled in teaching nurse education.

Nursing-pending: a student at the university who is preparing for application to nursing.

Nursing@Nike: a nursing living learning community in Nike Academic Village at UCF.

Pedagogy: the study of being a teacher or the process of teaching.

Residence Assistant: a trained peer leader in Residential Life who supervises those living in a residence hall or group housing facility.

Retention: tracks the full-time student in a degree program over time to determine whether the student has completed the program.

RN: registered nurse.

Rolling Admissions: admission of students as soon as they have successfully completed the minimum admission requirements for the program. This method generally creates a waiting list as there are more applicants than seats available.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

A few key limitations of this study are acknowledged:

1. Only those students who lived in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community were included in this study.
2. Many secondary students in Florida were participating in dual-enrollment programs in which they took college courses for credit at the local state or community college while still in high school. Some of the students who participated in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community came to the university with several of the nursing prerequisites completed, limiting the number of courses that they could take with their peers in the program.

Delimitations

1. Students who only participated in the Nursing Student Success class and nursing students who did not participate in either program were not included.

Positionality

When I arrived at the College of Nursing as an advisor in 2009, there was a serious problem with native students not being competitive enough to be admitted to the program. I had worked at another nursing program at another

university, but even though that was a graduate program, it presented the same kind of situation. Students from outside the institution, even from outside the local area and state, were better qualified than our own students. In this case, students from local state and community colleges were outperforming the native First-Time-In-College (FTIC) students in the application scoring. After meeting with the faculty and current students, it became clear that new students to the institution were at a disadvantage in preparing for the program.

I found that I was meeting with more students to tell them why they could not be a nurse than to help them get ready to start the program. There were days when I wanted to cry more than some of the students in my office who had just realized that their dreams of becoming a nurse were over. Something had to change. I realized at that point that I had to make some changes in not just how they were advised, but also in how they progressed through the first two years at the institution while preparing to apply to the program.

It did not help that our first-year students were taking third-year science courses in a class with 300 students, while the state and community college students were taking the same science class at the first- and second-year levels with just 40 students. The first step was to create a roadmap to make sure our students were taking classes in the right order, to build up the knowledge needed to be successful. Some of these students had been taking a third-year anatomy class in the second semester of their first year. That would change with the addition of the roadmap (Appendix B), a simple Excel spreadsheet, with a few

graphics mixed in to make it a little more fun. It was a huge hit. I had students coming for an advising session, and their roadmaps would be old and tattered, but they would not take a new one. They had all of their notes and plans and would not give it up.

If students applied with less than a 3.5 GPA and an 85 on the TEAS, they could just go home and see what to do next. If they did not know what the target was, they were just shooting blind. So I decided to tell them what they had to do to be ready and to be competitive. It was not enough to successfully complete the prerequisites. I was now telling them at open houses, orientations, and nursing information sessions, just how serious the competition was to be admitted to the program. Although some students left these sessions in a state of panic, or sometimes even in tears, I decided it was better for them to cry early rather than to possibly cry after they had applied to the program. Though the roadmap helped, it still left us with students who wandered through the first two years alone, wondering how they could possibly survive their classes and be competitive when it came time to apply to the program.

Over the course of the first two years at the institution, I worked to first create a student success course just for nursing students, eventually expanding it by creating a living learning community for nursing students called Nursing@Nike. My hope was that by giving students a chance to meet other students who had the same dreams and goals, they could work together to help each other achieve their goal of getting admitted to the program. The student

success class helped, but it was not until they lived together in the community that it seemed to make a difference. Now, they were not just in classes together. They were also going home together to do their homework and study for exams.

Becoming a nurse is challenging in many ways. Once students reach the decision that nursing is the career they desire, a significant amount of preparation is needed to be admitted into a program. During freshman orientation sessions, I usually ask the students how many of them are thinking about being nurses. It is a trick question, as I then say they should think about another career if they are not passionate about being nurses. Nursing is a profession that requires a lot of time and energy to prepare for the program, not to mention the amount of effort that is required to be successful and graduate. A student who is not committed will usually decide to pursue another career. Considering the shortage of nurses, programs cannot afford to admit any student who is not committed to being successful.

After two years, the College of Nursing saw the admission rate for these students improve when compared to students at the institution that did not participate in the program. The focus of this study was on exploring why this occurred.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provided pertinent background information that was necessary to understand the issues in this study. Also addressed were the statement of the

problem, purpose of the study, and specific research questions that were explored.

Chapter 2 provides a more detailed review of the literature. This includes the current state of the nursing profession, nursing faculty shortages, nursing admissions, nursing education issues, student generational challenges, faculty student relationships, first generation student issues, first year experience opportunities, retention issues, and community building discussions.

Chapter 3 specifies the design of the study. It contains an in-depth discussion of the methodology structure, methods used to gather data, the data collection plan, data analysis procedures, and a more in-depth discussion of the research questions that were examined.

Chapter 4 presents the relationships and demographics of the research participants as well as some introductory information related to their pursuit of admissions to the nursing program. The chapter offers the individual participant descriptions and narratives of their lived experiences. Their stories are presented through brief narratives using the words of each participant and reflections of the researcher.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the thematic findings as they relate to the conceptual framework, the literature reviewed for the study, and the two research questions. Each of the emerged themes was explored from the participants' perspectives, reflections, and narratives. All themes were identified

and discussed in detail; interpretations of findings were congruent with those of the dissertation committee chair.

Chapter 6 provides implications and recommendations for first year students living in an academic living learning community for students and administrators. Recommendations for future research were also provided, as well as the reflections of the researcher.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter 2 contains a detailed review of the literature surrounding the topics of nursing program preparation and cohort development. It has been organized to present a review of the nursing and nursing faculty shortage followed by a discussion of nursing admissions and nursing education including the topic of faculty student relationships. A discussion of student retention follows. The chapter concludes with a discussion of cohort development.

Choosing a Career in Nursing

Kersten, Bakewell, and Meyer (1991) explored the reasons that students choose nursing as a career. They quoted Maslow's (1970) Motivation and Personality concerning the needs that drive people to work, from physiological requirements, safety and security, social affiliation, esteem, and self-actualization (Kersten et al., 1991). Some choose careers to meet financial security, others to fulfill a need for belonging, and others because it is what they have wanted to do all of their lives. College students often choose a career based on the idea of being successful in life. Some choose a career that can be successfully accomplished, related to a self-efficacy expectations (Kersten et al., 1991).

Kersten et al. (1991) discovered that students choose nursing for one of five primary reasons: (a) nurturance, (b) emotional needs, (c) employment

opportunities, (d) financial benefits, and (e) interest in science. These reasons matched closely with what nursing means to those in the profession: (a) caring, (b) personal growth, (c) illness focus, (d) professionalism, and (e) job security. Nurses were the major influence agents for the students' image of nursing, whether they were family members, friends, or coworkers. In essence, according to Kersten et al. (1991), students choose nursing because it is a career that allows them to care, and they are often influenced by those closest to them.

Another issue is the number of students who initially choose to pursue nursing, and then change majors during the pre-nursing preparation stage of the career (Perin, 2006). This is a significant problem that is most likely attributed to a lack of understanding about the requirements and rigor of the program. Nursing has a strong science requirement, something that is not always practical for students who need remedial coursework. Perin recommended advising and counseling services to students who are in the low-SES or minority groups about the rigor of the program and the challenges students will face.

Nursing Shortage

According to the AACN report released on December 6, 2011, survey data showed an increase in enrollment in all types of nursing programs, including a 3.9% increase in Bachelors of Science (BSN) programs (Rosseter, 2011). Enrollment in nursing baccalaureate degree completion programs, commonly referred to as RN-BSN, also increased by 13.4% between 2010 and 2011. It is

clear that institutions and nurses have been moving to a more highly educated nursing workforce. Despite these increases, more than 58,000 qualified applicants were turned away from 503 institutions in 2011. The primary barriers to accepting all qualified students continue to be a lack of clinical placement sites, nursing faculty, and funding (Rosseter, 2011). At a time when many are in desperate need of a job, the field of nursing was already in desperate need of people to fill positions (Courchane, 2011). Though the economic downturn of the past few years has temporarily eased the nation's shortage of nurses, university nursing schools have struggled to keep up with what is expected to be soaring demand and chronic shortfalls in years to come. Table 1 displays the nursing shortages nationally and in Florida for the years beginning in 2000 and projected into 2020.

Table 1

Nursing Shortages

| Year | Nursing Shortage | |
|------|------------------|----------|
| | National | Florida |
| 2000 | -110,707 | 0 |
| 2005 | -149,387 | 0 |
| 2010 | -275,215 | -15,000+ |
| 2015 | -507,063 | -25,000+ |
| 2020 | -808,416 | -50,000+ |

Source: National League for Nursing (2012)

Employment services routinely list nursing as one of the hot hiring professions of the 2nd decade of the 21st century, but supply never seems to catch up with demand, even as the national unemployment rate has climbed to nearly 8% or higher in some states. The need for more nurses in the coming years has stemmed mainly from an aging baby boomer population as well as a generation of aging nurses who will retire (Courchane, 2011).

Although the nursing shortage of the early 21st century has been helped temporarily by the economy, the shortage is not expected to be resolved in the next several years. The primary reason why qualified students are turned away from nursing programs has been a lack of faculty (Courchane, 2011), and although the number of applicants to undergraduate nursing programs has risen, the number of students accepted has remained low. Table 2 displays the numbers of nursing applications and denials from 2006 to 2011.

Table 2

Nursing Applications and Students Denied Admission

| Year | Applications | Denials |
|------|--------------|---------|
| 2006 | 168,468 | 38,415 |
| 2007 | 177,370 | 36,400 |
| 2008 | 190,483 | 41,385 |
| 2009 | 208,784 | 42,981 |
| 2010 | 242,013 | 52,115 |
| 2011 | 255,671 | 58,327 |

Source: American Association of Colleges of Nursing, Research and Data Center, 2011.

Smith (2009) wrote that America could be facing a nursing shortage that would worsen exponentially as the population grows older. The problem, however, is that baby boomers are getting older and will require more care than ever, taxing an already strained nursing system. America has had a nursing shortage for years. By 2025, Smith estimated the country will be facing a shortfall of 800,000 RNs.

The shortage is a result of most nursing schools already at or over capacity for enrollment (Smith, 2009). The nursing profession has benefited from the recession which has prompted new nurses to sign up for school and older nurses to postpone retirement. Some 243,000 registered nurses entered or re-entered the profession during the recession that began in 2007, including many who were forced out of retirement by financial difficulties (Smith, 2009). As the economy improves, that kind of growth is unlikely to continue (Smith, 2009). Experts have stressed that there will be a nursing shortage even if every nursing school is at capacity. A lack of teaching staff is the biggest hurdle to minting new RNs, and the number of applicants jumped 20% in 2007 to approximately 400. This included professionals seeking a career switch from Wall Street, law and even the opera (Smith, 2009).

At the local level, many institutions have faced urgent demands from health systems executives to increase enrollment. For a time, that seemed an impossible challenge. From 1995 to 2001, the number of qualified applicants for nursing programs diminished markedly (Rosseter, 2011). Although that trend

changed, e.g., enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate programs in 2001 increased for the first time in six years, the country was still below 1995 enrollment levels (2011). More important, the nursing education system, as currently designed, may be near capacity for number of students. In 2000-2001, nursing programs across the United States turned away nearly 6,000 qualified applicants due to budget constraints, insufficient classroom space, or inadequate numbers of clinical sites, clinical preceptors, or faculty. That number had increased to over 58,000 in 2011 (National League for Nursing [NLN], 2012). Indeed, 38% of the nursing schools responding to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing survey cited the faculty shortage as the reason for turning away qualified applicants (AACN, 2005), a percentage that persisted in 2012 (NLN, 2012). Table 3 displays data related to the reasons for the denial of admissions to students.

Table 3

Reasons Why Programs Turn Away Applicants

| Obstacles for Expanding Capacity | Percentage of Schools |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Lack of Faculty | 38% |
| Lack of Classroom Space | 19% |
| Lack of Clinical Placement Space | 31% |
| Other | 12% |

Source: National League for Nursing (2012).

According to (Tanner, 2002), this decade has provided a golden opportunity for nurse educators. If ever there has been a time for revolution in nursing education, it is now. To respond to this crisis, leaders are needed who share the vision of our discipline and its essential place in health care, who have a vision of nursing education, who see possibilities in challenge, and who can inspire others to action. Although the policy work and efforts to marshal fiscal resources continue, leaders are needed who are willing to take some risks and lead a new revolution in nursing education. The starting point is to clarify what nurses of the future will need to know and be able to do. The populations served, the ways in which health care is delivered, the demand on families and other caregivers to provide care, and technology and the knowledge base for nursing practice have changed dramatically in the past decade. Innovation, according to Tanner, is needed in nursing education in four areas. First, there is a need for clinical teaching models that increase efficiency and effectiveness. The greatest constraints to increasing nursing schools' capacity for more students relate to how clinical instruction is delivered, i.e., one faculty member per 9 or 10 students, who are placed in clinical sites to practice nursing two to three days per week, sometimes with the aid of a preceptor. Evidence suggests this approach is no longer effective, if it ever was. Second, there is a need for new uses of technology to support clinical learning, e.g., simulations and other computer-assisted methods. Third, there is a need for an approach to curriculum development that allows rapid change and responsiveness to emerging health

care needs and advances in nursing science and practice. It has been said that changing a nursing curriculum is like moving a cemetery. There is not that kind of time with the pace of societal change. Nurse educators are still are struggling with content- driven curricula and the demand to "cover" ever increasing amounts of knowledge. Finally, there is a need for new partnerships between practice and education and among educational institutions for sharing laboratory and faculty resources (Tanner, 2002).

Goodin (2003) demonstrated that not only is the current nursing shortage different from those in the past, but it also has a variety of causes and possible solutions. Nursing shortages in the past were due to a growing population after World War II and dissatisfaction with working conditions in the 1970s and 1980s (Goodin, 2003). Although these factors are likely a part of the shortage being faced today, the quick fixes that helped in the past will not be useful this time as there are other factors involved this time that will require more effort and strategic solutions (Goodin, 2003).

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2012), registered nurses (RNs) were the largest group of healthcare professionals in the U.S. In the 1960s and 1970s when nursing was considered a profession best suited for females, there was a large influx of women into the field. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the workforce became more open to women, many women chose other career fields, slowing the growth of the RN workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

At the present time, as nurses who began their careers several decades ago near retirement age, there have been fewer nurses graduating from nursing education programs than ever, widening the gap between those entering the field and those retiring (AACN, 2005). This has been compounded by fewer nurses choosing to be nurse educators, typically because the pay for educators is far below nurse salaries outside of education. Fewer nurse educators lead to fewer nursing education programs and to fewer nurses entering the workforce. According to the AACN (2005), nursing was no longer the prominent choice of careers for young women, and the population of RNs was growing at its slowest pace in 20 years. Enrollment in entry level baccalaureate programs has declined by more than 20% since 1995 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

Nursing Faculty Shortage

According to Foxall et al. (2009), the nursing faculty shortage was also becoming a crisis, and was contributing to the shortage of qualified graduates being added to the existing workforce. The nursing educator workforce is essential in preparing a qualified workforce for society's healthcare needs. According to the AACN (2005), nursing professors who retire do not typically return to the academic workforce, and their expertise is lost. To try to stem the tide of retirements, the AACN worked to create opportunities that would convince faculty to work beyond their intended retirement age. Financial incentives, flexible assignments, including part time work, and specialized assignments are

some of the ideas that have been explored to recruit faculty back from retirement (AACN, 2005).

According to Tanner (2005), more than 29,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing programs in 2005. In 2010, the expected nursing shortage was nearing one million open positions. The primary reason for students being turned away, according to 76% of institutions reporting, was a shortage of nursing faculty. There are many factors that contribute to the shortage of faculty in this critical field (Tanner, 2005).

The primary reason for the faculty shortage has been retiring baby boomers (Walker et al.(2006). In 2005, the average age of faculty was 51.5. Just one year later, Walker et al. (2006), found the average age to be 45.1, showing a tremendous number of faculty had retired, leaving behind younger, less-experienced faculty. This was due, in part, to a decided emphasis on employing doctorally prepared faculty, devaluing the critical role that master's prepared educators play in the education of nursing students, while at the same time placing more emphasis on graduate programs that prepare nurses for advanced clinical practice (Walker et al., 2006).

In 2002, the NLN (2005) projected a shortfall of 20,000 nursing faculty nationwide, and in 2003, only 400 students graduated from research-focused doctoral programs. Additionally, there were only 437 graduates from master's programs in nursing education. That number was barely enough to keep up with the expected number of yearly retirements, which was projected at between 400

and 700 for both doctorally prepared and master's prepared faculty (NLN, 2005).

Table 4 contains the percentage of bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) programs which had faculty shortages in 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Table 4

Bachelor of Science in Nursing Programs With Faculty Shortages

| Year | Faculty Shortage |
|------|------------------|
| 2010 | 31% |
| 2011 | 38% |
| 2012 | 38% |

Source: National League of Nursing (2012).

According to Allen (2008), nursing schools have had increases in enrollment of 13% from 2004 to 2005, even as the number of nursing faculty continued to decline, creating a situation with more students and fewer professors to teach them. As the nation anticipated a severe nursing shortage, resulting in a lower quality of care for patients, solving the problem of recruiting and retaining nursing faculty continued to elude decision makers. As these challenges continued, many RNs left the profession, citing poor pay and working conditions, as well as better career choices for women. Since 2002, there have been many campaigns to recruit new nurses and they have been successful. This is evidenced by the increasing numbers of qualified applicants turned away from nursing programs, due primarily to a lack of nursing faculty (Allen, 2008).

According to Berlin and Sechrist (2002), a shortfall in the nursing faculty for the nation was leading to a general nursing shortage in the nation. They expressed the belief that if nursing programs were unable to recruit and retain qualified nursing faculty, they would have to turn away qualified nursing applicants in greater numbers as the problem persists or worsens (Berlin & Sechrist, 2002). In 2000, almost 6,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing programs due to a lack of space, a problem in which lack of qualified faculty was the primary contributor. In that same year, nursing programs reported nearly 400 vacant nursing faculty positions, and an earned doctorate was required for 64% of those positions. In 2005, more than 29,000 students across the nation were turned away for this reason (Allen, 2008).

According to Brady (2007), the results of the 2002 Faculty Census Survey of RN and Graduate Programs estimated there were 373 vacant, full-time, budgeted nursing faculty positions in associate degree in nursing (ADN) programs. In 2006, the same survey indicated the vacancy rate had increased, and was expected to continue to increase. This has contributed to a reduced number of students choosing to go into academia when there are better paying positions in advanced nursing practice (2007).

According to the National Study of Faculty Role Satisfaction (NLN, 2005), faculty stated the primary motivator for taking on and staying in the faculty role was working with students. ADN professors preferred this role over research and service requirements as well. Additionally, Brady (2007) indicated that

recruitment of faculty for these roles should include the idea of working in the community as these programs generally have stronger ties to the community when compared to BSN programs (2003).

There are many reasons for the nursing faculty shortage, but the two primary reasons are the aging workforce and better pay and workload in the private and clinical sectors (Rich & Nugent, 2010). Additionally there are expanding career opportunities for women, reducing the traditional pipeline flow of faculty in nursing.

Adding to the aging workforce problem, the age of graduates of nursing doctoral programs in 1999 was much higher than the median for all doctorates, 46 years compared to almost 34 (Rich & Nugent, 2010). This leaves only an average of 16 years of productive teaching, as the average age of retirement for nursing faculty was 62 years in 2010. It also takes longer to earn a doctorate in nursing, 8.3 years compared with 6.8 for all doctoral degrees. Additionally, in 2001, there were only 394 doctoral graduates, a decrease of more than 11%, which is a trend in the wrong direction to resolve this problem. This is a particularly noteworthy problem as the number of graduate programs increased from 54 to 79 in 2001. The number of graduate students has continued to increase, but the number of graduates from those programs has not changed. The number of masters' students and graduates declined every year between 1996 and 2001 (2010).

In a survey of 395 nursing programs, only 30 reported no faculty openings, with some schools listing more than a dozen openings (Rich & Nugent, 2010). Some of the reasons for the nursing faculty shortage include lower salaries, lack of clinical experience, dissatisfaction with a teaching career, and lack of funding at the higher education institution. In addition, those nurses who have made the decision to teach are often unprepared, as the skills required in clinical settings are very different from those required in the classroom. This creates frustration for both faculty and students (2010).

Nursing Admissions

As nursing work becomes more complex, it is important that nurses have a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing at the entry level (Newton, Smith, Moore, & Magnan, 2007). The American Organization of Nurse Executives has called for the BSN to be the entry level degree, yet nationwide, less than 35% of nurses have the BSN. Current BSN programs are often unable to increase the number of students admitted due to a shortage of faculty and clinical opportunities for students. Additionally, admitting more students usually ends with the admission of less capable students which, in turn, leads to higher attrition rates (Newton et al., 2007).

According to Newton, Smith, Moore, and Magnan (2007), a strong relationship between admission policies and success in nursing courses is the preferred method of ensuring nursing program success. In addition, programs

need to also improve progression programs and remediation efforts to help increase graduation rates. Early identification of students who are less prepared can also assist in improving retention. There are four obstacles that often influence success in the BSN program: feelings of alienation, lack of academic preparation, financial problems, and faculty/institutional commitment to retention of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Newton, Smith, Moore, & Magnan, 2007).

Sayles, Shelton and Powell (2003) sought to determine if there was a significant relationship between scores on nursing entrance examinations and the NCLEX-RN (National Council Licensing Exam-Registered Nurse). Although GPA and SAT scores were often used in the past to determine the best applicants to select for nursing programs, a decline in graduation and NCLEX-RN pass rates led the research team to find a better way to select applicants. Nursing students who earn the ASN or BSN have all the skills and knowledge needed to be a nurse, but until they successfully complete the NCLEX-RN, they are not able to be licensed or employed as a nurse (Sayles et al., 2003).

The NCLEX-RN is a nationwide examination used to determine if the nursing student has successfully learned the required knowledge to work as a registered nurse. Developed and owned by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), the test is administered nationally as well as in several American protectorates such as Guam (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2012). The exam uses computerized adaptive testing, and covers

content ranging from safety and infection control, health promotion and maintenance, to physiological integrity, which includes basic care and comfort, pharmacological therapies, reduction of risk potential, and psychiatric care. The test is multiple choice, but the computerized adaptive testing feature allows a test-taker to answer as few questions as necessary to show proficiency. If a question is answered correctly, a more difficult question is asked. If the question is missed, an easier question is asked. At some point, the test algorithm determines if the examinee is sufficiently knowledgeable to pass or not. Once the NCLEX-RN is passed, the state board of nursing will award the student a registered nurse license (2012).

Using a correlational comparative test, a relationship was sought between scores on the Nurse Entrance Test (NET), offered by Educational Resources, Inc. (ERI) and the NCLEX-RN (Sayles et al., 2003). The study indicated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between the NET and the NCLEX-RN for most of the NET scores. There was a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, prerequisite course GPA, and NET scores for mathematics reading and the composite score (Sayles et al., 2003).

ADN programs have been able to quickly admit and graduate nursing students to help fill the nursing shortage that is being felt nationwide (Hopkins, 2008). Despite this, there are growing concerns about the attrition rates and lower academic achievement rates of students in these programs. Identifying factors that predict success in these programs and applying interventions early

can help improve retention rates (Hopkins, 2008). Once a student is determined to be eligible and admitted to the program, an assessment should be completed to determine what additional support should be implemented to help ensure the success of the student. According to Tinto (1993), it is the responsibility of the college to identify, monitor, and aggressively intervene with those students who are most at risk of failure.

Admission and progression policies are a critical part of the nursing education process (Newton, Smith, Moore, & Magnan, 2007). It is crucial that the students most likely to succeed are selected, and that the nursing program adequately supports those students as they progress through the program. As enrollment in nursing programs declined in the last decade, programs became less stringent in their admissions policies. Programs that moved from a ranked student list to a rolling admissions process began to admit any student eligible, rather than just those who were most competitive (Newton, Smith, Moore, & Magnan, 2007). This admissions process allowed any student that met minimum eligibility standards to start the program even as better qualified students with higher grades and examination scores were required to wait for their turn to start. Students who barely met the required scores often repeated prerequisite courses and entrance examinations to earn their chance to start. Generally, nursing programs have not allowed for multiple course repeats, so weaker students have not had the same opportunities to keep trying until they “get it right” in the program (Newton, Smith, Moore, & Magnan, 2007).

Programs that use rolling admissions have tended to fill their positions on a first-come, first-served basis. This procedure has the potential for leaving better students out of the program and admitting less competitive students simply because they completed admissions requirements and met minimum eligibility requirements (Newton, Smith, Moore, 2007). This creates problems when less prepared students are unable to keep up academically and have to leave the program, leaving an empty seat that can no longer be filled.

With a national shortage in nursing, it is critical that nursing programs select students for admission who are best prepared to be successful in the program; then, support them in the program; and prepare them to successfully complete the national licensure examination (Rogers, 2010). Although increasing the number of students admitted will help, it will not solve the problem alone. As the number of students increase, the average readiness of those students decreases, and attrition increases. Focusing only on preparation for the NCLEX will also see attrition rates rise, as not all students will be strong enough to continue. There is not a single factor that guarantees success. Rather, a combination of factors is involved. The factors generally fall into three categories: (a) student related themes, (b) collaboration, and (c) nursing curriculum (Rogers, 2010).

Strong pre-nursing academic background is the first step in being successful in admissions and program completion. Motivation, critical thinking skills, study and test-taking skills, ability to handle stress are all key student-

related themes that have a high impact on potential success (Rogers, 2010). Though all of the students who Rogers interviewed believed that getting good grades was important, some did so because they thought the program was easier if they liked it. Others did it out of conscience. When asked why other students may not have performed as well, the students replied that they “have to really want nursing” (p. 97). Critical thinking was also stressed, as the students believed prior to the program, that they “did not know how to think” (p. 98). Finally, students and faculty agreed that though a student might perform well in the clinical setting, they needed to be a good test-taker, or the rest of the skills they have may not matter (Rogers, 2010).

In collaboration themes, communication was the key factor. Support systems among family, friends, and faculty were also important as were financial and religious support structures. Faculty involvement and student willingness to engage faculty for help were also cited (Rogers, 2010). Students are often required to meet with a program coordinator or instructor if their grades fall below a required level. The students interviewed believed that “students need at least one person to talk to in the program” (Rogers, 2010, p. 98).

When discussing factors related to curriculum, delivery methods were the primary factor. Rogers (2010) indicated that faculty who relied only on lectures were not considered to be successful by students. Course examinations that were constructed to mimic the NCLEX were also considered better so that students could get used to the process and would be better prepared to take the

examination (Rogers, 2010). Programs that incorporated NCLEX-RN type questions throughout the course examinations were viewed as improving student preparation for the test. Additionally, course examinations and standardized assessment examinations that resembled the NCLEX-RN were seen as improving student outcomes on the test. Finally, NCLEX-RN workshops and preparation courses were considered instrumental for success by the students (Rogers, 2010).

Wolkowitz and Kelley (2010) conducted research to identify the best predictors of success in a nursing program. They compared the relative strength of science, mathematics, reading, and English content areas to determine the best predictor. The reason for their research was that these same areas affect admission and placement decisions in nursing programs across the country. There has been a continual debate about whether it is better to use GPA or an entrance examination to evaluate student applications and make selections. There have been numerous studies on this topic (Hopkins, 2008; Sayles, 2003), and the results have been inconclusive as to which academic content area is the best predictor.

Nursing prerequisite courses generally have included biological science courses and social science and mathematics courses (NLN, 2012). The common science prerequisites include Anatomy, Physiology, Microbiology, and Chemistry. The common social science prerequisites include Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Nutrition and Statistics. Rosseter (2011) wrote that

although not all institutions required all of these courses, completing them was generally good preparation for a student seeking admission to most nursing programs. Table 5 contains the typical prerequisite courses and provides a description of their curricular content.

Table 5

Common Nursing Prerequisite Courses

| Course | Description |
|--------------------------|--|
| Anatomy | Structure of the Human Body. |
| Physiology | The physiology and interrelationships of organ systems of the human body. |
| Microbiology | Evaluating microbial structure and function, metabolism, growth, genetics, virology, pathogenicity, and lab techniques. |
| Chemistry | An introductory study of the fundamental concepts of chemistry. |
| Psychology | Survey of the basic principles, theories and methods of contemporary psychology, including the study of human diversity. |
| Developmental Psychology | A review of the effects of genetic, psychological, maturational, and social factors on behavior through the life cycle. |
| Statistics | Introduction to probability and statistical inference, including estimation, hypothesis testing, normal distribution, and samples. |
| Nutrition | Essentials of nutrition related to the lifecycle, including disease prevention and diet therapy. |

Source: University of Central Florida Undergraduate Course Catalog (2012).

There are multiple entrance exams, including the Health Education Systems Incorporated [HESI] Admission Assessment Exam (2012), the Nursing Entrance Test [NET] (2012), and the Test of Essential Academic Skills [TEAS] (2012). The NET is divided into six sections, including reading comprehension, math, test-taking skills, learning style, stress level, and social interaction. Although the entire examination must be completed in order to get a complete score, most programs only use the reading, English, and mathematics sections to determine admission (Pearson, 2012). The HESI includes eight sections: mathematics, reading, vocabulary, grammar, biology, chemistry, and anatomy and physiology. It is the most exhaustive of the three examinations by content, but it is the least used of the three entrance examinations (Elsevier, 2012). The TEAS examination is the most comprehensive in content and is composed of four sections: English, reading, mathematics, and science. The English and reading sections carry the most weight on the examination and include the basic language skills of spelling, grammar, and reading comprehension. The mathematics section tests knowledge of basic mathematics through algebra. Finally, the science portion of the TEAS Test covers general science through anatomy and physiology (ATI, 2012).

The TEAS is the current preferred testing choice and is heavily weighted towards the Reading and English Language Usage section. Additionally, many programs have students complete the Fundamentals of Nursing course early in their course work, after taking the fundamentals course, to evaluate current

progression. Wolkowitz and Kelley (2010), in their study, compared the results between the TEAS and the Fundamentals Examination to find a correlation between academic content predictors. After completing statistical analysis on over 4,000 students from across the country, it was determined that the science portion of the TEAS examination was the best predictor of early nursing program success, followed by reading, language usage, and mathematics.

Nursing Education

Nursing education has changed significantly. According to Rich and Nugent (2010), it has moved from an apprentice-based program in hospitals to institutions of higher education and has used nursing theory as the basis for curricula and practice. These researchers indicated that nursing research has advanced as has its impact on practice and nursing diagnoses as exemplified by primary care being provided in some locations by nurse practitioners rather than doctors. Rich and Nugent anticipated many challenges for nursing education .

Though the nursing population has experienced growth, it has been slow and has not kept up with the growth of the overall population (Rich & Nugent, 2010). In Rich and Nugent's assessment in 2010, the average age of RNs had risen from 40 to 46. Less than 10% of the current nurse workforce was under 30 years old. Despite the most recent economic downturn, the nursing shortage has persisted, and as aging nurses retire, it will leave even more openings in the nursing practitioner ranks as well as nursing faculty (Rich & Nugent, 2010).

According to Altman, Musselman and Curry (2010), the faculty at a Midwestern university nursing program developed a course aimed at improving freshmen retention. Students were experiencing education as isolated learners, as they were often in courses located in all parts of the campus. The director of student services and the college advisors implemented a no-credit orientation course to assist students with making connections, meeting faculty, improving student-advisor relationships, providing additional program information, and discussing nursing career options (Altman et al., 2010). The course met once a week for an hour for four months. The primary purpose was to introduce students to people and concepts that could help improve their learning skills and reduce the amount of anxiety they experienced throughout their academic careers. Collaboration between the advisor-instructors and the faculty was seen as a key contributor to the success of the program. Student services staff were also part of the team, assisting by administering surveys, securing room locations, and scheduling guest speakers (Altman et al., 2010).

In the first session, faculty shared their education and professional experiences, giving students a chance to meet the faculty in a non-evaluative setting in order to create a more comfortable atmosphere (Altman et al., 2010). Students were able to ask questions of the faculty and advisors. At the end of the session, students were able to mingle with each other and the faculty. This was another opportunity to create connections between the students and the institution to help improve retention (Altman et al., 2010).

Student satisfaction is important in any educational program (Liegler, 1997). The students' sense of satisfaction contributes to intellectual, social and affective growth and change. It can also influence retention rates and educational success. The best predictors of satisfaction, according to Liegler, are academic development, satisfaction with facilities and services, satisfaction with faculty, and social interaction with peers.

Astin (1984) expressed the belief that students who are satisfied with college put the most into it and get the most out of it. Additionally, he believed that nursing student satisfaction was related to student background/pre-enrollment characteristics, external influences, college facilities and services, academic integration, and social integration.

There are four criteria that can be considered significant predictors of student success in a nursing program (Newton, Smith, & Moore, 2007): overall GPA, English GPA, core biology GPA (includes anatomy, physiology, and microbiology), and the number of times a student repeated any of the core biology courses. Newton, Smith & Moore (2007) also concluded that overall GPA and scores on the Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS) are also strong predictors of success in a nursing program. Programs that admit on a rolling basis, as well as multiple times in one academic year, are more likely to have retention issues, as well as lower pass rates on the national licensure examination (Newton, Smith, & Moore, 2007).

Finally, clinical supervision and education has become a challenge for nursing programs (Rich & Nugent, 2010). As hospital stays shorten or disappear, nursing programs must compete against each other to secure those few sites where students can gain hands-on experience for practica and preceptorships (Rich & Nugent, 2010).

Smith (1990) sought to understand the reasons that admitted nursing students were not returning to their programs after having completed at least one semester. Students completed a self-report survey using a Likert-type scale that offers both academic and financial-employment choices to indicate the impact those choices had on their decision. The most reported reason was dissatisfaction with course scheduling. Second was “not enough money to support self”, followed by “working hours interfered with studies” and “dissatisfaction with program requirements.” The fifth most common was “demanding work responsibilities” (Smith, 1990, p. 217).

Although 100% of the faculty believed that “poor study skills and habits” (Smith, 1990, p. 217) contributed to the situation, only 14.5% of the students believed this was part of the problem. The financial reasons made the most sense. Smith noted that Astin (1984) discovered that students who work more than 20 hours a week were less likely to complete their programs. Astin also found that nursing had one of the highest attrition rates of college students.

Though community colleges and their open-door admissions policies have been considered the gateway to higher education, particularly for the

disadvantaged, nursing programs at these institutions have had limited admissions for a variety of factors (Bissett, 1995). This is mostly due to a need to allocate scarce resources. Nursing regulatory agencies require a very low student to faculty ratio. Due to limited financial resources, this limits not only the number of students that can be admitted but also the number of faculty that can be hired. Additionally, there are limited numbers of clinical facilities for students to have adequate learning experiences. Therefore, nursing programs have generally only accepted students based on merit and their potential contribution to society (Bissett, 1995).

Bissett (1995) also addressed the type of students attending community college, noting that disadvantaged groups made up the majority of community college students, and it was those nursing programs that offered the best chance for minority students to enter the nursing field. By using a more liberal admissions policy, such as rolling admissions, those students are more likely to be able to realize their dream of becoming a nurse. At the same time, the author argued that allowing underprepared students to enter programs was unfair to them if they did not have adequate support, increasing their likelihood of failure in the program (Bissett, 1995).

Faculty Student Relationships

Astin (1984) conducted research into the relationship between learning and involvement and developed the theory of student development--that students

learn by becoming involved. He determined that, in most cases, student learning and personal development were directly correlated to the amount of students' involvement while participating in the college experience. It is not only the quantity, but also the quality, of involvement that students devote to their academic careers that makes a difference. Student involvement may take many different forms; the student can be involved in academic activities, student affairs programming, and in- and after-class interaction with fellow students, faculty and staff (Astin, 1984).

Astin (1984) stated that although course content and classroom pedagogy, meaning the material that is taught and the methods that are used, are important, the key variable is what students do while in college. It is not just what they learn, but also how they learn it and from whom. Students learn just as much from each other about working in groups and teams while working in student organizations as they learn from their professors in the classroom. It is not enough for students to learn how to be nurses or accountants if they do not learn how to work together once they have graduated and gained employment in their chosen field (Astin, 1984). Astin also stated that academic performance and retention were positively associated with students' involvement in academic and non-academic programming as they participate with faculty and fellow students. In other words, according to Astin, the more a student is involved outside of the classroom with fellow students and professors, the more likely they are to stay at the institution and successfully complete their degrees.

Activities that involve student-faculty interaction, student-student interaction, such as participation in student affairs programming activities, and student relationships with faculty beyond the classroom, can have a significant, positive effect on student persistence and retention. Kuh & Kenzie (2005) wrote that students who assess the value of their interactions with peers and teachers, and receive feedback concerning their academic progress, are more likely to stay in school and persist. Graunke and Woosley (2005), who researched the effects of second year students' involvement on their academic performance, reported the same results. They determined that key predictors of sophomore success were dedication to an academic major career plan and satisfaction with faculty relationships.

In their review of faculty-student relationships, Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) reported that students who have similar interests and career aspirations as faculty, as well as those who seek out a professor to be a mentor, were more likely to have more frequent and higher quality contact with faculty. Some of the other qualifiers for both students and universities that were noted by these researchers as being related to student-faculty interactions were gender, college major, high school GPA, degree aspirations, parental education, living on campus, institutional size, and institutional type (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979).

There are also cues that students find in the classroom that indicate to them whether or not the professor is willing to have any contact outside of the classroom (Wilson, Anderson, Peluso, Priest, & Speer, 2009). Those cues,

which can include the professor's teaching style, the type of classroom conversation and discussion, and evaluation practices help students to understand which professors will likely have an interest in developing a give-and-take relationship beyond the classroom (Wilson et al., 2009).

Wilson et al. (2009) determined that students take all of the cues, both positive and negative, and use them as indicators about a professor's willingness or desire to have a relationship outside of the class as a mentor, coach, or advisor. The more a student has negative experiences, the less likely they will continue to try and develop those contacts; and the less likely they will be to stay in school in pursuit of their goals (Loo & Rolison, 1986). Although this is tremendously important to the retention, matriculation, and graduation of students, it should be noted that some of these cues are based on past experiences and students' perceptions are colored by those experiences. These cues can also include experiences such as feeling left out, having their ideas marginalized or minimized, unsuccessfully challenging the professors' ideas, and working in a group project that is not shared enthusiastically by all of the participants (Loo & Rolison, 1986).

In the case of minority students, two researchers found that infrequent student contact with faculty led to lower academic performance. Allen (1992) and Davis (1991), conducted studies of minority students' academic experiences. Anaya and Cole (2001) examined the specific benefits of faculty interactions on

minority students' academic accomplishments and found that faculty relationships had a significant effect on Latinos as undergraduate grades.

Race has been found to be a determining factor for minority students who had very little faculty contact (Nettle, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986). As a result, students came to believe that professors were not as willing to interact with them, even when the contact was limited to academic classroom issues (Kraft, 1991). This, in turn, created an environment where students were likely to believe the college environment was racially or ethnically insensitive, were less likely to have quality faculty-student relationships, and more likely to have lower academic achievement (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996).

Shelton (2003) wrote that as the nursing shortage has grown, the academic performance of high school students, mostly female, that intend to pursue nursing has declined. The top performers in high school have chosen other professional occupations such as medicine or law, traditionally dominated by males. Students entering nursing programs at the beginning of the 21st century were more likely to be older, have families, and have been out of high school for at least a few years. They have tended to start their nursing career education in community colleges, and have been less likely to persist compared to traditional age students (Shelton, 2003).

Although there are many factors involved in the successful retention of nursing students, according to Shelton (2003), one of the most critical is the students' perception of faculty support. Faculty support results from teacher-

student interaction. Similar to a nurse-client relationship, faculty-support requires development of trust to establish a therapeutic, working relationship. This can lead to professional socialization, self-actualization, self-fulfillment, improved self-concept and self-efficacy, and enhanced motivation for learning. Caring is essential to the nurse-client relationship and comes from a successful caring teacher-student relationship (Shelton, 2003).

Shelton (2003) demonstrated that students were more likely to persist with a higher perceived level of faculty support that includes functional support such as advising, mentoring, tutoring, goal setting, referrals to other agencies, and finally, preparing for the licensure examination. Psychological support is also essential and can be found in approachable faculty; demonstrating respect for and confidence in students, correcting without belittling, listening, being patient, acknowledging success, and have a genuine interest in students (Shelton, 2003).

According to Churchill, Reno, and Batchelor (1998) the learning community is a curricular model that purposefully structures a program to link courses and coursework together during the same semester so that student groups can work together in studying and in other experiences to increase interaction among themselves and faculty. By allowing students to bond, they become more comfortable working together both socially and academically, using peer study and support groups. This can also have an effect on retention, as student problems can be addressed as friendships develop and class absences are more noticeable. Churchill et al. (1998) found that students in

learning communities are more committed and involved with classes, develop a sense of community, and create a strong attachment to the institution. In their research, the program director in the program of interest determined that the 100+ students in the Essentials to Nursing class rarely knew each other and were preoccupied with external responsibilities, so a bond never developed (Churchill et al., 1998). Students generally only met with a faculty advisor when required.

A decision was made to create small groups earlier in the semester and to assign a faculty advisor on the first day. The groups remained intact for the first year of the program, allowing students to develop peer support and study groups (Churchill et al., 1998). The response to the small groups was immediately positive. Students were observed socializing, forming study groups, and making time to get to know each other. Faculty familiarity also increased and had additional benefits. Students with work or personal responsibilities were identified and offered additional support and advice. This included referrals for counseling, test assistance, and encouraging students to view computer-assisted testing programs. Students who demonstrated leadership qualities were also encouraged to pursue leadership positions (Churchill et al., 1998).

Hubbell and Hubbell (2010) described one of the many challenges that face nursing faculty and students in the 21st century as the change in the relationship between the student and the faculty. In the past, the relationship was more academic. At the time of the present study, more students held a

transactional view of their education. Seeing themselves as customers, they expect to receive a grade based on their effort rather than for the quality of the work (Hubbell & Hubbell (2010).

According to Hubbell and Hubbell (2010), an instructor will find some type of unruly student in any given classroom. This may or may not be confrontational. Even a sleeping student can cause disruption as other students notice and react to the situation. When these situations occur within a cohort group, the implications are more serious. It is possible that the same student will cause the same problems in multiple classes with the same students, often with the same professor. There is ample research on the topic of dealing with unruly students but far less on dealing with a student in a cohort or with a cohort that begins to take sides with the student (2010).

Although many of today's faculty complain that present-day students are worse than their predecessors, Hubble and Hubble (2010) agreed with Holton (1999) that conflict has always been a part of the classroom, and uprising and riots were not uncommon. According to Hubble and Hubble (2010), Generation Y students abide by few rules, have little belief in personal responsibility, are more prone to depression, and essentially are far more focused on themselves, almost to the point of obsession. The same complaints were made about Generation X at the turn of the century and the baby boomer generation before that (Holton, 1999).

Walker et al. (2006) found no statistical significance between Generation X and Y as to their preferences in teaching methods; however, there were implications for application of their findings in nursing education. Both groups preferred (a) lecture over other teaching methods, including group work; (b) the chance to read material first and have an expert lecture on the subject; (c) to have clinical skills practice without having a lecture on those skills; and (d) face-to-face instruction, rather than web-based (Hubbell & Hubbell, 2010).

Attrition and Retention

The high attrition rate of minority nursing students has not been successfully addressed at any level (Johnson, Johnson, Kim, & McKee, 2009). High attrition rates, for both minority and non-minority students, have a strong influence on addressing nursing shortages as well as efforts to improve nursing workforce diversity. Despite these concerns, there has been very little recent research to address nursing student attrition rates. There have been programs to address the problem. These include early intervention efforts that address study habits, personal growth, coping techniques, networking, mentoring, and social support (Johnson et al., 2009).

There are also several factors that affect attrition rates for all undergraduate students, not just those pursuing nursing (Johnson et al., 2009). Academic and social integration, as well as environmental pull, variables that include family responsibilities, financial concerns, working off campus, and

significant relationships are included in this list. Of these factors, family and working off campus have been viewed as the primary factors that affect minority students (Johnson et al., 2009). Table 6 displays factors that affect the attrition/retention of all students and nursing students and ways they can be addressed. Identifying students that are affected by these factors early and addressing them in positive ways with the appropriate university office, when available, is the best method for helping a student to be retained (Tinto, 1993).

Table 6

Factors that Affect the Attrition and Retention of College Students

| Factor | All Students | Nursing Students |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Financial Concerns | Student might have to reduce the number of credit hours. | Student will not be able to reduce credit hours. |
| Off-Campus Work | Usually not a problem. | Difficult to schedule around class and clinical requirements |
| Personal Relationships | Depends on the student | Serious changes such as marriage, divorce, birth of a child can have a big impact |

Source: Johnson, Johnson, Kim, & McKee (2009); Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, (1996).

With these issues in mind, the questions that should be addressed are how these factors affect retention and commitment as well as what can be done to change the status quo. These interactions and experiences are factors that affect outcomes, including persistence in college (Terenzini et al., 1996).

Barry, Hudley, Kelly, and Cho (2009) asserted that the college experience is potentially a stressful life event that requires a relevant social network for a student to successfully complete. Disclosure of the many events that make up this experience can also act as a means of stress reduction. This is critical, because discussing stressful events is one way to reduce the stress associated with those events (Barry et al., 2009).

At the collegiate level, Tinto's Interactionist Theory on student departure has become the paradigm to which all other departure theory is compared or contrasted, as evidenced by the more than 400 citations and 170 dissertations that are related to the theory (Braxton, 2002). Tinto's theory involves the interaction of student entry characteristics, the students' goals, and their level of commitment to those goals. Student entry characteristics involve family background such as socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and the expectations parents set for students. The individual characteristics include academic ability as well as race and gender (Braxton, 2002). Pre-collegiate academic and social education, are also important factors. Along with the goals students have set for personal attainment, students' perception of the institutions goals and how they relate back to the student are also critical parts of the departure puzzle. Social integration is another important aspect of Tinto's theory. Successful interaction with faculty and staff are critical, along with participation in extracurricular activities and informal peer groups and organizations. This leads

to another important theory concerning retention and involvement (Braxton, 2002).

Based on the premise of Astin's (1984) involvement theory, students learn more when they are involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. An involved student is one who devotes considerable time and energy to academics, spends time on campus other than for classes, participates actively in student organizations and activities, and interacts often with faculty and administration. Astin stated that the quality and quantity of the student's involvement will influence the amount of student learning and development (Astin, 1984). True involvement requires the investment of energy in academic relationships and activities related to the campus, and the amount of energy invested will vary greatly depending on the student's interests and goals, and other commitments. The single most important factor is the management of student time: the extent to which students can be involved in the social educational development is determined by how involved they are with family, friends, work for income, and other outside activities (Astin, 1984). This theory is a byproduct of a longitudinal study of college dropouts that Astin completed in 1975. In the study, Astin attempted to identify college climate factors that had any effect on student retention. Nearly every effect discovered was in some way tied to campus community involvement. This included life in the residence hall, student organizations, leadership development, even part time jobs on campus.

Basically, the more a student was involved on campus, the more likely they were to stay in college and succeed (Astin, 1984).

Tinto (1993) argued that there are three common misconceptions about retention on campus that create difficult challenges to successful retention plans. The first misconception was that retention is about keeping students in college along with their money for tuition. His argument was that retention is really about making sure all students have an opportunity to learn as much as they can, whether they decide to stay or leave. The second misconception was that retention is the responsibility of the student affairs staff. The truth is that the responsibility belongs to everyone who is employed at the institution (Tinto, 1993). The final misconception, according to Tinto, was that retention efforts are really only about keeping students in college who should not be there in the first place. The fact that only one-third of attrition is a result of academic difficulty tells the truth in this case. Most students leave college because of difficulties with social integration or family difficulties such as financial burdens (Tinto, 1993).

In concurring somewhat with Tinto (1993), Shelton (2003) stated that students who perceived greater faculty support were more likely to persist and complete their programs. Faculty members who created a caring atmosphere, a mentoring relationship, and directed assistance with academic issues were more likely to increase the retention of their students. Using a combination of theories developed by Tinto and Bandura (1997), Shelton (2003) developed a model that incorporated both internal factors such as self-efficacy and external factors as

explained by Tinto. Bandura's theory posited that students with higher self-efficacy scores are more likely to persist, because they have more confidence in their ability to succeed. By offering both psychological support, such as promoting confidence and self-worth, along with functional support, including modeling successful behaviors and skills, faculty can play a more powerful role in helping the student to persist (Bandura, 1997).

In a study that measured the success of retention of African-American students in a predominantly white institution (PWI), Furr and Elling (2002) found that involvement was a key indicator of persistence. Although involvement was an important factor in which students persisted and left the institution, inclusion was the bigger factor. Involvement in a multicultural organization had positive effects, but if the student did not feel valued by the organization, it had a negative effect. Just being a member was not sufficient. Students who did not have a comfortable knowledge about campus programs were also less likely to persist. Students who expressed interest in the institution long before they were admitted were also likely to be more successful, supporting Tinto's theory about personal and institutional goal agreement (Furr & Elling, 2002).

Finally, an additional concept developed by Astin involves talent. According to Solorzano (1996), Astin believed that any student given enough motivation, time, and resources will develop the talent necessary to reach any desired level of competence. This is the institution's supplementary role in the theory of involvement. It is up to the college or university, including faculty, staff,

and administration, to provide the means necessary for students to develop the necessary attachment through involvement. Once that attachment is developed, students are more likely to persist. Faculty members are the key group in this equation. Faculty interaction, inside and outside of the classroom, is an affirmative indicator of achievement (Solorzano, 1996).

Cohorts

Hunter and Murray (2007) posited that higher education personnel should be more open to helping first-year students become acclimated to the higher education setting. They noted that corporate America and the U.S. Military establishment both have generally offered extensive new member orientation and training to help their newest employees become more assimilated and, therefore, more comfortable, with their new environments. For many years, the attitude in higher education was that if students could not succeed on their own, they should not be in college. First year programs, according to Hunter and Murray, have shown that this is not the case.

First year programs began in the 1970s at the University of South Carolina after student riots broke out (Hunter & Murray, 2007). The university president recognized the need for better assimilation of new students and worked to create a new program that used student affairs professionals and faculty to help new students orient themselves to life in higher education. By the end of the 1990s, this practice had been widely adopted, with most college campuses having a

First Year Experience office designed to facilitate this process. Research to support the initiative and development of theory also contributed to the practice (Hunter & Murray, 2007).

State regulatory bodies and community agencies have consistently pushed for more nursing enrollment (Higgins, 2004), yet student attrition has limited the impact of admitting additional nursing students. As programs admit more students, the lower ranking of those admitted cohorts have proven to be less likely to be as academically talented as the original cohort size. Higgins addressed the need for peer tutoring within the program as a means to increase nursing retention rates.

Although Higgins' (2004) research was limited to one class at one college, findings were transferable to similar nursing courses in similar institutions. According to Higgins (2004), tutoring is an individualized process, and in nursing cohorts, it is generally accepted that face-to-face tutoring is preferred, and that the tutor should be enrolled in the same course with the same professor, in order to maximize the learning potential. Tutors must be authentic in their willingness to get involved and help and should be able to communicate on a personal level with those who need help (Higgins, 2004). Though students who actively seek out a tutoring program are more likely to succeed, based on intrinsic motivating factors, it can be argued that a tutoring program will help any willing participant. By identifying students who will be helped with tutoring early

in the program and offering some type of funding for tutors, nursing programs can actively work to reduce their attrition rates (2004).

The First Year Experience has become a major component at most higher education institutions, and one of the most common components is the freshman learning community or the freshman interest group (Jaffee, 2007). The purpose of these programs is to socialize, integrate, and retain new students. There are several factors that make these programs successful. First, students learn best when they are able to make substantive connections across their courses. When concepts introduced in one class are reinforced in another, there is a greater chance of the student retaining the information and making sense of it. Second, learning is improved when students are able to interact and engage with peers about the subject of their courses. Third, students learn best when actively engaged; and fourth, when students develop meaningful academic relationships with faculty, they tend to be more successful. When students live together in this process, it is enhanced even more as they spend more time together, study together and go to class together (Jaffee, 2007).

Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, and Leonard (2006) examined the role of living learning programs in facilitating the adjustment of first generation students in their transition to college life. Generally, first generation students are those whose parents did not enroll in or complete a degree program in postsecondary education. The definition varies, but the effect is the same. These students have little or no family history with higher education, and as such, are at a

disadvantage for successful persistence and retention in higher education (Inkelas et al., 2006).

According to Tinto (1993) these students are more likely to be successful when they completely separate from the home life and become academically and socially integrated into the college setting. The level of integration is debatable, but it is recognized that first generation students need the highest levels of integration and support to be successful. On-campus peer networks and social relationships can have a strong impact on the success of these students. Living learning communities offer a strong level of this type of interaction, as the students will usually not just live together. Rather, they often participate in campus and academic programs together as well (Tinto, 1993).

Living learning communities are designed to create a sense of community that allows for greater faculty and peer interaction, increased opportunities for coordinated activities, and a socially and academically supported residential living environment (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). There are living learning communities that are academically founded, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) or Nursing, and some that are theme founded, such as Honors, Environmental, and Exploratory. In the literature reviewed, it was repeatedly demonstrated that students in living learning communities are more likely to persist, have higher academic achievement, be more involved on campus, and interact more with peers and faculty (Shapiro & Levine, 1999).

Undergraduate nursing programs have used cohort groups in clinical rotation with varying degrees of success (Wilson et al., 2009). These learning communities involve on-the-job training opportunities in various in- and out-patient settings. Though some programs keep the cohorts together for the entire nursing program, others change the cohort groups every semester or every time the clinical setting is changed. Wilson et al. set out to discover which of these practices was optimal for student learning in a nursing program.

Adult learners, returning learners, and first generation students often confront the need to find their way through college without the help of a support network or of peer learners (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998). Students who participate in online programs or have busy lives outside of the educational environment also suffer from a lack of support. In this type of environment, the curriculum and faculty bear all the responsibility of engagement which often leaves students with something less than desired (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998).

Cohorts are learning arrangements with required sequences of course and student groups that stay intact through all or most of the work required for degree completion. They format the curriculum in ways that provide connectedness between students and faculty (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998). Though cohort arrangements limit the ability or freedom of choice in course selection and timing, they also remove the initial intimidation of entering a new classroom each semester with a group of strangers (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998). Researchers studying cohort groups, according to Reynolds and Hebert, have

suggested that cohorts can be an effective means of creating groups of learners that invite important interaction in and out of the classroom and support and motivate each other to complete the degree program.

Lawrence (2002) described a cohort as a small group of learners who complete an entire program of study as a single unit. A group of individuals with a common goal does not always create a community. Time, interaction, and commitment are all required for the community to develop (Lawrence,2002).

The circle is the first process by which the community is formed, similar to one's ancestors gathering around the fire for warmth and to eat. In the learning community classroom, the circle is usually used to allow a free flow of discussion (Lawrence, 2002). This begins to create a sense of equality and sharing that are essential to the development of the community. Participants begin to be willing to share thoughts that are not complete, allowing the community to finish "baking" (Lawrence, 2002, p. 85) the idea with dialogue, critique, and debate.

This co-creating of knowledge through collaborative learning and experiential knowing is identified as an important outcome of cohort learning (Lawrence, 2002). At the outside of the circle is the rim, and the community eventually can be seen as a group holding onto and supporting the rim, so that if one member is having a difficult time supporting or participating, the others can and usually will help that member through those challenges. A cohort group becomes a mini-society or family. Individuals in the cohort take on the distinct

roles of leader, recorder, counselor, content expert, comedian, nurturer and more (Lawrence, 2002).

The cohort instructor or advisor is a critical position (Lawrence, 2002). This person must maintain the authority required, but only for the course content. He or she is responsible for making sure the community is a safe environment, providing opportunities for feedback, and fostering independence. At the same time, cohort advisors cannot intrude into the community or the natural formation of the community will not be completed as the central authority figure is not a true member (Lawrence, 2002).

Maher (2005) discussed the importance of the student cohort model as an innovative way of thinking about learning. Emphasis on creating shared knowledge and facilitating collaborative learning in college studies is a relatively recent phenomenon. Cohort placement has been around for some time in graduate programs; however, these have been lock-step programs that require members of the cohort to follow a plan of study. They have often been less concerned with collaborative learning (Maher, 2005).

Maher (2005) described a cohort as a specific type of learning community, generally consisting of 10-25 students; however, some programs use many small cohorts to make up much larger cohorts. These students begin with developmental or experiential learning experiences and proceed through the program of study, and eventually graduate together. Cohorts have been found in

health careers such as nursing for some time, but until recently the rest of the academy has not used them consistently (Maher, 2005).

The cohort has been shown to not only assist the student with processing the academic requirements, but also to fulfill students' need for affiliation (Maher, 2005). Strong emotional ties often develop into a family-like bond, leading to relationships beyond the academic program. Other researchers have also shown that if the cohort is too well-defined, or if the roles are not self-developed by the participants, there is pullback from participation due to some students becoming overly dominant or from not engaging at any level (Maher, 2005).

Within the cohort model, a social system typically forms that is based on group dynamics and relates to the behaviors, structure, and functionality of the group (Wilson et al., 2009). The type and amount of communication within the group and the contributions each member brings to the group will also have an effect on its success at staying together and/or changing as it moves forward. Nursing students often encounter new and difficult situations in the clinical experience. Being part of a learning cohort offers the students resources they would not have if their experiences were purely individual. Working together in this situation allows students to achieve more than they would as individuals (Wilson et al., 2009).

Though Wilson et al. (2009) found that students who were together for longer periods of time were more likely to ask for a new group, they did not find a statistical difference between long or short term groups. The dynamics of each

group changed depending on the individual participants, rather than on the collective idea itself.

Sherrod et al. (1992) explored the perceptions of undergraduate nursing students about their experiences, both academic and non-academic. The students' perceptions were critical to understanding the reasons why students chose to continue in the program or to depart. A total of 20 students were interviewed and asked about their experiences in the program and at the university (Sherrod et al., 1992). Students identified a variety of positive experiences, such as involvement in activities, coursework, meeting new friends, and living close to home. They also were positive about academic support services, faculty, family and financial support, and the student nursing association. Faculty support was critical, and in agreement with Wilson et al. (2009) that instructor involvement was a key variable that contributed to the success of students in nursing programs (Sherrod et al., 1992).

Problem experiences included science courses, English courses, poor study habits, and loneliness (Sherrod et al., 1992). Also included were lack of faculty interest, large class sizes, failure to attend classes, and difficulty finding a good study environment. Some students also identified problems with family conflict, peer relationships, and racial tensions. Unlike previous studies, health problems were not listed as problem experiences despite stress and exhaustion being common complaints among nursing students (Sherrod et al., 1992).

When asked what they would recommend as help for the academic challenges of nursing school, the students suggested using academic support services, seeking faculty assistance, increasing the amount of study time, and adopting stress management techniques (Sherrod et al., 1992). For non-academic challenges, the researchers recommended becoming involved outside of the classroom, participating in nursing group meetings, supporting social integration of racially diverse groups of students and seeking roommates with common interests (Sherrod et al., 1992).

There are many challenges that students face on their paths to becoming nurses. Looking from the outside, considering the nursing shortage, one might think that anyone who desires to be a nurse would be able to find a seat in a program. Unfortunately, as the literature has shown, that is not the case. As the shortage in nursing grows, so does the shortage in nursing faculty, ultimately reducing the number of available seats in program to educate new nurses. As a result, nursing programs must find creative ways to not only increase the number of students admitted, but to also increase the number of qualified candidates. This is essential in ensuring that every admitted student has the opportunity to be successful. Through use of the cohort development model, students who are preparing for nursing might have a better chance of being admitted to programs and successfully graduating.

Conceptual Framework

The process of the group becoming a community is best explained by Tuckman's (1965), five stages to group development. The five stages are forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. They are explained in detail in the following sections of this review:

Stage 1: Forming (Testing and Dependence)

The forming stage happens as the group comes together (Tuckman, 1965). Using a living learning community as an example, this occurs as the community inhabitants move into their rooms, sometimes meeting their roommates for the first time. There is a period of awkwardness and social testing as they begin to learn the habits and idiosyncrasies of their new neighbors (Tuckman, 1965). At the onset, groups are primarily focused on orientation which is accomplished by testing social limits. This testing process allows the group members to determine what the boundaries are for interactions with other group members as well as for task behaviors with the authority figure (Tuckman, 1965). At the same time, the group members establish relationships with other members who emerge as group leaders. These are often dependency relationships, allowing both the group members and the leaders to learn the boundaries of the relationship. The process of orientation, testing and relationship development can be considered the group process of forming (Tuckman, 1965).

At the same time, the group will engage in task-activity development for orientation to the task (Tuckman, 1965). This is the process by which members of the group work to understand the task, how it will affect the group and individual members, and the method the group will use to accomplish the task. In the case of the nursing living learning community, this could be successful completion of the first semester of classes. The group must decide upon the type of information it needs in dealing with the tasks (course schedule, books, and study time) and how this information is to be obtained (Tuckman, 1965).

Stage 2: Storming (Intra-group Hostility)

The storming stage will often happen quickly as the individuals quickly get comfortable and resort to old habits, some of which are not acceptable to others in near proximity (roommates) or in the community at large (Tuckman, 1965). This can include habits of hygiene, sleep, study, and many others. As the group moves beyond the forming stage, it will enter this stage which is dominated by intra-group conflict. The members of the group may become hostile towards one another or an authority figure as a way to articulate their individuality and resist the creation of group organization. Interaction is uneven and 'infighting' is common (Tuckman, 1965). There will likely be key issues that cause cliques within the group that can affect whether the group progresses or regresses. It is entirely possible that the issues confronting the group may need to be overcome through dependence on an authority figure. In the case of the nursing living

learning community, struggles with individual hygiene, garbage removal, and/or overall cleanliness are common issues that appear (1965).

Emotional response to task demands is acknowledged as the second part of the storming stage (Tuckman, 1965). The members of the group may react emotionally to the task as a form of resistance to the demands of the task on the individual. The divergence between the individual's personal orientation and that demanded by the task can cause frustration that may be projected onto other group members who are not having the same problem (Tuckman, 1965). Students who are having difficulty with a particular class or section of a class may find themselves in this situation. These behaviors serve as resistance to group influence and task requirements and may be labeled as storming (Tuckman, 1965).

Stage 3: Norming (Development of Group Cohesion)

The norming stage occurs as the group comes to a common understanding of what is expected of group members (Tuckman, 1965). This will happen in small groups such as roommates and in larger groups such as study groups for classes that are shared by the community. New standards are adopted by the group, and individuals will accept certain roles in the group,. e.g, leader, follower, etc. (Tuckman, 1965).

This third group stage is identified as the development of group cohesion. Group members will have accepted the other members of the group as well as

their individual quirks and traits (Tuckman, 1965). The group becomes a single unit as the individual members accept the primacy of the group, their desire to preserve and continue, and with the establishment of norms that are generated by the group. Cooperation and collaboration are of primary importance, and task conflicts are avoided if possible, but discussed, if not, to insure harmony (Tuckman, 1965). This is typically seen in the living learning community during study groups where there is disagreement over course content.

Tuckman (1965) labeled this stage of group development as the open exchange of relevant interpretations. The openness to other group members is pivotal during this stage. Resistance is overcome in this third stage in which group feeling and cohesiveness develop, new standards evolve, and new roles are adopted (1965). From a social perspective, this can be viewed in the living learning community as group members organize group events, e.g., a movie or shopping trip, as well as group dinners in the community room. This becomes the norming stage. This openness is followed by a theme of solidarity in the group and being more sensitive to the needs and feelings of one another (Tuckman, 1965).

Stage 4: Performing (Functional Role-relatedness)

The performing stage occurs as the group begins to process the tasks that have been assigned, both as individuals and as a community (Tuckman, 1965). In some cases this will be classwork in which multiple students are engaged in

the same class, a community requirement such as community service, or a programming requirement in the residence hall such as a fire drill.

Tuckman (1965) described the final stage of development in group structure as functional role-relatedness. The group, which developed during the preceding phase as an operating unit, can now turn into a problem-solving organization. Group members take on roles that will develop the actions of the group, because they developed the ability to relate to each other as individuals in the previous stages (Tuckman, 1965). The group becomes a sounding board for group members, and assignments and problems are explored, tested, and solved.

In task-activity development, the fourth and final stage is identified as the emergence of solutions (Tuckman, 1965). It is in this state that the group makes practical attempts at successful assignment completion. The group attains the fourth stage when the groups' interpersonal arrangement becomes the tool of assignment activities. Roles become flexible and functional, and group energy is channeled into the task. This stage is known as performing. Interpersonal problems between group members are a thing of the past, and group energy can be devoted to practical assessment of and efforts at solving the task at hand (Tuckman, 1965).

Stage 5: Adjourning (Dissolution and Closure)

Finally, the adjournment stage occurs with the community at large as the end of the academic year brings about the need, in most cases, to move to a new residence hall (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Some of the subgroups will stay together during the move and will continue their subset of desired support for the group, but the majority will move on to new areas and continue to work individually on their academic requirements.

Tuckman and Jensen (1977) demonstrated an additional stage, adjourning. This stage is the closure stage for the group and is reached, hopefully, once the task has been successfully completed and the group's purpose fulfilled. In most cases, the members of the group move on to new groups and projects. From an organizational perspective, acknowledgment of and understanding the group members' vulnerabilities is helpful, especially if members of the group have bonded and feel a sense of insecurity about continuing without the support of the group (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). In the case of the nursing living learning community, this stage has been met through the option of continuing to live together in a new community. Students are given the option to do so and act as mentors to the new members of the community the following year.

Community Building using Group Development

According to Tuckman and Jensen (1977), when there is a high level of student group interaction, learning can occur in a community. Active involvement is the foundation for a discovery-based approach to learning. However, student interaction does not occur spontaneously; developing student interaction must be a vital characteristic of the community design. As the community progresses through the stages of group development, participation progresses from student interaction into cooperation and collaboration (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). For most students, collaborative group work is new and they need careful support from the faculty and staff in order to succeed in group activities. Training in teamwork, such as active listening and constructive feedback, should be provided for groups in the early 'forming' stage of development (Matthew, Cooper, Davidson & Hawkes, 1995). In the nursing living learning community, this happens during the teambuilding retreat at the beginning of the semester.

When the group progresses to the second stage, storming, it is often due to some type of "storm" arising within the group. Regardless of what caused the initial storm, group members should be assisted in talking through whatever caused the problem in order to resolve the conflict (Matthew et al., 1995). In the case of the living learning community, this might be something as simple as forgetting to take the trash out or as serious as property theft. In the situation where the problem is social, it is usually resolved by the Residence Assistant who meets with the two students and helps them talk out the problem.

Information handouts that provide information about conflict resolution strategies are helpful in these situations. During the norming stage, the group often works to solve internal problems without the need for outside mediation (Matthew et al., 1995).

The norming stage characterizes the period of time through which the group will transition if they are to develop into a performing group (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). As the level of complexity increases through more cooperative exercises and the responsibility for outcomes is realized by the group, the group will evolve from the norming to the performing stage (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Transition from cooperative to collaborative learning starts in the norming stage and grows to full potential in the performing stage. With collaborative projects, the group members require less formal structure, working among themselves to discuss and solve problems (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). An example of a fully collaborative learning exercise might be the development of a community service project. In the nursing student success course, the group works to achieve consensus on the community service location, schedules the day and time as well as transportation, and develops a final presentation describing the project and outcomes. In this situation, interaction among the group members is required to successfully achieve consensus regarding all aspects of the project (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

According to Smith (2005), there has been some criticism of Tuckman's work. The first criticism is subjected to stage theories in general, in that they seek

to present a universalist method. This can lead to over-reaching since humans are generally rarely that straightforward. There is a general understanding that human interactions are characterized by more unpredictability and fluctuation.

As I have previously indicated, some critics have also demonstrated that rather than a linear process, the different stages are both fluid and overlapping, as well as cyclical. As the purpose or goals of the group change, some number of the original group will either restart the process entirely, or move back through the stages as necessary, such as resetting the norms that were determined in the norming stage (Smith, 2005).

Summary

This chapter introduced the concepts of a career in nursing as well as the current challenges of nursing and nursing faculty shortages and the relationship between the two shortages. The difficulty of being admitted to a nursing program and the difficulty of completing the nursing program were also discussed. Relationships between faculty and students and their effect on the attrition and retention of students in nursing programs was also thoroughly explained. Finally, the use of cohorts in education as well as the conceptual framework of Stages of Group Development by Tuckman (1965) were reviewed. In Chapter 3, the research methods and plan for data analysis are discussed.

CHAPTER 3
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Design of the Study

The purpose of this research was to understand the lived experiences of pre-nursing students who opted into a living learning community that used a cohort development model for community building. There was a need for this study of cohort development and resulting psychological sense of community from the perspective of students' lived experiences as they prepare for admission to the nursing program. Table 7 provides a broad overview of the contents of this by presenting the research questions, their linkage with the theoretical framework, and the protocol items that will be used in interviewing participants in the study.

Table 7

The Relationship of Research Questions to Theoretical Framework and Interview Protocol

| Research Questions | Theoretical Framework | Protocol |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. How do Nursing@Nike students make sense of their experiences with the community? | Forming/Storming/ Performing | Items 1-21 |
| 2. How did membership in the community impact the progress of the Nursing@Nike students beyond the first year? | Performing/Adjourning/ Forming | Items 22-29 |

The goal, in conducting this research, was to ask students to provide reflections on their academic and social learning experiences in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of the lived experiences of the cohort development process. The appropriateness of this approach has been confirmed by Creswell (2009) who stated that “researchers may use paradigmatic reasons for a narrative study, such as how individuals are enabled and constrained by social resources, socially situated in interactive performances, and how narrators develop interpretations” (p. 55). This was confirmed by van Manen (1990) who stated that in phenomenological research, the meaning of the lived experience should be the prominent concern. Additionally, the van Manen conceptualization of interviewing was used for the purpose of obtaining qualitative data that were words, patterns and themes describing the experiences and subsequent meanings of cohort development and psychological sense of community.

Population

The students that were selected for participation were residents in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community in Nike Academic Village. These residents included 68 students, 60 of which were female, and 8 were male. The group included 49 White, 10 Black, 5 Hispanic, and 4 Asian/Pacific Islander students. All were first-term freshmen who had completed less than 30 college credit hours. It was anticipated that 6 to 12 participants would be sufficient, depending on when saturation began to appear in the collection of data.

According to Creswell (2009), saturation is reached when no new relevant data is expected to be discovered.

Methodology

The proposed methodology for this study was narrative analysis, as posited by Creswell (2009). According to van Manen (1990), phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experiences. Narrative analysis is the interpretation of the story of those experiences.

This approach includes reflection on the meaning and significance of phenomena of daily life in the community which is fundamental to pedagogic research. This study addressed the phenomenon of group development, how it was experienced and made sense of by pending nursing students, and how it related to the theory of stages of group development. Depth gives the phenomena meaning, and rich descriptions of the experiences offer a dimension of depth (van Manen, 1990). These rich descriptions of the lived experiences were the goal of this study.

Methodological Structure

According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological research involves the dynamic interaction of six critical research activities, which he described as the methodological structure of human science research. These six critical activities are:

(a) Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; b) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (c) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (d) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (e) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and (f) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (pp. 30-31).

It is also important to understand how these six activities were reflected in the process of the research and how the researcher interpreted the essence of each into the interactions with the participants of the study. Having lived in several residential life “homes”, the researcher was often struck as to how some would have a great sense of community, and others would be completely without connection, strangers in a strange place, each traveling a different path on the same road. My curiosity had no bounds as to how this experience had affected the participants and what gains or losses they experienced. It was with careful diligence that I parsed each phrase of each conversation to get the true story and the real impact of the lived experiences of these students.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study. Both questions were answered using the themes developed from the coding of the notes and transcriptions from interviews with the participants.

1. Research Question 1: How do Nursing@Nike students make sense of their experiences with the community?
2. Research Question 2: How did membership in the community impact the progress of the Nursing@Nike students beyond the first year?

Research Setting

The setting for the research conducted for this study was campus classrooms, residential life community rooms, conference rooms, and other quiet, comfortable, well-lit, and enclosed private areas agreed upon by each participant and the researcher.

Data Analysis

Following the methodological structure for human science research advanced by van Manen (1990), six critical research activities were identified as important to the entire process from interview to result. For this study, the activities were particularly relevant to data analysis. In using a qualitative methodology, this is the logical progression after interviewing, the final component of data collection in this study.

1. Turning to the nature of lived experiences is a commitment to dwelling on the subject, which in this case were the lived experiences of the cohort and community. The lived experience is the beginning and end

point of phenomenological research, which is “being-given-over to some quest, a true task” (van Manen, 1990, p. 31).

2. Investigating experience as one lives it required establishing contact with the original experience. This “means that phenomenological research requires of the researcher that he or she stands in the fullness of life. . . exploring the category of lived experiences in all its modalities and aspects” (van Manen, 1990, p. 31).
3. Reflecting on essential themes required making a distinction between appearance and essence, between things of one’s experience and that which grounds the things of that experience. This is about bringing into focus those actions and experiences which tend to be obscured over time.
4. The art of writing and rewriting required the “application of language and thoughtfulness to lived experiences, to what shows itself precisely as it shows itself” (1990, p. 32). This was interpreted to mean the researcher needed to be true to the experiences that were shared with him and report them faithfully as they were understood by the participants.
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented relationship was about staying focused on the narrative, not getting lost in abstract thoughts, superficialities or falsities. This comes back to the commitment to

share the experiences as they happened and to accurately share the students' understandings of how they made sense of the experiences.

6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole was about making sure that the researcher did not get lost in the bits and parts that make the story. It was important to stay focused on the purpose of the research and make sure the work came to a close, and answered the fundamental question that started the journey.

Additionally, the four life-world existentials posited by van Manen (1990) were used as guides in this process: (a) Lived space (spatiality) refers to the space in which one finds oneself; (b) lived body (corporeality) refers to the phenomenological fact that one is always a living part of this world; (c) lived time (temporality) is about one's perception of time, fast in good times, and slow in times that one wishes would pass quickly; and (d) lived other (relationality) is about one's relationships with others, in a shared interpersonal space. These four life worlds can be differentiated, but cannot be considered out of context with the others. They come together to create one's lived world (van Manen, 1990, pp. 101-105).

Within that conceptual understanding, researchers worked to allow the participants to share their stories about preparing for admission to the nursing program. Data analysis was a constant thread throughout the study once the participants began to share their stories.

Using narrative analysis allowed the researcher to compare stories, looking for key themes and concepts that were shared among the nurse pending population at the university. The individual experiences of the participants were, in part, the product of individual interpretation, but they were also a reflection of community interaction. Inasmuch as the given experiences may be impactful for one person but not for another, it was important that a variety of voices were heard and their interpretation of the experiences were examined. To do this, the researcher transcribed notes from the survey and interviews. The researcher then followed basic methods of narrative analysis including the reading of notes and transcriptions, coding the data, and selecting themes (Creswell, 2009). Using these methods helped the research to remember the small details that emerged during the interview process. With nearly 200 pages of interview transcripts, it would be easy to forget or lose important details that helped inform and share the voices of the participants.

Validity and Verification

This research was governed by the principles of qualitative research: triangulation, trustworthiness, saturation, and an audit trail (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation is a method in which a combination of multiple sources of data is reviewed by multiple researchers using multiple methods of analysis (Creswell, 2009). The purpose is to cross-reference the data to ensure that common themes are not missed, and, at the same time, to make sure the data being

collected are relevant to the question being asked. By using multiple interviews with different participants, the researcher put forth his best effort at telling the participants' stories in the most authentic fashion possible.

Trustworthiness is essentially reliability and validity in quantitative methods (Creswell, 2009). The goal is to ensure that (a) the data gathered answer the question(s) asked, and (b) another researcher would find the same types of answers to the same questions. There are four dimensions to trustworthiness which include: dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Dependability implies accurate findings that are consistent with the context of the verifiable patterns and themes discovered in the research. Credibility is about precision and accuracy in interpreting the recorded data from the participants. Transferability differs from generalizability in that findings in one context may be transferred to situations or participants that are similar or have been involved in the same types of experiences. Confirmability means that the results of the research show the truth of what happened rather than demonstrating what was expected to be found.

Saturation is the point at which no more data needs to be collected. This is the most challenging principle to uphold, as it becomes easy to narrow or broaden the study based on the questions being asked. The key for saturation is to stop when the data do not provide the researcher with any more questions to ask (Creswell, 2009). In analysis, this required the researcher to look for instances that represented each theme and to continue looking (and

interviewing) until the new information obtained did not provide additional new insights.

The audit trail is the most important and oft overlooked step in showing the authenticity of the research. It is a complete and exhaustive record of all activity that has occurred during the research process. This must include all decisions made about what to study, what questions to ask, what questions not to ask, and the information collected. The benefit of the audit trail is to be able to authentically answer any challenges to the study about why it was or was not conducted in a particular way (Creswell, 2009).

Data Collection

Survey

The goal of this study was to understand how students in a cohort development model created a psychological sense of community and how students made psychological sense of community in that experience. Due to that limiting factor, the sample for this study was one of convenience, essentially those students who self-selected to participate and share their experiences.

Students were initially recruited using an invitation that was sent via e-mail to all previous participants in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community and the Nursing Student Success Course. The email was used to identify those students who were willing to participate in the research by sharing their

experiences during the program and how those experiences shaped their expectations for applying to the nursing program. From those who responded, 12 students were chosen to be interviewed.

Interviews

Creswell (2009) stated that one-on-one interviews need to be conducted with individuals who are not hesitant to speak and share ideas and that the interview should take place in a setting that allows the participant to speak freely. The students who were the most open and willing to speak in a focus group were selected for the interviews. Each of the participants in the final phase of the study was interviewed at least once, with the possibility of a second interview for any needed clarification. Similar to the survey questions, the one-on-one interviews were semi-structured with open-ended prompts to give interviewees the ability to share what mattered most to them in connection with the program. Participants were asked to sign a consent form to participate in the study and for the interview to be recorded (Appendix D). Participants were informed about the approximate amount of time for the interview and how the information that was collected and transcribed would be used. During the interview, notes were taken to record body language, facial expressions, and the researcher's reactions to these observations. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix E. Immediately following the interview, the information was transcribed so that the information was fresh and could be easily recalled for context and reaction.

Additionally, the interviews were reviewed again after a period of time to allow for perspective.

Protection of Human Participants

Approval to conduct the study was sought and received (Appendix F) from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Central Florida. The application required descriptions of identification of risk, methodology, participant information, setting of the study, and potential risks with steps to minimize risk, emotional discomfort, and loss of confidentiality. This protection included all research participants.

All participants were asked to sign an informed consent (Appendix C) after having the study explained, including the purpose of the study, the interview procedure, potential risks, and the emphasis on confidentiality. The researcher explained that (a) pseudonyms would be created for each participant and that no recording or data transcription would be labeled with an actual participant's name, and that (b) all efforts would be made to protect confidentiality of name and information given to the researcher. Ample time was provided for the participants to read and review the informed consent, and all questions were answered. In the case of possible emotional discomfort, a list of counseling offices were provided along with contact information. A copy of the consent form was given to each participant.

Informed consent is a significant requirement in qualitative studies.

Informed consent includes the title, purpose, and explanation of the research and procedures, and allows the participant to ask questions and to stop participating in the study at any time without consequence. Protecting confidentiality and privacy is paramount. No information identifying the participants was included on the recordings, and all names used in the final report were pseudonyms. Once the recordings were transcribed, they were deleted from the recorder.

Authorization to Conduct Study

Before beginning data collection, the researcher submitted the study to UCF's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was given approval (Appendix E) to conduct research on human subjects.

Originality Score

The UCF College of Graduate Studies requires the submission of each dissertation or thesis to Turnitin.com to test for originality. This researcher's major professor defined an acceptable originality score to be between zero and 10%. The originality score for the dissertation was 3%.

CHAPTER 4 PARTICIPANTS' VOICES

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of freshmen nursing students living in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community through deep questioning of the participants regarding their respective experiences (van Manen, 1990). Both the personal and institutional experiences of the nursing students, as they prepared for admission to the nursing program, were explored.

Conducting the Interviews

The phenomenological research design in this study employed open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format. This approach yielded to voices of these students and allowed for a narrative analysis of their stories and experiences of living in Nursing@Nike. Therefore, a qualitative approach employing a phenomenological lens was helpful to understand the lived experiences of participants and how they make meaning of their experiences.

The Interview Protocol (Appendix D) served as the guide to facilitate the interviews. As Cresswell (2009) stated, the arranged questions in a semi-structured interview are guided by participant responses, thus allowing a dialogue that permits flexibility to explore deeper meaning and clarification as dictated by the responses. The questions are more flexibly worded, are

generally not strictly predetermined, and allow for greater exploration during the interview. This semi-structured format allowed both the researcher and participants to engage in a dialogue where questions were tailored according to participant responses, prompting further exploration in certain warranted areas. Probing questions were used, when needed, to seek richer detail from each participant. These additional probing questions proved extremely useful in soliciting and discovering important information.

A total of 12 interviews were conducted with participants in individual face-to-face meetings. Overall, the open-ended interview format allowed the participants to guide the dialogue in a comfortable manner. Participants seemed to be very calm and relaxed throughout the interviews. Although initially scheduled for 60 minutes, the average duration of each interview was approximately 35 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 15 minutes; the longest interview lasted 45 minutes. The research participants were enthusiastic and eager to talk about their experiences. Participants frequently commented that they enjoyed the questions and that their answers helped them to reflectively acknowledge their resiliency and persistence in life and as nursing students living in Nursing@Nike.

It was enlightening to hear the stories and personal aspects of the lives of each of the research participants. I was highly intrigued by the similarities and differences of the challenges experienced by these men and women.

Participant Profiles

Overview of Participant Characteristics

All participants met the criterion for being interviewed of having lived in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community during their first year at the university. All of the students were first-year students and had never participated in a cohort based education program prior to living in Nursing@Nike. None of the participants knew each other prior to moving into the community. The average age of the participants was 19.

Of the 12 participants, there were 10 females and two males. All of those interviewed were White with the exception of one Asian/Italian and one Hispanic student. Only four of the students were first generation college students, and only two of the students were employed. All of those interviewed, with the exception of two students indicated that they were involved outside the community. These demographic data are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

Participant Demographic Data

| Participant | Gender | Ethnicity | 1st Generation student? | Work for Income | Involvement Outside Community? |
|-------------|--------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Susan | F | White | No | No | No |
| Leigh | F | White | Yes | No | Yes |
| Kayla | F | Asian/Italian | Yes | No | Yes |
| Alizabeth | F | White | Yes | No | Yes |
| Aiden | M | White | No | Yes | No |
| Hallie | F | White | No | No | Yes |
| Cameron | M | White | No | No | Yes |
| Emily | F | White | No | No | Yes |
| Amanda | F | White | No | Yes | Yes |
| Mary | F | White | Yes | No | Yes |
| Allene | F | Hispanic | Yes | No | Yes |
| Jan | F | White | No | No | Yes |

Three of the participants had begun their freshman year at the University of Central Florida in 2010. The remaining nine students had enrolled as freshmen in 2011. The majority of the students who participated in the study had been admitted to a nursing program, but not necessarily their first choice of programs. Eight of the students had been admitted to the Basic BSN program at the University of Central Florida, and one had been admitted to a collaborative nursing program between the university and a local state college. The other three were still working to successfully complete the requirements and be able to apply. Participant academic information is presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Participant Academic Information

| Participant | Freshman Year | Program | Year Admitted |
|-------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Kayla | 2010 | Basic BSN | 2012 |
| Hallie | 2010 | Basic BSN | 2012 |
| Mary | 2010 | Basic BSN | 2012 |
| Alizabeth | 2011 | Basic BSN | 2013 |
| Amanda | 2011 | Basic BSN | 2013 |
| Emily | 2011 | Basic BSN | 2013 |
| Jan | 2011 | Basic BSN | 2013 |
| Leigh | 2011 | Basic BSN | 2013 |
| Aiden | 2011 | Concurrent ASN-BSN | 2013 |
| Susan | 2011 | Not Admitted | |
| Cameron | 2011 | Not Admitted | |
| Allene | 2011 | Not Admitted | |

In understanding the context of the experiences of these participants, it was important to gather information on the challenges that any nursing student faces: time, money, and coursework. All of these students carried a full-time course-load or more. In order to prepare for admission to the nursing program, these students were required to complete the first two years of their education in just four semesters in order to meet the application deadline. Nearly all of the students were receiving financial aid assistance; two of those interviewed received no family support and worked part time on campus in order to pay for food and essentials.

In order to be ready to apply to the nursing program, students are forced to take third-year courses in the beginning of the second year. This often creates difficulty as the students have not developed the necessary time management

and study skills necessary to handle the amount of information delivered in these classes. By working together in this community with built-in study groups, the students hoped to overcome these challenges. The following interview summaries give voice to their time in the community and how the experience affected them individually and as a group.

Mary

. . . I mean I felt like I was proud and living there, like I felt like I had an advantage over people who weren't in the community, because I felt like I was being guided and I had resources and people to rely on. . . .

(Interview A, p. 4)

Mary just finished her first year in the nursing program. She had a rough year, doing well in the first semester, and then nearly falling apart in the second semester, almost failing two classes. Although her schedule was interrupted and graduation is a little further away, she believes she has turned the corner and will be successful in the program. She has a good relationship with her family, talking to her parents and her sister almost every day. She now lives with her boyfriend who is applying for officer school in the military. She was very involved on campus during her first two years, participating in the Association of Pre-Nursing Students (APNS), an informal running group called KnightRunners, and C.R.E.W, a Christian youth group on campus. Although she did not work while she was preparing to apply to the nursing program, her involvement did cause

some scheduling issues with her studies, and she eventually had to relinquish leadership positions so she could focus more on her classes. During her second year, Mary was both a Residential Life resident assistant for the Nursing@Nike community and the peer advisor for the student success (SLS) course that all members of the community were required to take together.

. . . Because I knew that nursing school was going to be tough, I knew that not that many people got in, so I thought that if I was living with people who were the same major as me that I would have other people to like lean on. . . . (Interview A, p. 3)

Mary, like most of the other students, had attended open house, orientation, and other information sessions where she learned just how challenging the nursing program was, not just to get admitted, but also to graduate. She stated that while she was intimidated by the idea of living with 35 other students who might all be more academically capable, she knew she had to do something to help make sure she would be successful. There was definitely a gender imbalance with only four male and 28 female students.

. . . I would say that in the beginning we were. . . very cliquish, I feel like in the beginning it was a little bit awkward, but after we did the retreat and went through the class everybody was really really close. . . . (Interview A, p. 3)

Mary had a unique perspective about the program as she was a participant the first year and a peer advisor and resident assistant the second year. She believed that in both groups, the lack of a common course or program the second semester of the program left the group without the means to stay intact. She believed that the group started out strong with the retreat, and then over the course of the two semesters slowly drifted into small groups or cliques that were not supportive of each other.

. . . I felt like I had an advantage over people who weren't in the community, because I felt like I was being guided and I had resources and people to rely on. . . . (Interview A, p. 4)

During the four semesters that the students have to prepare for admission to the nursing program, there are a multitude of ways for students to learn about the requirements for admission, including the entrance examination and prerequisite courses. Mary consistently mentioned that she was surprised to hear students say they had no idea about the entrance examination or that they could talk to an advisor.

. . . there were some people who, for example, that didn't show up to the retreat who didn't want to go and some people who weren't motivated. . . .
(Interview A, p. 4)

There were times when Mary was frustrated with her peers, because she did not understand why they did not take advantage of the recourse available to them. It was hard for her to listen to them complain about how tough it was to

prepare for the program, knowing that they were not acting as if they truly cared or were motivated to succeed.

. . . we would have family dinners every week, it was more frequent in the beginning and happened less towards the end but it still happened. And we would all meet up and like cook for each other like every week. . . .

(Interview A, p. 6)

As Mary saw the community, it was strongest in the beginning and slowly became disconnected over the course of the freshman year. She enjoyed the family dinners that would turn into study sessions with all 36 students helping out. They would leave notes in the common room to remind each other about big events on campus or for plans to meet somewhere off campus, e.g., for movies or bowling.

. . . I feel like everyone was truly trying to help each other because I know if I didn't go to class I could just post on a Facebook page and be like "hey, I didn't go to class today, can I have the notes" and then so I know somebody would be there for me. . . . (Interview A, p. 5)

Mary knew in that first semester that they were a community because they could depend on each other for support in class and in studying. She believed that was what started to make them into a family as much as a community. Mary also dated one of the male students in the program for almost one year. After the relationship ended, both of them started the nursing program together. She believes the relationship was beneficial for her due to his work ethic when study

time was involved. Other times she would help him to take a break and get some fresh air when some topic would become too frustrating to continue studying.

. . . I just feel like being a part of living learning community in general you're more involved and you feel like a part of something and more motivated, I feel like it provides opportunity for you to make friends, because you're with people who are like you. . . . (Interview A, p. 8)

As a resident assistant during the summer semester after her first year, Mary experienced what normal residential life was like, according to her peers. She was surprised that they really did not know each other, and did not talk to each other. Some of the students belonged to the same fraternity or sorority and did not even realize they had a common bond since they did not bother to get to know anyone else in the hallway.

. . . I've never been the kind of person to seek out advising really. . . .
(Interview A, p. 10)

Mary believed that had she not been a part of the Nursing@Nike community she would probably never have been admitted to the nursing program. After seeing so many other students who had no idea how to prepare for admission to the program, she believes that she would have been just as clueless.

Jan

. . . I feel very confident in my decision to live there; I wouldn't have chosen anywhere else to have lived. It's definitely been an awesome support group and I don't know that I would have gotten the support group anywhere else. . . . (Interview B, p. 1)

Jan was about to start the nursing program. She was in the second cohort, the year after Mary was in the program. She had a great relationship with her family, calling them her main support group and relied on them very heavily. She was fortunate that she did not have to work during the program, so she was able to focus on her academics and getting involved on campus. She was active in her church youth group and VolunteerUCF, a volunteer group that coordinates community service projects for interested students. When asked if her involvement on campus had any effect on her time in the community, she responded that she did not have enough time to do all of the things she would have liked, so her academics and the community came first.

. . . Nursing@Nike was actually the main reason why I chose to attend UCF. . . . (Interview B, p. 2)

Knowing that the community would be a small group of students with common goals and interests, Jan felt that she would do better coming to UCF and living in this community than if she attended any of the other institutions to which she had been accepted. Although she may have still come to UCF if she had not been offered a spot in the community, she said knowing she had the

recourse to help her prepare to apply to the nursing program made the decision much easier.

. . . I think it developed much better in the first semester especially with the SLS class, second semester I think everybody kind of got almost too close to each other. . . . (Interview B, p. 2)

Similar to Mary, Jan believed that not having the common connection or class in the second semester created a situation that was not conducive to the welfare of the community. She witnessed personal conflicts between other students, but did her best to not get involved. She believed it was more important to work with her student colleagues, trying to focus on why they were at UCF and in the community. Two years later, Jan continued to live with the same roommates, all of whom met for the first time in the community, and all of whom were admitted to the program.

. . . some students didn't study as much, but it's like "oh, I got this grade and was very excited" but there were others who also got that grade but were willing to sit down and help you out if you needed it. . . . (Interview B, p. 3)

Despite a learning challenge, Jan worked hard to make sure she would be competitive for admission to the nursing program. She believed that it was really helpful when some of the other students would explain class topics in a different manner than the professor, helping her to understand and be successful on her tests and in the course. However, it was clear to her that there were other

students who saw her need for extra help as an advantage for them to be more competitive than she.

. . . at least we were kind of suffering together. . . . (Interview B, p. 3)

One of the reasons Jan believed the community bonded was the feeling that they were all in this together. They would work together in the common area and watch other students outside enjoying free time, something that was a sparse commodity for these students. When she would feel the mood getting too serious or somber, Jan would tell a joke, and it did not matter if it was any good. The “dumber the better” to make the members of the community smile and take a breather before they started studying again. During the weekend retreat at the beginning of the semester, the entire community cohort spent time at the campus challenge course, both on high ropes and low ropes courses. Over the course of the year, different subgroups would go back to the challenge course for open events. Jan indicated that doing those activities helped the group continue to work on their teambuilding. One of her favorite group activities was to go to a trampoline course, but the majority of their group time was consumed with studying for tests. Jan indicated she was sad due to not living in the community any more. She believed she was part of something when she was living in the community with everyone.

. . . I don't know if there is a professor that I have not personally met. I introduced myself and with almost all my professors I go to more than once for office hours whether it's to look at a question that I missed or just

to say I need help with this or that. . . being at a big university you can chose to be a number or you can choose not to be. . . . (Interview B, p. 6)

Jan knew that by coming into the university and the living learning community she would have to work twice as hard as everyone else to be competitive for admission to the nursing program. She believed that she would need to develop a relationship with the faculty, especially in such a large university. She believed that it was important to get to know her professors outside of the classroom because then they would know her by her name and not her student number. She chose not to be known as a number, believing they would appreciate her hard work more if they knew her name and they know she wanted to learn.

. . . it's scary to think what people think they need to do in order to apply. . . . (Interview B, p. 6)

Jan did not realize how difficult it was going to be. It was a lot more work than she had ever expected, and she questioned how anyone else was even getting it done who was not in the living learning community. She believed that all of the university resources were right at her fingertips and did not know where the other students were getting the resources to be ready to apply.

. . . I feel like I developed more relationships with people and was more likely to say hello to someone and or introduce myself. . . . (Interview B, p. 7)

I first met Jan when she came to university for a University Campus Tour and nursing information session. She was very quiet and shy and rarely spoke unless she was asked a question. By living in the Nursing@Nike community, she believed that it helped her to be more open and that it became easier to talk to new people. She believed that she has improved in her ability to meet new people just because she had to do it in the living learning community and has learned that it is good to meet other people.

Emily

. . . I saw it (Nursing@Nike) on one of the websites for housing, when deciding for housing I decided to sign up for it, I did not really know what it was. . . . (Interview C, p. 2)

Emily was ready to begin the program in the Fall 2013 semester. She reported having a supportive relationship with her family and that she was actively involved on campus with KnightRunners, VolunteerUCF, and the Knight Pantry. Emily was a suitemate to Jan and shared an apartment with her, Alizabeth, and Amanda, at the time of the interview. The four had never met each other prior to moving into Nursing@Nike.

. . . in the beginning we were all very kind of separate, did not really know each other, then we did the retreat and suddenly it was like "oh, I know them". . . . (Interview C, p. 2)

Emily stated that there was a clear difference in the community before and after the retreat, in how the members of the community interacted with each other, both socially and academically. Emily self-described as very introverted and reserved when first meeting people, so during her time at the Nursing@Nike community at the retreat, she experienced everyone talking when students were separated into groups beyond just her roommates. Also, she was able to get to know the other students better when they were solving problems during the group exercises.

. . . outside the community I noticed a difference between the other pre-nursing students where they would be a little bit stand-offish about studying because they would say “oh, you’re my competition”. . . .

(Interview C, p. 3)

Emily told the story of having a conversation with another student in her class, during which the student said, “Don’t you look around our classroom and see all this competition?” It may be a result of Emily’s being a talented student, but she claimed that she did not see other students as competition. In the living learning community, she did not believe there was a lot of competition. Rather, there was more collaboration. It was more of an all-for-one goal--they were going to help each other out.

. . . it helped a lot when you’re discouraged, and you get stressed about different issues, if you’re with someone who is in the same major. . . .

(Interview C, p. 3)

Emily also talked about how difficult it was to talk with other students in different careers such as a business major who did not have the same admission challenges. Thus, it was hard to relate. When she need to vent when she was frustrated and just wanted to talk about an issue, the other nursing students were going through the same things and were able to help. Emily also stated that ideas would flow more easily when the group was brainstorming about what individuals could do to solve homework or test preparation problems. A lot of times when she would walk by the community room on the first floor, she would see everyone hanging out there, studying for tests, and she had a lot of people come to her dorm room and study. She believed that would not have happened if they did not know each other.

. . . I went to some professor's office hours, but besides that no. . .

(Interview C, p. 4)

Emily worked with a graduate nursing professor on research during her time in the community. She met the dean of the Honor's College at one of the parent retreats, and he told her he had a professor that he wanted her to meet who worked in the College of Nursing. She communicated through email until they met. She helped the professor type some documentation for research.

. . . same roommates, different day. . . (Interview C, p. 5)

Emily and the other three girls moved straight from the Nursing@Nike community to an apartment in the same academic village, hoping to participate in the second-year mentors' program with the new students who would come in the

following academic year. She described the move as no big deal, because they would still have each other to rely on. Unfortunately, the mentoring program did not go very well that year, so they had limited interaction with the new first-year students.

. . . it helped me with the adjustment because I came from a very small school with only 100 people per grade. . . . (Interview C, p. 6)

When Emily came to the second largest university in the country, she described it as a bit overwhelming. Being in the living learning community helped. Because the community was smaller, it made the university seem smaller. It was on-campus, so it helped with that adjustment a lot. Moving forward to her sophomore year, Emily stated that she believed she was more self-confident. She realized that there are not horrible consequences for reaching out and talking to different people and asking questions.

Alizabeth

. . . even in coming to UCF and choosing where I would live it has been the most beneficial to me especially for my future. . . (Interview D, p. 1)

Alizabeth was a first generation student with a great family relationship. She was admitted to the nursing program in Fall 2013 along with Jan, Amanda, and Emily. She stated that her family was very supportive, but that she wanted to move far enough away from home to establish her independence. The question for her, Emily, Amanda, and Jan was if they had traded the dependence of family for the

dependence on each other. Elizabeth worked on campus with the University Foundation, making calls to potential donors and alumni. She then moved to a student assistant position, working with office tasks. She has been involved in the on-campus Innovation Church, as well as an honor sorority, Phi Eta Sigma, which is known for its volunteer efforts. Elizabeth considered herself very religious and devoted to her relationship with God. She indicated that she spends a lot of time with the church and trying to encourage her friends to join as well.

. . . I thought the idea was really cool, that I would be living and surrounding myself with people that all had the same goal as me. . . .

(Interview D, p. 3)

Elizabeth knew that it would be important to have friends who could help her and that she could help, depending on the course subject. She fit right into the collaborative strategy of the community. She stated that she thought it would be an honor to be a part of something like the community because she went to an art school during her secondary education, and for six years she had been a part of something similar.

. . . there were the people that you know decided that nursing was not for them. . . . (Interview D, p. 3)

Elizabeth stated that the community quickly developed subgroups. This included several that quickly realized that they were not really interested in nursing, as well as those that liked the program and took to it. She believed that

they stayed together and got the best out of it that they could, and that they used the resources that they had available to them. She felt there was a third group, the students who just did not care at all. Despite the variances in the groups, she believed that every group was inviting, especially when it came to studying. Because they were all in the same classes, they would meet together and forget about the groups and work together for what they needed to get done.

. . . being able to walk down the hallway and talk to everyone about their classes and invite people over to study or go into the common room as a group. . . . (Interview D, p. 3)

It was very important to Alizabeth that she live in a community where she would know everyone and be able to talk to them about what they were doing as a community. She believed that the only stressful part about it was knowing that the other students were her competition. At the same time she knew that if she lived in an environment with thirty other students that had the same vision and the same goals, that it would be good to have that support and encouragement. Despite knowing that they were all competing to get admitted to nursing, Alizabeth stated that she did not feel like anyone was less than helpful because of that fact. In fact, she complimented Emily with being a “brain” who could help with chemistry and the sciences, but then Alizabeth would help Emily with algebra.

. . . the biggest thing was that it helped keep me focused on what I wanted. . . . (Interview D, p. 4)

There were many days when it was hard to keep going for Alizabeth--days when she did find out that she did poorly on an examination or when she discovered the admission requirements for nursing had been raised. One day when she had taken the TEAS, she did not get the score she had hoped for. Although she could work hard to do well in her coursework, Alizabeth did not do well on standardized tests. Just having the other students there to lift her spirits and to remind her why she was going through this, to have friends that were just there ready to help was reason enough to live in the Nursing@Nike community.

. . . Emily, Amanda and Jan, all of us were really close. . . . (Interview D, p. 5)

Alizabeth firmly believed that being with the other three girls in her suite was a strong contributor to being able to successfully compete for admission to the nursing program. Though there were other students in the community they would socialize with, it was that core group that made the difference. Everyone else was more academic related and community related. The four suitemates would go to each other's homes over the weekends and were always doing things together.

. . . I had roommates that you know went out and partied and roommates that had other majors. . . . (Interview D, p. 5)

In the semester prior to living in Nursing@Nike, Alizabeth lived on campus in another residence hall. During that summer semester she earned two Bs and believes that was because she did not have the same support and resources that

she had in the living learning community. She had roommates who were mathematics or elementary education majors and spent their free time socializing and going to parties. With such a wide variety they did not have similar classes so the relationship was not built around the fundamentals of working together. This was something that Alizabeth was not familiar with since she participated in a cohort group in high school. As part of the chorus they all had similar classes, they went to nationals and so they were always together for rehearsal and competitions.

. . . I think of the people that I know that were not in the program and they have no idea. . . . (Interview D, p. 6)

Alizabeth stated that during the course of her first two years, she would often find herself helping other nursing students with what classes to take and how to prepare for admissions. Being in the living learning community made her feel that she had an advantage, but she did not want to use that against her friends who did not live in the community. Being a member of the Association of Pre-Nursing was also beneficial.

. . . I knew who I was but I think it's really helped me find where I belong. . . . (Interview D, p. 7)

Alizabeth was very conscientious about her role in life and trying to make the best decisions. She was very concerned in coming to college that it would be very easy to get pulled into the wrong crowd or to stray away from her major. Being surrounded by good people and people that she knew accepted and

welcomed her was invaluable. The support of those people who want her to be a nurse because they know who she is has been inspirational to her, helping her grow as a person and to aspire to do well. She stated that she always had somewhat of a negative attitude and would often say “Oh, I can’t do this, or I can’t do that.” Having that continual positive attitude surrounding her life has helped make her more positive and more successful.

. . . as a nursing student I think it’s important to understand how to work well with other people. . . . (Interview D, p. 7)

Alizabeth believed that Nursing@Nike, especially the teambuilding that the group experienced, gave her and the other future nurses an early opportunity to learn to work with other people. Her view was that living in a community that forced her to get to know everyone else and learn how to get along with them would help her to be a better nurse. She believed that it is good for everyone to really get to know themselves and how to deal with other people, even if they do not like them.

Leigh

. . . I didn’t have any friends coming here from high school. . . I am the only one that branched out and I was really nervous. . . . (Interview E, p. 1)

Leigh was one of the out-of-state students and had absolutely nobody here at the university when she arrived. She was a first generation student with

a family that was invested in making sure that she had all the support she needed to be successful. She joined the Alpha Zeta Delta sorority before she even began classes and had to start working off-campus during her spring semester to help support herself. She also attended meetings with the Association of Pre-Nursing Students to make sure she did not miss anything important as she prepared for admission to the nursing program. She was actively involved with the sorority, participating in volunteer events and holding a leadership position. Leigh believed that having those connections would keep her focused on staying in school and doing well. She also stated that she was diligent to not allow the part-time job or her sorority involvement take time away from her studies and found that they both helped her stay focused. She was admitted to the nursing program in Fall 2013.

. . . I did not want to live off campus because I do not think you get the “Freshman Experience” unless you live on campus and once I found Nursing@Nike, I just felt like that is where I needed to be. . . . (Interview E, pp. 3-4)

Leigh came to the university knowing that she would have to help make this opportunity happen. Although her parents were very supportive of the move and career choice, they were not financially able to pay for everything, at least not the best of everything. She had several choices for places to live on campus but chose Nursing@Nike so she could have the instant classmate connection and study group option. She believed that she needed the peer pressure

influence to work hard, and her parents agreed. She defined the “Freshman Experience” as being independent, living away from home. Leigh believed that she needed to live with other first-year students on campus so that she would stay connected and informed about campus activities and events. For her, it was an immersion experience, moving in with 35 other students she had never met before.

. . . I am not going to study with somebody that never studies. . . .

(Interview E, p. 4)

Like many of the other students, Leigh moved into the community with the idea of getting as much help as possible in getting admitted to the program. It was clear to her that there were several different subgroups, but that did not keep the larger group from working together in study sessions or social events. It was important to her to find that person who had a similar class schedule and study habits so that they could support and encourage each other as they worked through the prerequisite coursework.

. . . the only drama I ever dealt with was with my suitemates because they did not get along. . . . (Interview E, p. 5)

Leigh was not surprised that not everyone got along in the community. She stated that there was one student who made it clear she would not help any other students since that was helping the competition. Although this aggravated Leigh, she found other students to work with who helped her with the collaborative effort she was there for. It was clear to Leigh that the point of the

community was to work together as a team while preparing for admission to the program (*The competing student was not admitted to the program*). Leigh described the challenge of her suitemates not getting along as awful. She and her roommate never really talked to them, but they would hear them arguing or fighting. One of the suitemates finally moved out, which for Leigh was sad because people got along with her, but she just never really made an effort to get along.

. . . but I can't go out every night like they do. . . . (Interview E, p. 6)

Leigh knew that to be competitive for nursing admissions, her academics had to come first. After attending orientation and learning how competitive the program was, she knew that she could be friends with her sorority sisters, but she would not be able to live the same lifestyle and be successful in preparing for nursing. She chose to live in Nursing@Nike with other students who had the same mindset: "I am a freshman and in college and everybody gets to have fun, but my school is always going to come first." One of the important things of living there was that everybody had the same goal as Leigh, and it was easy to talk to a classmate or mentor about a class because they were either going through it with her or had gone through the same thing previously.

. . . it felt like a community because we all could come together when we needed to. . . . (Interview E, p. 7)

Leigh believed the weekend retreat definitely brought the community closer, helping them to discover their likes and dislikes as well as strengths and

weaknesses. Soon after the retreat, the community was studying together in the common room for a biology test, comparing how they did on a practice test. It was those instances when Leigh believed it was definitely a community, but she believed it was strictly for academics. She did not feel like the group socialized on a regular basis other than small groups here and there. Leigh stated that one of the few times she interacted with the community outside of the residence hall was in the classroom and at Association of Pre-Nursing Student meetings.

. . . I mean it gets frustrating but I cannot expect them to stop their life for me. . . . (Interview E, p. 8)

After her first year in the living learning community ended, Leigh moved into her sorority house on campus. The advantages of having lived in Nursing@Nike quickly came clear as she contended with life in the sorority house. She no longer had a nursing roommate but managed to stay focused and continued to be successful in her coursework. She stated that she would often have to loudly ask her sisters to keep the noise down while she was studying or preparing for the TEAS examination. She would wear headphones and ear plugs to block the noise during social events that she would not attend while she was studying for an examination. This was on top of her feelings of sadness for not being able to afford to continue living in Nike and participating in the second-year mentoring program. While she had sisters in her sorority who were nursing students, none of them lived in the sorority house.

. . . I am going to go to college, this is my major, I am not going to let anything stop me. . . . (Interview E, p. 9)

Leigh has always been very goal oriented. During her high school years, she would often have other students in her class who would declare they had no intention of going to college. She joined the pre-medicine club at the school so that she could find other students with the same or similar goals for college. For her it was easier to succeed when she could feed off that kind of energy. She believed that experience made her consider Nursing@Nike more because if the high school club could provide those benefits, then she could only imagine what living with the same type of students would do for her focus and success in classes. This dedication carried over to her interaction with faculty at the university. During the more intense courses, such as anatomy, she would make time to visit her professor twice a week. The professor came to know her by name, which is impressive in a class with 300+ students.

. . . it helped even more because Mary, our resident assistant, was applying for admission to nursing when we were living there. . . you could see how she was anxious about it. . . . (Interview E, p. 9)

Despite her success in high school and her plans for being successful, Leigh was still anxious about being competitive for admission to the nursing program. Leigh stated that despite knowing that the living learning community was about collaboration, there were some who still believed the need to compete. Leigh believed that the interaction she had with the other students,

Mary, and the other second-year students made it easier for her to “keep her act together” and helped her prepare while still having the “freshman experience”. Having that help allowed her to stay focused and keep her grades up where they were needed to be competitive.

. . . the retreat taught you a lot about your character. . . . (Interview E, p. 11)

Although Leigh thought the retreat was a lot of fun and that it was very helpful for getting to know the other students, she also learned where she needed to work on her leadership and teamwork skills. Leigh believed that approaching all things in life with a positive attitude will likely yield more success. For her, the retreat was a character building experience. This was important to her as she believed that as a freshman in college she really did not know who she was and did not believe any of the other community members did either.

Allene

. . . I said “hey why not” because I liked Nike and I was a Nursing major and I said you cannot go wrong might as well. . . . (Interview F, p. 2)

Allene was a minority student who did not allow it to define her. She had a strong relationship with her family, and both of her parents had graduated from college. She did not work during her first year, but she was involved in both the Association of Pre-Nursing Students and with a sorority. She liked the idea of the living learning community because everyone had the same classes, so it was

easy to form study groups. Allene was focused on her goals and became an ROTC student, pursuing both the nursing program and commissioning in the U.S. Army. At the time of the study, she was the president of the Association of Pre-Nursing Students.

. . . some people got really good friendships out of it, and, and they live together now and some people it did kind of the opposite and turned them off to not only the people but nursing in general. . . . (Interview F, p. 2)

Allene had a much different take on the community than the other participants. It may be the same sense of order that the military offers. She believed that having students in the same residence and the same classes had different effects for different students, because whether or not she would see them in the hallway she would have to see them every week in class. Though she stated that this was good, the community was cliquy at times, devolving into high school drama. Allene recalled an instance when suitemates became especially “catty” and were talking about each other while in the same room. The imbalance between males and females also played a role, as several of the female students were attracted to one or two of the males. This caused some issues when some of them began dating.

. . . so it was good that you always know someone in your classes even beyond Nursing@Nike. . . . (Interview F, p. 3)

Allene believed that living as a group with students in the same major was good because they could feed off of each other’s motivation to help keep each

other motivated. She also believed that having the built-in study group was the one thing that made everything else she might have to deal with worth the effort. During her sophomore year, she did not live with anyone from Nursing@Nike, yet she still attended classes with several of her cohort and had study groups with them. She described how they would always walk to class together and sit together in class. They would also go for breakfast, lunch, and dinner or attend the Association of Pre-Nursing Students meetings as a group. Allene also described how some of them would go bowling or just out anywhere to have fun, but that it was rarely a large group.

. . . we all live on the same floor, so it is hard to avoid interaction. . . .

(Interview F, p. 2)

Although Allene would agree that in some residence halls there are suitemates and roommates who do not know each other's names, she believed it was different in Nursing@Nike, not just because of the retreat, but the fact that most of the students were in the same classes, on the same schedule, so they had no choice but to do things together. She described it as not being able to get away from each other due to group study sessions, group dinner times, and going to class together.

. . . honestly I was kind of glad to get out just because of the people. . . .

(Interview F, p. 5)

Allene had no problem saying that she liked living in the community for the academic support, but that she didn't have the greatest time being around the

other students. She stated that over the course of the academic year, the tension and resentment built up to take a toll on the relationships.

Though Allene believed that she and her roommate got along well, they did not get along with their suitemates. In addition, two roommates across the hall were also split among the four of them; thus, there was tension in both suites. She believed that this experience taught her how to live with people who she did not know and how to get through it when things were not perfect. She learned to ignore the drama and focus on her studies. She indicated she now felt confident that she can live with whomever she needs to, and that this will likely help her during her time in the military.

. . . if we could do something to be able to meet once a week in the 2nd semester. . . . (Interview F, p. 6)

Despite having the challenges with her suitemates and some of the drama that went on, Allene added that she believed it would have been good for the community if the students had a common course to take each semester of the program. She believes the group started out strong, but once there was not a reason for them to meet as a group once a week, the relationships started to break down, allowing the cliques to grow and change the community dynamic.

Susan

. . . I thought it might be an easier way to make connections with people definitely because you have someone with similar interests. . . . (Interview G, p. 2)

Susan presented herself as the rebel of the group. She was quick to talk about her boyfriend, who was a tattoo and piercing artist. His talent was evident based on her appearance. She made it clear that she did not have a good relationship with her family, and that she considered her coworkers her real family, despite poor working conditions. At least one of her parents was college educated, and she made clear she was not a first generation college student. Although she stated that moving into Nursing@Nike was a good decision, she was the only student who participated in the study who thought the community members were in active competition with each other. Susan did not work during her first semester but did work off campus starting the second semester. She was not involved on campus except for events involving Nursing@Nike. Susan stated that when she signed up for Nursing@Nike she did not necessarily know what it was, but since it was nursing, she thought it would be her best choice.

. . . It (the community) developed like a high school. . . . (Interview G, p. 2)

For Susan, living in Nursing@Nike was an option, but if she did not get into it, it would have been “no big deal.” She believed that the community was really just a lot of different groups, a lot of different cliques and a lot of them did not like each other. She believed that because the hallway was split with four

rooms on one side and the rest of the rooms on the other, that nobody hung out with the four separate rooms, and the two sides each formed their own group.

For Susan, location was the key to the groups. She believed that since her room was close to the boys' room, they frequently hung out with them. Whichever room was closest would determine who spent time together. Additionally, she believed that there were religious and racial reasons why people did not spend time together, and if she spent time with another group, her group ended up getting really mad at her.

. . . Even within my group there was dividing lines. . . over high school drama. So that was interesting. . . . (Interview G, p. 3)

According to Susan, other students complained all the time, mostly to the resident assistant. She stated that towards the end of the first semester, some of the students were trying to get room changes. Mary, the resident assistant, tried to have everyone talk through the issues, but nobody wanted to talk; they just wanted to make this drastic move instead. She believed that after the winter break, there were clear dividing lines between groups that were impossible to ignore. During this process, Susan indicated that life would get stressful even though she tried to keep herself at a distance because she was not involved in the issue. Though she claimed that she did not care about who she socialized with, who other people socialized with, or who was "hooking up" with who, she believed that she was always pulled back into the drama. She said that she

never had conflicts with anybody and stayed very neutral because it was easier than having to choose sides.

. . . it did not necessarily have value. . . so it was not necessarily important. . . . (Interview G, p. 4)

Though Susan did not believe there was any value to the program having a sense of community, she did get use from learning how other students study, seeing how important the program was to them or seeing if they really wanted to become a nurse or if they just thought it sounded good. She admitted that the program helped with studying the first year, mostly because she did not know how to study and had never studied through high school. It was also helpful if she was sick, because someone would have notes from class as they all had the same classes.

. . . people did not want other people getting in our territory; the first floor was ours. . . . (Interview G, p. 4)

When other students from other parts of the residence hall would spend time in their community room, Susan believed that it upset the Nursing@Nike residents. For example, she stated if the community room was full of students from other floors watching TV, and they wanted to study for a test, the community members would come together and ask the other students to leave so they could work. Yet, if there was a conflict within the group, they were not able to resolve it on their own.

. . . because there would be less competition, because you are already in the program. . . . (Interview G, p. 6)

After her first year in Nursing@Nike came to an end, Susan moved off campus into one of the affiliated housing apartment complexes. When asked how she thought they compared, she stated that her biggest challenge was lack of convenience, especially with campus resources. She also talked about the feelings she had concerning safety and the lack of security in being off campus. Despite these challenges and that she does not have the same social and study options with her new neighbors, Susan stated that she would stay in her current location even if offered space in a new community on campus. She made it clear she prefers the anonymity of her current residence over the challenges she faced in the living learning community. However, when asked if she were admitted to the nursing program if she would live with her nursing coalition cohort, she said “Yes,” indicating that everyone would be willing to help each other and she believed there would be no competition.

. . . he would just be like “just figure it out, figure it out, you can figure it out on your own”. . . . (Interview G, p. 7)

Susan talked about the difficulty she had with a professor as well. She would go to her chemistry professor’s office hours, but did not feel as if she was given any help. She mentioned that he was difficult to understand due to an accent, so she would go to office hours to clarify what was expected. She believed that it was a waste of time, as the professor would not provide any more

information than what was offered in class, telling her to review her notes and figure it out. However, this was the only professor that she admitted having sought out for extra help. When asked if the living learning community had any benefit for her as a student, she talked about getting tips for studying and other useful information but stated that the program really had no benefit to her.

. . . you definitely feel like you are losing a connection with a bunch of people. . . . (Interview G, p. 8)

Despite the drama and challenges that Susan lived with in Nursing@Nike, she chose to live with three of her friends from the community when she moved out of the community. She also stated that it felt weird moving out and leaving everyone behind, even though she believed that she got along with 10 of the 36 members of the community. While she said that she occasionally socializes with some of the students, she indicated she was not sure if she would continue to pursue nursing as a career. Susan believed the community helped her to learn how to build connections with other people, especially since in this case she lived in a hall with them and they all shared at least one class. She stated that had she lived in any other residence hall, she would likely never have met anyone or bothered to talk to them.

. . . they all kind of found each other within that weekend. . . . (Interview G, p. 8)

When asked what she would like to discuss about the program, Susan took the time to discuss the weekend retreat. She believed that the retreat

helped to form a lot of the subgroups that developed in the community. She stated that the interactions that happened during the weekend allowed the students to find each other, the good and the bad; students with similar personalities were able to connect; those who were more outgoing were able to connect, just as the quiet people or the very religious people. She also mentioned that it was clear who the students were who did not want to do anything because they were drama queens and the students who would do this because they had to and make it fun. She said that by the end of the weekend, she had realized that she had nothing in common with the other students except nursing, and she really had no reason to talk to those students ever again. From that point forward, Susan did her best to stay neutral with the other 35 members of the community; never being overly nice, but not being unfriendly. Despite this, when asked to participate in a group interview, she made it clear that her participation would depend on who else participated in the group interview.

Cameron

. . . I think I would have changed my major if I didn't live in Nursing@Nike my freshman year. . . . (Interview H, p. 1)

Cameron is one of four male students who participated in the second year of the program. At least one of his parents had a college degree. Cameron did not work during his time in the living learning community; however, he was heavily involved in an off-campus activity, a drill team. He stated that he spent

about 26 hours a week with the drill team, effectively leaving him no time to participate in any Nursing@Nike events, other than classes. He had a good relationship with his family, and mentioned that his mother pushed him to live on campus and specifically in the Nursing@Nike community. She wanted him to have the full college experience, yet he spent a lot of time off campus. Cameron had some improvements to make in his GPA and prerequisites before he would be eligible to apply for admission to the nursing program.

. . . it was amazing. . . . (Interview H, p. 2)

Cameron believed that he made 35 friends in the program and said he still stays in contact with most of them. He also stated that he spent a lot of time going places with his friends, including places to eat and to study, even just hanging out in the residence hallway. When he talked about the benefit of living in the community, it was the fact that all of the students were “in the same boat” together, and that everyone was going through the same things, all helping each other. He believed it was good to have people with the same interest, same worries, same concerns, and same classes. Despite all of these good things, he did state that he had the occasional personality conflict, but nothing serious or lasting. He believed that there was no way 36 students could live together for a year and not have any conflict.

. . . it was things like that that got me through the program. . . . (Interview H, p. 3)

Cameron believed that the common bond of the desire for nursing was what made the program “awesome” and worth doing. The fact that all knew what each student was going through and were in the same classes made him feel like he was part of something special. He stated that if he had been living with random roommates with different majors, it would have been difficult. By going through the living learning program and the prerequisites with similar students, he believed that it was less stressful. He remembered the opportunity the community had to take a tour of the nursing classrooms and laboratories and said that experience motivated him more than anything else to be successful in his pursuit of nursing admission.

. . . I do not think I could have done it, without the community. . . .

(Interview H, p. 4)

At the end of the year, Cameron moved back home for six months and after that moved into his own apartment. He stated that it was traumatizing when he moved out of the community, that it was “weird,” like everything that he had made connections with was gone. He said that he sees a few of his community friends here and there and on Facebook, but does not get to see them every day. He indicated that he believes the program helped him with perspective for the nursing program, what the nursing program is about, and the realization that it was the right major for him.

Kayla

. . . maybe it wasn't what I was expecting initially but it was a good decision. . . . (Interview I, p. 1)

Kayla was the over-achiever of the group, and was about to start her second year of the nursing program when she was interviewed. Both of her parents attended college, and encouraged her to participate in the program so that she would have every advantage possible for admission to the nursing program. She believed it was a good choice because she was able to make the right friends, those who were as passionate as she was for nursing and getting admitted. She had a good relationship with her parents, but had a difficult relationship with her much older brothers. She described them as being very competitive. Though they were very supportive of her, they wanted much more for her than just being a nurse. Kayla was fortunate to only work when she wanted to, so she had plenty of time to focus on her coursework and getting involved on campus. She was (and is) an Honor's College student, involved with the LEAD Scholars program, as well as participating in the Association for Pre-Nursing Students.

. . . our first year had a lot of kookiness to it. . . . (Interview I, p. 2)

Like the others, Kayla came straight from high school to the university. She participated in a cohort group in high school, which led her to believe that doing the same in college would help her be more successful than trying to "go it alone." She described herself as really shy, and her demeanor in the classroom

the first semester supported that description. As a result, she believed there were different cliques forming, but she was not confident enough to try and join in with any of them. She believed there was a lack of unity in the first year, but during her second year she served as a mentor for the second Nursing@Nike cohort and described a sense of unity and cohesiveness with that group. Looking back, she indicated that it may have been her shyness that kept her from speaking up or joining in the different groups. She believed the second-year resident assistants, both for the new first-year group and for the second-year group acted more as a focus point and kept the communities together.

. . . it was like the group development like went from the performing to norming. . . . (Interview I, p. 3)

As a mentor for the second cohort, Kayla observed a different dynamic than she experienced in the first year with her cohort. She believed they were more cohesive, helping each other with studying, and she believed this was also true for the rest of her second-year cohort who acted as mentors. Interestingly, she described the interaction in terms of the theoretical framework of this study, Tuckman (1965). Kayla described living in the community as a good experience, and said it gave her and the other students an advantage in having close contact with their advisor every week, reminding them of what they need to do in order to be ready to apply and submit a competitive application. Additionally, she indicated having other students with the same goals and determination was also helpful, both for support and for help when studying for examinations.

. . . did he purposely put us with someone with a really different personality? (Interview I, p. 4)

Despite having a very positive outlook about the program and the impact it had on her academically and socially, Kayla had what many students would describe as “the” horrible roommate situation. She described herself as a people pleaser, so it was hard for her to comprehend how she could not have a good relationship with her roommate. Her suitemates were close friends and avoided the tension between Kayla and her roommate, leaving her with few options for making it through the year, other than suffering through the situation, which was only further complicated by her shyness. The students completed a personality questionnaire, and Kayla and her roommate were exact opposites. The situation became tense as the end of the year approached and her roommate began counting the days until she could move, constantly reminding Kayla that she did not like her and could not wait to get away from her. Kayla was often driven to tears by what she perceived to be hateful comments that had no justification. This was the first time Kayla had been in this type of situation, and counted it as a great learning experience, despite how difficult it was. What made it more difficult was that she thought she and her roommate started out as good friends, going out together, and spending a lot of time together.

. . . just when you live with someone, the first time you are living out on your own, and you don't realize the different things. . . . (Interview I, p. 7)

In discussing her roommate, Kayla struggled to place any of the blame on her roommate or to say anything disparaging about her. She suggested that the issue was she was too shy and failed to reach out to try and solve the problem when it first started. When asked if there were differences in academic abilities or other reasons for the behavior, she indicated that was a possibility, but did not know or did not want to say. She described her roommate as very competitive, having been a cheerleader in high school, and a person who liked being the center of attention. She also stated that the roommate had very little support from her family and often discussed difficulties she had with her parents having divorced. She indicated she wished her roommate had asked for help with her coursework or advice, so that they could have opened up and talked about the feelings, but she did not know how to start that kind of conversation.

. . . you hear about so many people who go to college and they change their major like they change their clothes. . . . (Interview I, p. 7)

Kayla was determined that she would not be one of those students who had no idea what they were doing in college. She wanted to have a firm grasp of what she wanted to do and to be around other students with that same mindset. She stated that the community was the kind of place that had some boundaries, but the students living there would lend a hand if someone needed help. She indicated that just the fact that the students had that one thing in common, a common goal with a community, provided a sense of stability. Her only regret was not working on building more relationships. She said that she should have

worked on building more friendships and gotten more involved with the other students who had similar personalities. She ended up living with them in the second year, and wondered how much better her first year could have been if she had reached out to them earlier.

. . . I don't want to go back to the cliquy thing but I feel like there were definitely groups. . . . (Interview I, p. 8)

Kayla described her experience during the first year as an outsider. She stated that there were different groups that would socialize together, but not the whole community. She stated that with that large of a group it would be hard to coordinate any activity, but in the next breath mentioned how the resident assistant in the second year was able to do just that. She also admitted that she did not do that much in her first year because she spent a lot of time in Lead Scholars and Honors College activities. She stated that she made the connections in her second year that she should have made in her first year, so she believed that she was a step behind everyone else with the “forming and norming.” Yet it was still better than living outside the community. She noted that her friends who lived in other residence halls lacked the academic focus that was needed to truly prepare for admission to the nursing program. Despite all of the challenges that she had, she stated that she would have made the same decision as it gave her the best chance at being prepared to apply to the nursing program.

. . . I would go to every single SI (Supplemental Instruction) SARC (Student Academic Resource Center) offered. . . . (Interview I, p. 10)

Kayla presented herself as a very focused student, so it was no surprise to learn that she visited her professors often and attended any extra study session she possibly could. She stated that she would make specific appointments with her professors if she did poorly on any examination so that she could plan an amazing comeback to salvage her grade in the class. She believed the living learning community kept her from being “discombobulated” due to the availability of the nursing advisor and other campus resources. She described the personal relationship that she believed she had with her advisor as making her first two years much less stressful than she anticipated prior to arriving at the university. Kayla described leaving the community the first year as a very awkward experience due to the challenges she had with her roommate; however, her second year was a very sad experience as one of the four roommates moved back home and only two of the four started the nursing program. The four of them went from being constant companions to having no interaction at all in the span of a few days. Fortunately for Kayla, during the second semester of the first year, one of her three second-year roommates asked her if she wanted to live with her, sparing her the difficulty of looking for a roommate and place to live during her second year.

. . . picture yourself here two years from now, and then say like how are you going to get here in two years? (Interview I, p. 14)

Kayla indicated that she believed the two years she spent in Nursing@Nike helped her grow significantly as a person, but most importantly, it showed her how important communication skills are to be successful in any endeavor. Living in the community also helped her with staying on track for nursing, and she definitely had some obstacles academically. She was a top student in high school, but on her first examination in biology, she earned a C, which prompted her fellow community members to invite her to go to SI sessions at the Student Academic Resource Center.

She suggested that having the members of the community come to the College of Nursing to tour the classrooms and laboratories was also a great motivator, and should be presented in a way to make the students think about how important their career choice is and what they are going to have to do to successfully prepare for admission to the program.

Hallie

. . . other people in the program did not know it existed and they were like "oh if I had known that was there it would be really cool". . . (Interview J, p. 1)

Hallie was in the first cohort and, like Kayla, was about to start her second year in the nursing program at the time of her interview. She had a very quiet personality, much like Kayla, but was more reserved. She described her relationship with her family as fine, and said that both of her parents had

bachelor's degrees. She did not work for income while she was in the program, but she was involved on campus, playing the snare drum in the Marching Knights Band which practiced three times a week. She believed that her time with the band had a big impact on her ability to form relationships in the community due to the amount of involvement she had with the band. She chose to live in the Nursing@Nike living learning community so she would not have a randomly assigned roommate, but rather someone who at least had a similar interest in career.

. . . I did not have as many common classes with the group because I was in honors and had AP credits and then it was kind of cliquey. . . .

(Interview J, p. 2)

Hallie stated she did not know if the group formed into a community. She knew a lot of the students had classes together, and they had study groups, and she thought that was really great for them. Because she did not have a lot of classes with them and due to her time commitment with the band, she believed that it tended to be cliquey. The only time she believed they were all together was for the student success class. She also remembered a lot of students changing their major and researching their new careers. Though she defined the community as cliquey, at the same time she did not feel that people were mean to each other. Because there were two halves to the hallway, she did not feel as if they saw each other that much, so only the people who lived together really became close friends. Hallie stated that she spent time socializing with her three

suitemates and two other girls in her hallway. She remembers some of the girls in the other half of the hallway who were really good friends, would go out all the time, and just had different interests. While she did not experience any of the “high school drama,” she remembers other students in the community who would complain about roommate drama, and some students being mean.

. . . we were scared freshman and we did not have any other friends coming into college. . .so it was nice that we were all together. . . .

(Interview J, p. 3)

Hallie did not know any other students at the university when she arrived, let alone anyone in the community. Despite her time away from the community for band practice and rehearsals, she believed that having the chance to live with everyone in the same major and take classes together was very valuable experience. The fact that everyone started with the same goals and for the first semester worked to help each other stay on track was important to her. She stated that she was able to form strong bonds with two of her roommates during the first year, and added Kayla to that group in the second year. Of the four suitemates, only Hallie and Kayla were admitted and started the nursing program together.

. . . I would say that we were all friends; some of us better friends than others. . . . (Interview J, p. 3)

Hallie explained that the fact that the community members all knew each other, at least by name, was important. She talked about friends of hers in the

band who would tell her they had never spoken to their suitemates and barely knew their roommates. She believed that the four students in her room were best buddies, so it was strange to her that other students living elsewhere did not know their suitemates, or other students in the hallway who lived next door to them.

. . . there were a couple rooms on the floor that were designated “We are going to hang out, everyone go to this room”. . . . (Interview J, p. 3)

Hallie remembered socializing with other members of the community occasionally. The resident assistant (RA) held only one social event, despite being required to have several events throughout the academic year. She stated that during the second year, when she lived in the Nike Apartments and participated in the mentoring program, the RA was a lot better, and she had more events for the students, and it was more fun. She was not able to participate in most of the “family” dinners that Mary described because most of the time she was at band practice, but she was invited and attended a few times. Hallie stated that occasionally she would go out to dinner with other members of the community but remembers that it was a very boring life since most of the time she was either practicing or studying.

. . . it definitely helped make transition into college a lot easier. . . .

(Interview J, p. 5)

Hallie indicated that she believed the living learning community helped her with transitioning into life at the university, but that it also helped her prepare for

admission to the nursing program. Being in the community she learned what to expect as she was preparing and completing her coursework. However, she was not sure how much the program helped her academically. When it was time for her to move out of the community, she believed her excitement about moving into an apartment and having a private bedroom helped her overcome the bittersweet feeling she had about leaving all but 10 of the community behind, as only 11 students moved into the apartments for the mentoring program. Hallie said she has managed to stay in touch with four of her close friends from the first year, even though they left UCF for a different institution, and that she visits with them whenever they are in town.

Aiden

. . . I wanted to be a nurse for a really long time, and so anything that could help me get there I wanted to take advantage of it. . . . (Interview K, p. 2)

Aiden was the class clown of the second cohort. He is about to start the concurrent nursing program that blends the university program with a program at the local state college. He was not competitive enough to get into the Basic BSN program at the university. Both of his parents have college degrees and he enjoys strong family support from his parents and siblings. He worked part time as a recreational assistant on campus with intramural sports as a referee for various games. Aiden states that working with intramural sports did not affect his

involvement in the community; however it did keep him from getting involved in other activities on campus.

Aiden was convinced that living with and going to class with students who wanted the same career would help him be better prepared to apply to the nursing program. As a child Aiden overcame a serious life-threatening disease, and he attributes his desire to be a nurse to the care of the nurses that comforted him during his time in the hospital.

. . . in the beginning we all started off as one big group and then it started breaking up into little tiny groups. . . . (Interview K, p. 2)

Aiden stated that he believes the physical or geographical layout of the residence hall led to some of the community subdividing. He discussed how he socialized with the students in the room next to his and across from him, but really did not have much to do with the students who lived in the smaller part of the hall that was separated from the main hallway. He believed that this made the community more personable, and that it would have been too hard to have a personal relationship with all 36 students. Despite the fact that he believed it was natural to make better friends with some than others, he stated it was nice to be able to see anyone from the community anytime on campus or in class and be able to sit next to them without it being awkward. He would consider them all friends, but if he was going out with a group to do something fun, it would be with the small group that he mostly socialized with in the rooms close to his. He also mentioned that if the teambuilding retreat weekend could have occurred earlier in

the semester, it would have had more of an effect, because he believed like groups were already established by then.

. . . the first semester was really good, but the second semester everything just kind of died off. . . . (Interview K, p. 3)

Similar to what several others stated, Aiden believed that not having a common class in the second semester to keep everyone connected had an effect on the community. He stated that since students did not see each other several times a week in class, schedules started to diverge in different directions, and there was no common time for everyone to get together. However, he still believed that the entire year was beneficial. In fact, he stated that because there were so many people in the community to socialize with, it made it hard to socialize with people outside of the community. Aiden had only met one of the members of the community before students moved in and that was purely by chance.

. . . I didn't feel like I had any "high school drama". . . . (Interview K, p. 3)

Aiden mentioned that he could see where some members of the community would say there was "high school drama." However, he stated that he personally did not get involved in any of those issues. He remembered that two of his roommates had relationship problems with their girlfriends who lived in the community. Although he was never directly involved, he believed that he knew about all of the problems that happened on the floor, including the

roommate conflicts, simply because everybody in the community knew what was going on.

. . . when I would talk to friends they would be say “Oh, this is what I just heard--do not tell anyone else though”. . . . (Interview K, p. 4)

Aiden stated that while he recognized that everyone on the floor had to compete for admission to the nursing program, he believed that he would use that competition to push himself to do better, since the better other students would do, the better he would need to do to stay competitive. He also stated that he recognized it was just human nature to be competitive, so there was no way to avoid it. In fact he only had one experience where another member of the community refused to help him, as she did not want to help her competition.

. . . I think the center of our community was basically our SLS class; that is what it was pretty much centered upon. . . . (Interview K, p. 5)

Aiden believed that living in the community was good because the other students understood his problems and worries and could help him out. If he did have questions or wanted to find out something, other students would be there to help and support him. He discussed having a friend outside of the community who was also pursuing nursing, a friend who was always asking him for information because as a community member he likely already knew about it. Aiden believed that the center of the community experience was the SLS student success course and that everything grew from there. Because of the class, the students in the community would get together twice a week and the class was

more social even though it was an education class, but it gave them a chance to grow as a community. Aiden said that within just a month or so, the students started using the common room as a study room, posting sheets of paper for biology or chemistry tests or anything else similar and everyone would write notes to each other. Other students in different areas of the residence hall knew that it was a study room, not so much a social room. Aiden believed that these types of activities were what made the community a community built around their scholarship more than their social aspects. He said that the community did participate in social activities such as going to the on-campus cafeteria, the Marketplace, social parties, and even to the theme parks in Orlando, but that their academics always came first.

. . . the ability to find your different groups that you want to hang out with; basically right from that little pool (the Nursing@Nike community). . .

(Interview K, p. 6)

After his year in Nursing@Nike was over, Aiden applied for and was selected to be a resident assistant. He was assigned to a regular residence hall without a living learning community. He stated that most of his residents did not even know each other. He indicated that his residents do eventually form close friendships with people, and they do end up finding people that are like them, but when he did room checks, he saw the same people in the same rooms, including students that did not live on his floor; and groups were of four or five people, never a big group as was the case in the living learning community. Aiden said

he thought it is human nature to break down into smaller groups, to want to hang out with just a few people at a time instead of trying to hang out all of 36 students together at the same time.

. . . I do not think it did. I would hope it did not. I don't think it changed me. . . . (Interview K, p. 9)

Aiden had a very strong personality, and was very confident that he knows who he is, more than most students his age. Because he was able to meet a many people during that year, he claimed that it was worth it. He indicated that he still socializes with some of the students from his Nursing@Nike cohort, the ones with whom he feels it is worth it to make an effort to keep the relationship. He stated that it was easy to hang out with the residents of Nursing@Nike, that it was almost effortless. Currently, he has to physically travel to someone's place if he is going to socialize with them. But, for better or for worse, he indicated that he did not feel as if the community had a significant impact on him. He believed that whoever you chose to associate with, "they seem to change you, but if you only associate with people like you, then you do not change that much." He believed that he did not grow close enough to anyone in Nursing@Nike to really to want to change for good or bad. It was never that strong a relationship, in that community, and he did not feel like it had that impact.

Amanda

. . . I didn't know anyone; I didn't know anyone at UCF, let alone the community (Nursing@Nike). . . . (Interview L, p. 3)

Amanda was probably the most determined student from the Nursing@Nike community. Although both of her parents have college degrees, including one with a doctorate, she had to make everything at UCF work for her in order to stay and earn her degree. She had what she described as strong relationships with her parents and siblings, yet each relationship was unique in its own way. She worked part-time on campus in one of the cafeterias, with most of her working hours being late at night. She was involved with her church group and the Association of Pre-Nursing Students, but that was all she had time for after her studies and her employment. Her determination paid off, and she started the nursing program in Fall 2013. She stated that she has made three of the best friends she has ever had: Alizabeth, Emily, and Jan. Amanda chose to live in the community for the built-in study groups and to be able to meet new people because she came to UCF without any friends or family. She indicated that she expects that the four of them will continue living together until they separate for jobs or marriage.

. . . having that one class together, and having several classes that are in common, it was easier to talk to them and get to know them better. . . .

(Interview L, p. 2)

Amanda participated in a health academy during her four years of high school, taking the same classes with the same students and they had the same common goal: to be in the health field. She stated that her experience in the academy led her to believe that participating in Nursing@Nike would be familiar and make her transition to a large university easier and less stressful. She indicated that having a community with common goals and students that she was almost forced to get to know was a good setting, and it was easier to get to know people than just trying to meet them in class or walking around campus. Amanda talked about the fact that she did hear about the “high school drama,” but she did not experience it. She experienced it in her high school academy and believes that her experience at the university was nothing like the high school experience.

Other than speaking to her future roommate on Facebook to coordinate what they were bringing to the university to use in their room in the residence hall, Amanda did not know anyone at UCF or in the living learning community prior to moving in day. She remembered the first day of class, that everyone was very quiet, and that it was that way for a while.

. . . we definitely became a community after that. . . . (Interview L, p. 3)

As Amanda remembered it, the group began to operate as a community once the weekend teambuilding retreat was completed. She talked about how her first impression of one of the other students was of being opinionated and judgmental. But during the retreat, she discovered that the student was the most

encouraging and supportive person in the community. She found out that the student wanted to hear what the other students had to say and then responded well to it, even if there was a disagreement. Because of this, she believed that the retreat taught her not to judge people by the way they look, or by the way they might present themselves. Another student was very quiet and withdrawn, but during the retreat, the student opened up to the others and participated in all of the activities. Despite this, Amanda and her roommates spent more time with each other and less with the rest of the community. Their religious values likely played a part in that choice, as they preferred to stay in the community and study, with a quick break for frozen yogurt rather than going to a party or nightclub. Amanda also mentioned that the community had value in the classroom as well. She believed she was more comfortable sitting in class with members of the community after the retreat, whereas before she had always sat alone.

. . . I just cannot imagine one of you not being there. . . . (Interview L, p. 5)

Amanda described her small group as a family within a family. One of the other members of the community became so accustomed to seeing the four of them together that she told them she could not imagine running into any of them alone or without all four being present. She believed each of them brought a certain thing to the table that allowed them to be a natural group, and though they have never had serious fights, they have had occasional disagreements. She talked about how Alizabeth and Jan were wonderful, encouraging and

supporting; about how Emily had that right amount of sarcasm that makes life more interesting. She also described Emily as the one they could always count on to make sure they understood the topic of the day in the classroom, simply because of her ability to think and see things differently than the rest of the group. When Amanda was growing up she stated that she believed in “family first, family first, family first,” but that she has since gone to her friends before her family, which she described as okay. She commented that the four friends routinely travel to each other’s homes for special occasions and holidays. At one point, one was dating the brother of one of the other three.

. . . there were times when I thought “should I even be doing this?”. . . .

(Interview L, p. 6)

According to Amanda, there was not the usual amount of competitiveness in the community that she would see with nursing students who were not in the program. However, she stated it was often difficult to hear about the better grades or TEAS scores that some of the others students had earned. She described this as further motivation to work harder and do better. Once the year was over and Amanda and her roommates and four other Nursing@Nike students moved into the Nike apartments, they found that it offered some variety to be around students pursuing other majors. She stated that she still had seven other nursing students to study with and to keep each other motivated to do well. Amanda recalled that in both her first and second years in the community, she

never had a problem finding someone in the community to help her if she was having a hard time understanding a concept in class.

. . . I did go to them (professors) a lot my first semester. . . . (Interview L, p. 7)

Amanda was quick to point out that she was never shy about asking for help if it is needed. During the SLS class, a learning specialist came to the class to talk about learning styles, how to study for a test, and how to take the test. She stated that over the course of her first two years, she had several appointments with him to make sure she was using the best skills and tools possible. Additionally, she talked about meeting with several other professors, including those for biology, statistics, chemistry, and history. She stated she would share her notes, asking if she was focusing on the right topics while studying for examinations. This was suggested repeatedly to all the students in the community during their first semester.

. . . I just have a lot on my plate and I try to do one thing at a time. . . .
(Interview L, p. 8)

Amanda stated that she was not sure whether the community helped her become more or less dependent. She indicated that she is more confident when she has the opportunity to speak with her advisor to make sure she is on track, and that part of the community certainly helped her. She talked about how her roommates have high energy and want to “go” all the time, whether it is for academic or social reasons. In her first year, she stated that it was good to have

a resident assistant who was more proactive, making sure the students were aware of their responsibilities and what they needed to accomplish. During her second year, she said her resident assistant has helped her become more independent, that her resident assistant only answers questions if asked, but does not come looking for students. She also discussed the fact that being a mentor for the new cohort helped with her confidence, since the cohort members saw her as the expert and expected her to answer all of their questions.

. . . I don't really want to do this, I don't really want to be here, this is stupid. . . . (Interview L, p. 10)

Amanda had a hard time with students who were not motivated to fully participate in the community. She talked about how much she and her roommates learned about being a team at the retreat and that she believed it would have been better if everyone had been as involved as they were. She felt like they learned how to not judge people, how they learned, and how to work with people who were different from them. Though she indicated she did not consider herself a leader, she believed that now if she needed to be a leader, she would be able to step up to it.

Summary

This chapter presented the relationships and demographics of the research participants as well as some introductory information related to participants' pursuit of admissions to the nursing program. The chapter offered

the individual participant descriptions and narratives of their lived experiences. Their stories were presented through brief narratives using the very words of each participant, as well as reflections of the researcher. Chapter 5 contains descriptions of the themes which emerged during participant interviews.

CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter contains a discussion of the thematic findings as they relate to the conceptual framework, the literature reviewed for the study, and each of the research questions. Two research questions were designed to provide a framework through which the lived experiences of nursing students who live in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community and their pursuit of admission to the nursing program could be explored. The two research questions were designed according to Tuckman's Model for Stages of Group Development.

The data collected from the 12 participants were gathered through semi-structured interviews, deep researcher reflection, member checking, and field notes. The process produced rich descriptions from the participants about their experiences. The questions were also instrumental in enabling a vivid portrait of their lived experiences in trying to gain admission to the Bachelor of Science nursing program. The emergent themes provided a distinctive perspective of nursing students as they faced competition among each other and with other students in the pursuit of attaining a nursing degree.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to elaborately describe the experiences of nursing students and the nursing program. Once all the data were analyzed, several themes emerged. These themes are discussed in this

chapter in significant detail in relation to the accompanying connected narratives of the participants. The emergent themes identified were as follows:

1. Academic and social support groups
2. Social glue
3. Academic prioritization
4. Personal development

Thematic Generation

After all participant interviews were completed, I analyzed, reflected upon, and triangulated the collected data. van Manen's (1990) six critical research activities were used to generate the relevant themes. I also developed a thematic content matrix (Table 10) to help with the data examination process. This tool allowed me to begin identifying preliminary categories and issues that originated from the multiple data sources (Creswell, 2009). On numerous occasions, I revisited the original interview transcripts, audio recordings, member check statements, and observational notes to thoroughly explore participant words in depth and to capture the true essence and meaning of their stories. I then consolidated those thematic findings into smaller groups of similar items and discovered four groups of thematic content that developed into the four themes.

Table 10

Thematic Content Matrix

| Categories and Issues | Aiden | Alizabeth | Allene | Cameron | Jan | Amanda | Kayla | Leigh | Hallie | Emily | Mary | Susan |
|---|-------|-----------|--------|---------|-----|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|------|-------|
| No fear asking for help | | | | | x | x | x | x | | | x | |
| Support groups | | x | x | | | | | x | x | | x | |
| Surrounded by similar students | x | x | x | | x | | x | x | x | x | x | |
| Academics came first | | x | | | x | x | | x | | x | x | |
| Powerful social bonds | | x | | | x | x | x | | | x | x | |
| Quick ride to responsibility | | x | x | | | | x | x | | x | x | |
| Learn to communicate and be assertive | | | | | | | x | | | | | |
| Leaving home behind | | x | | | x | | | | x | | | |
| Extracurricular activities were a distraction | | x | | x | | x | x | x | x | | x | |
| Previous cohort experience | x | x | x | | | x | x | | | x | x | |
| One big new family | | x | | | x | x | | | | x | x | |
| Drama/Cliques | x | | | | | | x | | | | x | x |
| Study groups | x | x | x | | x | | | x | | x | | x |
| Atmosphere of support | x | x | | | x | | | | | x | x | |
| Empathy of goals | x | | | x | x | | x | | | | x | |
| Academic cooperation | | x | | | | | x | x | | x | x | x |
| SLS/Retreat | x | x | | | x | x | | x | | x | | x |
| Immersion experience | x | x | | | x | x | x | x | | x | x | |
| Brought order to chaos | | | | x | | | | | | | | x |

Discussion of Thematic Findings

Table 11 summarizes the relationships between the emergent themes and the research questions of this study. Research Question 1 was answered via the themes of academic and social support groups, and social glue. Research Question 2 was addressed by the themes of academic prioritization, social glue, and personal development. The theme of social glue overlapped across both research questions.

Table 11

Relationship of Research Questions to Emergent Themes

| Research Questions | Emergent Themes |
|--|--|
| 3. How do Nursing@Nike students make sense of their experiences with the community? | Academic and social support groups; social glue |
| 4. How did membership in the community impact the progress of the Nursing@Nike students beyond the first year? | Academic prioritization; social glue; personal development |

Theme 1: Academic and Social Support Groups

How do nursing students make sense of their experience within the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community? Research Question 1 was designed to explore and uncover themes that might emerge from the perspective of the members of the living learning community about their experiences while living in

the community. Two themes emerged which collectively provided a rich response to this question: (a) support groups and (b) social glue.

Peer support and collaboration are essential in the development of the community. According to Tuckman (1990) the group must go through both the storming and norming stages in order to have a chance to perform. This group was formed by random selection of First-Time-in-College (FTIC) students who selected this living learning community as their preferred choice for on-campus housing. The goal of the group was determined before the group was even chosen, so these students were at a disadvantage in not being able to determine the purpose and goals of the community. There were initially 32 applicants for the community in the first year, and 44 applicants in the second year. All 32 from the first year were selected. Of the 44 applicants in the second year, 36 were randomly chosen. Of those 68 students, 12 volunteered to participate in interviews for this study. None of the participants were living in the community during the time of the study. They were all sophomores and juniors.

The first interview was with Susan. Over the course of the interview, I became concerned that I was going to learn that the community had not been quite as successful as I had originally believed. As it turned out, the truth was somewhere in the middle. Susan was very open and honest and was quick to point out that she experienced a lot of drama in the community, similar to what she had seen in her high school years. She also shared that her family relationships were not as supportive as she would have liked.

. . . interesting, me and my mom were distant most of the time, and then for a little while we kind of get close again, most of the time we distance each other. And then. . . with like I guess my family is the one I make, the ones I made here at work. I hang out with them 80 hours a week and it sucks most of the time, but we are like a family. . . . (Interview G, p. 1)

As the interviews progressed, it became clear that not everyone shared these same perceptions. Though there was drama, mostly between roommates, it was not community wide. The majority of Tuckman's "storming" (1990) happened between roommates, not among larger factions within the community. Of the 12 participants, Kayla probably experienced more drama than any of the others. At one point in her first year, she genuinely believed that her roommate hated her.

. . . I'm not sure if our personalities just didn't mesh up at all or like if I wasn't like, if I didn't communicate enough with her at first because she just, she didn't like me. . . she was kind of like opposite. . . . (Interview I, p. 4)

Kayla struggled with the social aspects of the community from the very beginning. A bright and passionate student, she knew what she had to do in order to be eligible and competitive for admission to nursing but not necessarily how to go about making friends along the way. Once she ran into someone who did not like her, for no obvious reason, she was in a situation in which she had no experience with how to change the dynamic of the relationship. It simply became

a waiting game for both students to get to the end of the first year. Interestingly enough, other students who had similar issues chose to ask for a change in roommates, but these two did not.

Despite not being in the same cohort, Aiden and Cameron both stated that they knew of roommate drama, but that it did not affect them. Cameron was in the first cohort and Aiden was in the second cohort, yet they both witnessed the same type of situation and handled it in essentially the same way, writing it off as normal behavior and not getting involved.

I mean nothing major, you're not expected to get along with everyone, it's impossible and so of course you butt heads with people and definitely butt heads with some people but. . . (Interview H, p. 3)

I was never directly really involved with any of it, but I knew exactly what, like I could tell you pretty much all the problems that happened. . . .

(Interview K, p. 3)

Both of the men were only moderately involved in the community. Aiden was heavily involved in working on campus, and Cameron was over-involved off campus with a marching drill team. Despite this, they both stated that the primary reason for choosing to live in the community was to be around other students who were at the University for the same purpose, to become a nurse.

This theme, support groups, was discussed repeatedly by all of the participants who were interviewed. While these four, Susan, Kayla, Cameron, and Aiden, did not take advantage of the opportunity, everyone else made it a

priority to be involved and get as much out of the opportunity as they could.

Emily, Jan, Alizabeth, and Amanda took it to another level and created a second support group just within their room, creating a core for the rest of the community to build on. Mary believed in it so much that she applied for and was accepted to be a Resident Assistant and then volunteered for the position with the Nursing@Nike community, and was the SLS peer advisor, fulfilling two vital student roles with the program. Hallie, Allene, and Leigh all took advantage of the support group structure, helping themselves and the rest of the community, and clearly missed it once they left after the first year was over. Jan summed up the value of the built in support groups perfectly. . .

. . . I mean especially with chemistry I remember us renting out the programming center and there was virtually at least half of us there usually, and someone would get up and write something on the board, and you know who's answering what and if someone didn't understand it then someone would come in and help, it was really cool because we really did rely on one another for answers and for understanding of things we were doing. . . . (Interview B, p. 4)

What was clear from all of the interviews was that the students desired to have a class in the second semester that would keep them all together at least once a week. Similar to the SLS class that they are required to take in the first semester, a class in the second semester would give the students a common

course to keep them focused on the commitment to the community and to continue to work on achieving their goals, both individually and as a group.

Theme 2: Social Glue

Culture is often described as social glue, that thing that holds a community together. The students in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community certainly developed their own culture. Tuckman (1990) described this as norming, the time when a group decides what is okay and what is not okay. The rules and boundaries that govern the interactions of the members of the community must be determined by those same members or they will have no meaning. Mary spoke of how the retreat gave everybody the chance to get to know each other and learn more about themselves at the same time:

. . . I know after the retreat, after getting to know everybody, like bond with everybody and open up to everybody, I felt like everyone felt more comfortable talking to other people not who you like initially clicked with, and then as classes went on and you learned who was in what class and who was good at what class and who you should talk to and where people lived, we just became more comfortable with each other cause we all knew were in this same thing together. . . . (Interview A, p. 3)

For Mary, the community became a second family. She became the resident assistant for the hallway and the Peer Advisor for the SLS class. Her role as class mom was never more evident than when she would bring cookies to

class or to study sessions. The community also provided Mary with her first college relationship, as she dated one of the men in the program for most of the first year. Though she knew it caused some grief with a few of the other girls, she believed that it helped her academically, as her boyfriend was able to tutor her and helped her focus more on her studies. It was usually she who would interrupt their study sessions for a social activity or just to take a mental break rather than her boyfriend.

For Amanda, the retreat started what became for her a new family. The four suitemates (Alizabeth, Emily, Jan, and Amanda) have bonded to the point that they have lived together ever since they moved into Nursing@Nike. They travel together on vacations during the breaks between semesters, and participate in all major life events, e.g., birthdays, christenings, and anniversaries, within each other's extended families.

. . . She described us perfectly. She said "I just can't imagine one of you not being there", "like you as a four are a whole" and "if Jan wasn't there, you guys wouldn't be whole" or "you guys wouldn't be the same if Emily wasn't there, you guys wouldn't be the same". Each of us bring a certain thing to the table that just allows us to be, I mean we never really fight, of course there are like little tiffs here and there but I mean, definitely a family I guess we have become. . . . (Interview L, p. 5)

This was generally the case among roommates or suitemates. For Leigh, it was her roommate. Her roommate did not get accepted into the nursing program, but they are still friends today.

. . . we became best friends; we still have all the same classes together even though she did not get admitted. I like to take care of her basically, I mean my suitemates and even my next door neighbors, we would go get dinner together and celebrate birthdays together. I think that those were the people that made it work and I leaned on. (Interview E, p. 7)

Despite moving out of the community and into a sorority house the next year, Leigh maintained those relationships because of the bonds forged during that first year. She moved into the sorority house for financial reasons, but even then she still spent most of her time with these friends in class and in study sessions.

For Aiden, it seems the social aspects of the community were the most important, since he was rarely in the community due to class and work commitments. He recalled going to dinner together at the on-campus cafeteria, and then going to parties and other social events as well. He talked about several trips to Universal with some of the women who had annual passes.

. . . my roommate and I play sports together still, we play football and soccer and stuff. I have always wanted something more than just facade type friendships where you just kind of hung out, I want something more. . . . (Interview K, p. 5)

During his second and third year at the university, Aiden earned a position as a resident assistant, but was not assigned to a living learning community. He described the hall that he was assigned to as very difficult to find common bonds to engage students. Most of the students did not know each other and some students that lived in the same room together did not know each other's names.

Even for Susan, the bonds that she had created left her feeling "weird" as she moved out of the community, despite moving off-campus with three other community members into a new apartment.

. . . like you are moving out of your first place from college and you definitely kind of feel like you are losing a connection with a bunch of people because at this one time you lived with 36 people in one hallway even if you only got along with 10 of them that is still 10 people you would have probably never met or got along with in another dorm. . . . (Interview G, p. 8)

Susan stated that she has stayed in contact with a few members of the community since they all moved out, but mostly just for socializing. When I asked about her career plans, she said that she was debating about switching to another career instead of nursing. When I considered her comments about her family relationships, which she did not keep a secret even while living in the community, I have to wonder if she just doesn't simply prefer to keep people at a distance.

Alizabeth was probably the most optimistic of any of the participants I interviewed. She made it clear that she believes she could belong to any group in the community, that they were all open to anyone who wanted to be a member.

. . . No, I think every group was very inviting, you know, you saw someone in the hallway. It wasn't like they turned a cold shoulder, you know, everyone knew who everyone was and even if you didn't hang out with them or do the things they did, they still recognized you as a person; and if you were in their room or something they were not, you know, rude to you. Everyone was friends, you know, and helped each other. Especially when it came to like studying, you know, because you're all in the same classes, you all meet together, and it was just, we forgot about the groups and everything else, you know, we just kind of got together for what we needed to get done. . . . (Interview D, p. 3)

In her statement, Alizabeth captured the essence of the community as most of the students described it. Despite all of the differences that the members of the community had, they were usually willing to come together to help with homework problems or to study for the next big test. The culture of the community was clearly similar to a high school situation, which was not surprising, because all of them were just a few months out of high school. There were varying levels of maturity and very different personalities, which naturally led to conflicts within the group, even while some of them formed very strong

social bonds. Despite the challenges they had with the roommate situations, all of them shared a willingness to talk to each other and help with difficult tasks and courses.

Theme 3: Academic Prioritization

When asked why they chose to live in Nursing@Nike, all students who participated in the interviews answered that they wanted to live with students like them. They wanted to live where they would be able to have a study group to help with the tough schedule they would have as they were preparing for admission to the nursing program. Some were more concerned than others, but they all knew they were going to need some help to be successful in completing the nursing prerequisite courses and be competitive in the admissions process.

For Jan, the Nursing@Nike community was the only reason she came to the university. She came for a tour during one of the open house events and decided that she had to attend this university, live in the Nursing@Nike community, and graduate from this nursing program. Nothing else would do.

. . . actually I did not think I had gotten in. It was, there was a mess up in the application process, I think, and somehow they told me that I wasn't in. It was something with the rooms and they had changed and so I know that it was definitely a disappointment hearing that. I was very upset about it and then, not too long after, they called me back and said that I was in and that actually was what pushed me to say yes. . . . (Interview B, p. 2)

She believed that getting the mistake corrected was a sign that UCF was where she should attend. She had come to the College of Nursing to visit a friend who worked there at the time and was able to sit with an advisor and take a tour of the simulation and skills laboratories. She stated that she could only imagine herself in those settings, learning to be a nurse. Within a few months, she was helping to organize study groups. She shared that though studying was a chore, being in the community made it fun, because she was doing it with her friends.

Susan would like you to think that she really did not care if she lived in the community or not. She talked about the strained relationships with her family but then stated she wanted to live in Nursing@Nike to have an easier way to make connections with people.

. . . I thought it might be an easier way to make connections with people.

It was an option, just an option when they had all of them. I had, my thing was, I really want to live at Nike and living with other Nursing students would be very cool, but, if I do not get into it, I don't get into it. . . .

(Interview G, p. 2)

Susan also talked about how the value of living in the community was to see how other people studied, to see if other people were serious about nursing, or if they just thought it would be a fun career. She admits that she did not study much in high school and really did not know how to study. Clearly, she was

looking for any help she could get when she arrived at the university, and if she found a friend as well, that was an added bonus.

Aiden shared that he had known he wanted to be a nurse for a long time, and he wanted to take advantage of anything that could help him get there. He had been on campus previously and knew that the community was in a good area, and that he would meet other nursing students was helpful.

. . . It was good because they always understood your problems, and you know they understood your worries and they could help you out, if you did have any questions or if anyone did find out something it was easy to get the information out to people. . . . (Interview K, p. 4)

Like Susan, Aiden believed that it was good to be around other talented students who obviously (to him) were going to be admitted to the program. By being around those students, emulating their work efforts and studying with them, he believed it would show him what he needed to do to be admitted as well.

Despite the failed logic of knowing who would be admitted to the nursing program, the method of emulation and immersion in the experience worked for Tyler, as he was admitted to the nursing program. He transferred into one of the concurrent programs with the local state college, but he will still have the opportunity to graduate from UCF with a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Leigh was probably in the worst position for being tempted to participate in social activities. Being a member of a sorority, she most likely had numerous opportunities to attend parties and other social events, and might have even

been required to attend some of them. Despite her conflicting priorities, she maintained her focus on her coursework.

. . . obviously I am friends with my (sorority) sisters, but I can't go out every night like they do; like I knew that my academics was going to come first and it was nice to like live with the people that had the same mindset as I do like "yeah, I'm a freshman and in college and everybody gets to have fun", but my school is always going to come first. . . . (Interview E, p. 6)

In fact, Leigh believed the true basis of the greater community was only academic, and the only social aspect of the community was in the smaller subgroups. She stated that the only purpose in the community for her was academic, and this was most likely the case due to her association with the sorority. She remembered spending a lot of time in the community room and programming room working with other members of the community on their homework or to prepare for tests. She stated that occasionally some of the students who were studying would take a break for dinner, but would come right back to the study sessions.

Mary, like most of the other students, had attended open house, orientation, and other information sessions where she learned just how challenging the nursing program was, not just to get admitted, but also to graduate. She stated that while she was intimidated by the idea of living with 35 other students who might all be more academically capable, she knew she had to

do something to help make sure she would be successful. Though there was never any outright hostility, there were some dramatic moments where some community members were left wondering what they had done to cause the situation that developed. “High School drama” was a phrase oft repeated during the interviews.

. . . I would say that in the beginning we were. . . very cliquish, I feel like in the beginning it was a little bit awkward, but after we did the retreat and went through the class everybody was really, really close. . . . (Interview A, p. 3)

There was also a clear gender imbalance with only four male students and 28 female students. This created some tension, as most of the students had just graduated from high school and were not adept at the kind of collaboration that would be needed to make this community work as intended.

Theme 4: Personal development

It is impossible for me to imagine that after living in this community for a year that any student would not believe that they had been changed somehow by the experience. However, when asked “What did living in the community do for you as a person”, Aiden stated that he did not believe that the community had any lasting impact on him.

. . . I do not think it did, I would hope it did not, I do not think it changed me. For better or for worse, I do not feel like it had an impact on me, it is

all about who you associate, it is kind of like your friend group, it is whoever you chose to associate with, they do seem to change you, but if you just, I do not know associate with people kind of like you, you do not change that much. . . I did not grow close enough to anyone to really to want to change for good or bad to dress or do whatever. . . . (Interview K, p. 9)

Despite his earlier comments in the interview about how he made several friends during his time in the community, and still has connections to them today, at the end of the interview, he posited that he did not make those kinds of friends. It was also very interesting that he believed he would only change for his friends and not just for himself. In fact, when asked about his feelings when he moved out, he had a very different perspective.

. . . And I still hang out with some of the people from last year, the people that I want, that I have to make an effort to (hang out with), it is not just effortless, because nothing is, it was just so easy to hang out with people on the floor, that, that is why you did it almost, it was just effortless. . . . (Interview K, p. 9)

Every other participant believed that they took more away from Nursing@Nike than what they brought with them. Mary believed that it helped her become more independent and improved her leadership skills. It certainly helped her gain the confidence necessary to apply and become a resident assistant the following year.

. . . I really learned time management and prioritizing because there were people on the floor who wanted to go out and I would say “No, sorry I cannot go with you I need to study.” So, it helped me say no and prioritize and when to say “Yes” too, but as a person, besides growing as a leader and being independent. . . . (Interview A, p. 11)

Mary also believed that the community helped her get admitted to nursing, helping her move from being a “B” student to an “A” student in her coursework. She believed that she was more motivated during this period than at any other time in her life, simply because the community helped her to be more serious about her goal of becoming a nurse.

For Jan, Alizabeth, and Susan, the community helped them learn to meet people and to step outside of their comfort zones. Prior to living in the community, Jan believed that it was difficult for her to meet people with whom she did not necessarily have a connection, but now she can do so without much effort.

. . . because I am like “ok, well I have done it there and you know it is good to meet”. . . . (Interview B, p. 7)

Alizabeth shared Jan’s feelings, despite believing she knew exactly who she was when she arrived at the university. She was concerned about being drawn in the wrong direction when she arrived, and believed the community helped keep her focus on her goals.

. . . it has definitely grown me as a person to aspire to do well, to aspire to go after nursing even though I may have failed a test or failed other things within school and stuff, but I think it has made me more positive too. Because I have always had kind of a negative attitude “oh, I cannot do this, I cannot do that”. . . . (Interview D, p. 7)

Susan had similar thoughts, but from a different perspective. It has been shown that most of her decisions have been based on what is convenient for her, not necessarily what is in her best interests. She was indifferent about moving into the community but soon realized it was easier to make friends there since they would see each other on a regular basis.

. . . I probably would not talk to other people if I lived in another dorm if I did not have an SLS class with them. I would feel no reason to go talk to them. Having the SLS class kind of taught me to go talk to them or living in the community because I would have to see them all the time. . . . (Interview G, p. 2)

For Kayla and Allene, the improvements were more about interpersonal relationships. Both of them had varying degrees of roommate drama, Kayla more so than Allene. However Allene, as a prospective member of the U.S. Army, recognized that she will benefit from learning how to live with new people and not allow interpersonal issues to affect her performance in school or work. For Kayla, it has been useful as she has progressed through the nursing program and has to interact with a variety of unique individuals on a daily basis.

. . . if there is drama, just like brush it off and focus on your studies; so that was something good. . . because now I feel confident to live with whomever I need to. It helped me academically because I see other people doing it where if I did the same as them when I was in Nursing@Nike and they're able to do well now, then if they can do it, I can do it. . . . (Interview F, p. 6)

For Amanda and Emily, the benefit for them came in a smooth transition to the university from high school. Both of them came from small schools or communities and were initially overwhelmed with the size of the university and were looking for ways to feel more comfortable, so that they could focus on their academics without getting lost in the masses.

. . . I came from a very small school with only 100 people per grade and so when I came to going to, you know, the 2nd biggest university, it helped 'cause it was a smaller. It felt like it was smaller because of our community that we had here (Nursing@Nike). . . . (Interview C, p. 6)

. . . It was a nice transition from (high school to the university) as a freshman just being able to just go "ok, now you're in a big university with all these people that you have no idea and maybe no common goals or anything like that". . . . (Interview L, p. 5)

Though this was a common theme throughout the community, and has often been used as a marketing strategy, none of the other students talked about it in the detail that these two did. Even more interesting is that Emily and

Amanda were roommates in the second cohort, and so they were able to help each other work through the challenge of being at a large university together. As both of them were overwhelmed with the size of the university, they both came into the living learning community with the idea that it would help them adjust from the small town high school to the large big city university. By living together in the second year, they kept some of the common bonds that helped them to be successful, such as taking classes together, studying together, and keeping each other motivated.

Another common thread in the personal development theme was the teambuilding retreat. Several of the students mentioned how it helped them find out more about each other so that they could find friends that were more like them. Most of the students also mentioned that the treat helped them develop the skills necessary to work successfully in groups, both within the community and in the classroom. A few students also talked about how the retreat gave them the chance to learn more about their own character, and to see how they fit in with the rest of the community.

Summary

This chapter contained a discussion of the thematic findings as they related to the conceptual framework, the literature reviewed for the study, and both of the research questions. Each of the emerged themes was explored from the participants' perspectives, reflections, and narratives. A content matrix was

formulated to demonstrate how the findings were recognized. All themes were identified and discussed in detail; interpretations of findings were congruent with those of the dissertation committee chair. Sub-themes were not used simply because the four identified themes adequately covered the thematic content that was discovered during the interview process. The identified themes were:

- Academic and social support groups
- Social glue
- Academic prioritization
- Personal development

CHAPTER 6 UNDERSTANDING THE VOICES

Listening to the Voices through the Framework

For this study, Tuckman's Stages of Group Development (1990) were used to show how the students who lived in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community made sense of their experiences as they became a community; how they moved from being just a group of students living together into an actual community of learners who worked together and supported each other in the pursuit of their individual and community goals. Tuckman's theory consists of five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Tuckman first developed the model to better understand how groups transitioned from the forming stage to accomplish the stated purpose of the group being formed and progressed through adjournment of the group. For this research, the model was used to understand the lived experiences of first-year nursing students living together and working toward a common goal of admission to the nursing program.

Table 12 shows the relationship between the themes discovered in this research and Tuckman's model of group development. The first stage is forming and is visible in the academic and social support groups theme. The second stage, storming, is addressed in the themes of academic and social support groups and social glue. Norming, the third stage, is reflected in the themes of social glue and academic prioritization. The themes of academic prioritization

and personal development help illustrate the fourth stage, which is performing. Finally, the fifth stage, adjourning is exemplified in the themes of personal development and academic and social support groups. This chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the relationship between the thematic findings and Tuckman's Stages of Group Development (1965).

Table 12

Tuckman's Stages of Group Development (1965) and Thematic Findings

| Stages of Group Development | Thematic Findings |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Forming | Academic and social support groups |
| Storming | Academic and social support groups Social glue |
| Norming | Social glue Academic prioritization |
| Performing | Academic prioritization Personal development |
| Adjourning | Personal development Academic and social support groups |

The first stage of group development occurs when the group forms or comes together, either by choice or by design, as was the case in this research on the learning living community. In a community, the inhabitants move into their rooms, sometimes meeting their roommates for the first time. At the same time, the group members establish relationships with other members who emerge as group leaders. These are often dependency relationships, allowing both the

group members and the leader to learn the boundaries of the relationship. At the same time, the group will engage in task-activity development for orientation to the task (Tuckman, 1965). In the case of the nursing living learning community, this could be successful completion of the first semester of classes.

Amanda, Jan, Emily, and Alizabeth discussed how this occurred during the teambuilding retreat as much as anything else. For Aiden and Cameron, this process mostly played out in the SLS class as well as in the study groups that quickly formed in the community room of the residence hall. For Susan, Hallie, and Kayla, it almost never happened, as they chose to stay disconnected or they were not immediately able to make the connections with the rest of the students. For Allene, Leigh, and Mary, the forming began when they first arrived, as they were out-going and had a strong desire to take advantage of what the community offered. Though this process occurred more obviously for some than others, all of the participants were part of the process as they participated in the retreat and the SLS course.

The storming stage will often happen quickly in this type of situation, as the individuals quickly get comfortable and resort to old habits, some of which are not acceptable to others in near proximity (roommates). This can include habits of hygiene, sleep, study, to name a few. As the group moves beyond the forming stage, it will enter this stage which is dominated by intra-group conflict. Members of the group may become hostile toward one another or an authority figure as a way to articulate their individuality and resistance to the creation of the group

organization. Interaction is uneven and infighting is common (Tuckman, 1965). There will likely be key issues that cause cliques within the group that can affect whether the group progresses or regresses.

Based on all of the interviews, the storming stage was evident in the community. Some students were direct participants in the process, and some watched from a distance; however they were all affected. Kayla had the most direct experience, living with a roommate that she believed despised her very existence. Allene also had some roommate challenges with her suitemates. Once again, Cameron and Aiden watched from a distance, but this was easy to do with only four male students in the program. Susan, Leigh, and Hallie talked about how they saw the drama but stayed out of it as much as possible.

Mary was oblivious of the drama in her first year, distracted by a boyfriend, even though she knew other girls were jealous of the relationship. While it could have affected her sense of community, she chose to focus on the more positive aspects of the community: taking classes together, studying together, and helping each other to stay motivated. She did notice it happening in the second year once she was the resident assistant and had to be involved in solutions to the problems. The interesting group in this stage was comprised of Amanda, Emily, Alizabeth, and Jan. They almost appear to have insulated themselves from the drama of the larger community, yet they participated in the favorable aspects, such as family dinners and study groups. Not only were they separated by living in the smaller half of the hallway, but they also developed their own sub-

community in their suite. They did, however, mention their own bit of storming, when they described their tiffs about dishes and laundry.

The norming stage occurs as the group comes to a common understanding of what is expected of each other (Tuckman, 1965). This will happen in small groups, such as roommates and suitemates, as well as larger groups, such as study groups for classes that are shared by the community. Group members will have accepted the other members of the group as well as their individual quirks and traits. The group becomes a single unit by the individual members accepting the primacy of the group. From a social perspective, this can be seen in the living learning community as group members organize group events, such as a movie or shopping trip, as well as group dinners in the community room. This becomes the norming stage. This openness is followed by a theme of solidarity in the group and being more sensitive to the needs and feelings of one another (1965).

For the students in the Nursing@Nike community, the norming stage does not appear to have happened as might be expected in a normal group. Although some sub-groups, e.g., individual suites, and some combinations of suites, did norm, the community as a whole did not come completely together. Nearly every student mentioned cliques in one form or another. For Kayla, Allene, Susan, and Mary, these cliques were formed early in the year immediately before, during, or after the teambuilding retreat. For Aiden, Cameron, Leigh, and Hallie, it happened after the winter break once the community no longer had the common

course to attend, such as the SLS class in the first semester. Once again, for Amanda, Jan, Alizabeth, and Emily, none of this happened, as they normed as a quartet, and blended in with the larger group as necessary for study groups and social events, nearly oblivious to the somewhat dysfunctional challenges happening in the rest of the community.

The performing stage occurs as the group begins to process the tasks that have been assigned, both as individuals and as a community (Tuckman, 1965). In some cases this will be classwork in which multiple students are engaged in the same class, or a community requirement such as community service or a programming requirement in the residence hall, such as a fire drill. The group, which developed during the preceding phase as an operating unit, can now turn into a problem-solving organization. The group becomes a 'sounding board' and collaboratively works on and solves problems or assignments.

It is in this state that the group will make practical attempts at successful assignment completion. The group attains the fourth stage when the group's interpersonal arrangement becomes the tool of assignment activities. Roles become flexible and functional, and group energy is channeled into the task. This stage is known as performing. Interpersonal problems between group members are a thing of the past, and its energy can be devoted to practical assessment of and efforts at solving the task at hand (1965).

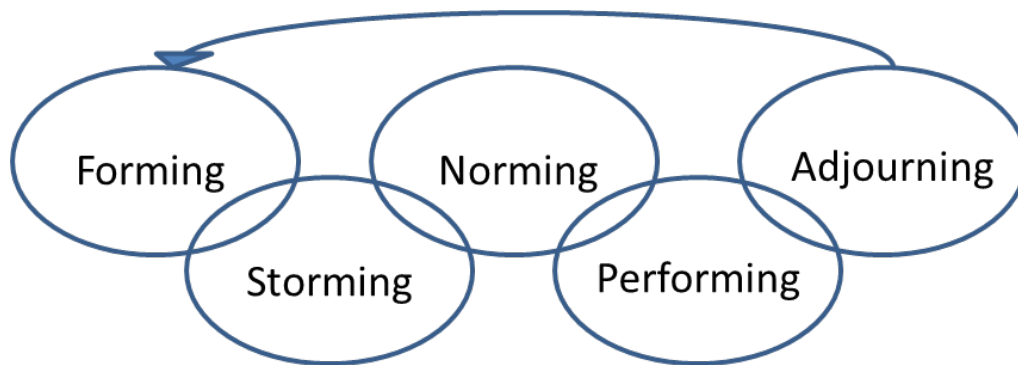
Within the Nursing@Nike community, the interviews clearly demonstrated that the performing stage emerged in the study groups for the community as a

whole, but also individually, as some members of the group took lessons from the interactions of the group for their own self-improvement. Although academics continued to be the primary focus for the majority of students, it was clear that the academic direction changed for some, willingly or not. As some of the students realized the nursing program was not for them, they moved on to other disciplines, yet they had to successfully complete the coursework in which they were enrolled during the first semester. This happened both of the first two years, and it came clear during the interviews that the community had two parts. The larger community included everyone, but slowly shrank as some of the students chose to pursue other academic careers. Despite this, the larger group continued to work together to pass the classes they were enrolled in, so as not to let their GPA suffer.

For Susan and Cameron, it should have been clear by the second semester that their priorities were not aligned with what needed to be done to be competitive for nursing admissions. Both were below the minimum eligibility standards. Allene became focused on her military options, letting her nursing requirements simmer on the back-burner while she took care of what had to be done for her ROTC scholarship. For the rest of the participants, their success at being competitive and earning admission to the program revealed the benefit of keeping their academics at the top of their priorities. There was a consistent theme among them about not letting social events or dysfunctional issues get in the way of achieving their goals.

Finally, in most cases, the adjournment stage will happen with the community at large at the end of the academic year with the need to move to a new residence hall (Tuckman, 1977). Some of the subgroups will stay together during the move and will continue their subset of desired support for the group, but the majority will move on to new areas and continue to work individually on their academic requirements. This stage is the closure stage for the group and occurs, hopefully, once the task has been successfully completed and its purpose fulfilled. In most cases, the members of the group move on to new groups and projects. In the case of the nursing living learning community, this stage has been met with the option of continuing to live together in a new community. The students are given the option to do so and act as mentors to the new members of the community the following year.

As a result of this research, the researcher altered the visual design of the stages of group development, as the interacting stages appear to be cyclical as well. The cyclical nature of the interacting stages is shown in Figure 3.



© Alton Austin: *Interacting Stages of Group Development Cycle*

Figure 3. Interacting Stages of Group Development Cycle

Of the 12 participants in the study, eight moved out of the Nursing@Nike community into another location with one or more of the other members of the community. Amanda, Emily, Alizabeth, and Jan, moved into the Nursing@Nike second-year apartments and acted as mentors for the new first-year cohort. Aiden and Mary both moved on to become resident assistants (RA), with Mary working as the RA for Nursing@Nike for her second and third year. Leigh moved out of Nursing@Nike and into her sorority house because the rent was cheaper. Kayla and Hallie moved into the Nursing@Nike second-year apartment with two other members of their cohort. Cameron moved back home for six months before moving into an off-campus apartment. Susan moved into an off-campus

apartment with several members of her cohort as well. Almost all of these moves required a choice on the part of the participants to continue the social group structure with their community friends. This led them back to the forming stage, as they started the process over in their second year and tried to create new academic and social support groups. The traditional representation of the Stages of Group Development shows either 4 or 5 boxes with each stage and an arrow pointing to the next stage (shown in Figure 1, pg 7.). The representation that I have developed based on my research shows the five stages overlapping each other, and an arrow taking adjournment back to forming as the group starts over as the primary objective of the group changes (shown in Figure 2, pg 7.).

The interview process used in this research could have been improved. The survey that was used was somewhat redundant, as several of the questions resulted in answers that were very similar. Had more participants been available, a trial run of the interview on two or three students would have helped to solve this challenge. Additionally, a couple of the students were limited in their answers, either because they were not prepared to discuss what was asked, or possibly because they were not really interested in being involved, but felt as if they had to since they had been asked. Additional prompting or reassurance may have helped them to be more comfortable and to share more details of their experiences.

The four life-world existentials posited by van Manen (1990) were also used as guides in this process. The Lived space or spatiality refers to the space

in which one finds oneself. In this research, it was evident that the participants were affected by the space in which they lived. It is important to remember that the hall the community was located in was split by a fireproof doorway. There are three rooms on one side and six on the other side. While this had an effect on students in the first year, it did not have the same effect in the second year. Several of the students could not wait to move to an apartment style residence where they would not have to share a bedroom, while others found that living so close helped them form stronger relationships. The lived body, or corporeality, refers to the phenomenological fact that one is always a living part of this world. No matter how the students felt about the community, they knew they were going to be a part of it for at least one year. Some of the students lived in conflict rather than asking to move to another hall, while others that did not participate in this study moved out as quickly as they could. Lived time, temporality, is about one's perception of time, fast in good times, and slow in times that one wishes would pass quickly. Kayla clearly felt this during her time with her roommate that had very strong feelings against her. Time would drag when they were together as they would count the days until they could move to another residence. Finally, lived other, relationality, is about one's relationships with others, in a shared interpersonal space. This is the whole basis of the study, as learning about the interpersonal relationships that formed helped to illustrate how the community developed. These four life worlds can be differentiated, but cannot be considered

out of context with the others. They come together to create one's lived world
(van Manen,1990, pp. 101-105).

Giving Purpose to Qualitative Methods of Searching for Knowledge About Nursing

Following the methodological structure for human social science research advanced by van Manen (1990), the six critical research activities are important to the entire process from interview to result, but for this study, they were deemed most relevant to data analysis, which in qualitative methods is the logical progression from interviewing, the final component of data collection in this study.

Turning to the Nature of Lived Experiences

Turning to the nature of lived experiences is a commitment to dwelling on the subject which, in this case, were the lived experiences of the cohort and community. The lived experience is the beginning and end point of phenomenological research, which is a “being-given-over to some quest, a true task” (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). I am certain this is a critical piece of the method; however I am not sure how it fits into what my research was about. Though I have thought endlessly about the community since its inception, I am not sure that is what this is implying by dwelling on the subject. The community has been a big part of my life for the last three years, and I cannot imagine how things would have turned out if I had not brought it to fruition back in 2010.

Investigating Experience as We Live It

Investigating experience as we live it requires establishing contact with the original experience. This “means that phenomenological research requires of the

research that he or she stands in the fullness of life. . . exploring the category of lived experiences in all its modalities and aspects” (van Manen, 1990, p. 31).

After having lived with this program for two years, I find this activity to be essential. I cannot imagine having conducted a study with this methodology without being intimately familiar with the program and without having more than a casual knowledge of the nursing program and students. Having developed deep and rich connections with these students, I know that I have fairly and accurately shared their experiences with the reader and given full voice to what they shared during their interviews.

Reflecting on Essential Themes

Reflecting on essential themes is about making a distinction between appearance and essence, between things of one’s experience and that which grounds the things of one’s experience (van Manen, 1990). This is about bringing into focus those actions and experiences which tend to be obscured over time. This activity was without question the most difficult to bring into focus. There were so many themes and ideas offered during the interviews that it was difficult to decide what was important and what was not important. Only by taking the time to read and re-read the interviews, while at the same time focusing on the research questions and theoretical framework, was I able to come to a conclusion on which topics were the most important and should be developed into themes to be reported. Almost like allowing a fine wine to mature,

I had to give the information time to develop and coalesce into what became the four critical themes of this study.

The Art of Writing and Rewriting

The art of writing and rewriting is about the “application of language and thoughtfulness to lived experiences, to what shows itself precisely as it shows itself” (van Manen, 1990, p. 32). I interpreted this to mean I must be true to the experiences that are shared with me and report them faithfully as they were understood by the participants. I found this to be the easiest of the activities, simply because I chose to critically review each interview as I processed it. As I wrote the participant profiles for Chapter 4, I continually edited and tightened up the language used to make sure that I was using the exact context that was shared with me. This for me was the most important part of the method, as I did not want to leave any possibility that their voices could be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relationship

Maintaining a strong and oriented relationship is about staying focused on the narrative, not getting lost in abstract thoughts, superficialities or falsities (van Manen, 1990). This comes back to the commitment to share the experiences as they happened and to accurately share the students’ understandings of how they made sense of the experiences. This activity clearly is the culmination of the

previous four. To stay focused on the narrative, it is critical to have a solid understanding of the program, to have meaningful relationships with the students, and to be faithful to their voiced experiences. Although it was easy to find myself looking down the wrong road, looking for stories that were dramatic or exciting, those were not the kind of stories that the students wanted to share. It was obvious from the very first interview that the participants wanted to share what they believed was important information that would help make the program stronger. Whether the interview lasted 20 or 45 minutes, and whether the transcript was six or 14 pages in length, all of the students seemed to have agreed to participate with the hope of helping to make the program better for the students who would follow them in years to come. By focusing on what I perceived to be their desire, I was able to avoid looking for what would be exciting and to find what was meaningful and had purpose.

Balancing Research Context by Considering Parts and Whole

Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole is about making sure that the research does not get lost in the bits and parts that make the story (van Manen, 1990). The researcher's task is to stay focused on the purpose of the research and make sure the work comes to a close and answers the fundamental question that started the journey. This was by far the most difficult activity to bring to fruition. There were so many ideas and experiences discovered during the interviews, it became difficult to narrow them to the

essential themes that were needed to keep the study focused on what was important. Any good story is comprised of all of those bits and parts, so to try and ignore them was not feasible. It was very important for me to use them as building blocks in the participant profiles to set the stage for how I came to select the four themes identified in Chapter 5.

Validity and Verification

This research was governed by the principles of qualitative research: trustworthiness and an audit trail (Creswell, 2009). The idea is to cross-reference the data to ensure that common themes are not missed, and at the same time to make sure the data being collected are relevant to the question being asked. Trustworthiness is essentially the same thing as reliability and validity in quantitative methods (Creswell, 2009). What is being looked for is to make sure the data are answering the question that is being asked, and that if the same type of questions were posed by another researcher, the same types of answers would be given.

In an effort to validate the emergent research themes, avoid subjective interpretation, and minimize any researcher bias in the interpretation of findings, the dissertation committee chair also reviewed and interpreted the interview transcripts. The dissertation chair's task was to read the results and determine if the summarized interpretations were plausible. Having read all of the transcripts,

her determination was that the interpretations presented in this work were in fact plausible.

The audit trail is the most important and oft overlooked step in showing the authenticity of the research. It is a complete and exhaustive record of all activity that has occurred during the research process. This must include all decisions made about what to study, what questions to ask, what questions not to ask, and the information collected (Creswell, 2009). Throughout the duration of this study, I kept a journal of my thoughts, decisions, and other life events that occurred. When I began the dissertation, my wife bought me a hand-bound leather journal with parchment paper as a gift. It now contains all of the important details of the last three years and will stand the test of time as it safeguards them.

In conducting the study, I also engaged in member-checking with several of the participants. In addition to reviewing their interview transcripts, participants were sent an e-mail that outlined the four themes highlighted in this study. They were instructed to review the themes that were generated as related to their stories of life in the community and to the research questions of this study. They were also asked to relate their approval or disapproval of the themes provided. Additionally, the participants were instructed to provide any extra feedback or commentary they believed necessary. Eight of the participants were supportive of the themes generated by the researcher. The other four were nonresponsive.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, the implications that promote success and its relevance for future nursing students, faculty, and administrators are discussed. The implications of this study are derived from the participants themselves with the intention of addressing the challenges of the retention and success of first-year nursing students who participate in a living learning community. Findings from this study cannot be generalized beyond the research participants involved. However, the findings should act as a guide for higher educational professionals to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of first-year nursing students' participation in a living learning community. Important recommendations for future research on the documentation and improvement of the success rate of first-year nursing students in a living learning community, as well as the researcher's reflections, are also provided.

Purpose of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the fact that literature on first-year nursing students participation in a living learning community did not exist. Most of the participants in this study were able to successfully compete for admission to the nursing program. Although two of the students chose to pursue a different

major, it was more likely due to the lack of ability to compete rather than a choice to pursue a different career.

This study captured the lived experience of 12 first-year nursing students who participated in a living learning community designed for nursing students. Participants, in their own words, spoke of their experiences regarding living and studying together as they prepared to apply for admission to the nursing program. The study sought to capture (a) their motivations (b) their frustrations (c) their beliefs about the culture of the community, and (d) what they benefitted from living in the community.

Four themes emerged from the research to provide insight into the lived experiences of first-year nursing students who participated in a living learning community. The inter-connected narratives provided an understanding of the lived experiences through the voices and experiences of the first-year nursing students and set the stage for continued research. Those narratives and voices are woven into the conclusions and implications of this study.

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

Of the 68 students who participated in the first two cohorts of the Nursing@Nike living learning community, not all were successful in their attempts to be admitted to the nursing program. A total of 30 were admitted to one of the

nursing programs at the university, 18 to the basic program on the main campus and 12 to the concurrent programs with one of the local state colleges. Of the remaining 38 students, 10 were preparing to apply to the nursing program starting in the spring or fall semester of 2014. The remaining 28 had either changed their majors, left the university, or were not eligible to be admitted to the nursing program. Considering these numbers, just over 44% of all the Nursing@Nike participants were sufficiently competitive to be admitted to the nursing program. If the remaining 10 who have indicated they will apply for 2014 admission are accepted, the percentage will have increased to nearly 59%. This is remarkable when compared to an average admission rate of approximately 15% for all first-year students who begin their course work at UCF as nurse pending students. I believe that it is safe to say that despite the challenges that come with living with strangers in a new community and the potential for roommate drama, the benefits of the academic and social support groups and the culture of academic prioritization enable this program to give students an advantage in helping to prepare them for admission to the nursing program.

Implications for Future/Current Nursing@Nike Students

The participants were asked to share whatever thoughts they had about the program that were not asked during the interview. This question was asked with the intention of gaining additional insight into the ways in which the program could be improved for future cohorts. Allene was very quick to suggest that the

program needed a way to keep the students together in a common course for both semesters of the first year. She believed that the cohort started very strong in the first semester, but grew apart and moved in different directions during the second semester, because there was no common connection for everyone. When I asked if she would have been willing to pay for an extra credit for a pass/fail class that just brought the students together to talk about their experiences and meet with faculty, she said that would have been ideal.

Kayla thought more excursions to the college laboratories and clinical sites would be good for students to help stay focused on where they were going. Because the majority of classes that are taken for the nursing prerequisites are offered by other colleges within the university, she believed that sometimes it would be hard to remember why she was taking such difficult courses. Moving the concept of a nursing career from the abstract to the concrete, with opportunities in the college and with nursing faculty, would help students stay focused on their goal.

Aiden's interest was centered on the beginning of the program. He stated that it was unfortunate that more students were not aware of the opportunity. When he told some of his nurse pending friends that he lived in the community, they asked "What is that?" Though the program has been capped at a specific number due to space limitations in the residence hall and the SLS class, a larger pool of applicants would make it easier to select a group of students with the most to gain from the program. When only the minimum number of students that

can be admitted apply, administrators are forced to accept all that apply, even those who have the majority of their general education and nursing prerequisite courses completed. This creates a situation where there are even fewer connections to allow the students to forge the kind of bonds needed to be successful when applying to the nursing program.

For Amanda, Jan, Alizabeth, and Emily, the value of the community was about more social growth. They talked about the retreat and how powerful its effect was on them and the community. Jan discussed the third cohort and how that cohort did not have a retreat at the beginning of their program. This was due to a different advisor being responsible for the community that year who was not comfortable with the teambuilding and cohort development aspects of the community. Jan believed that students in that cohort did not get the same experience, e.g., some of them did not even know the names of other students in the cohort. She also believed that in the second semester a second course to keep everyone engaged would have made a big difference to the community.

Unfortunately, Mary, Susan, Cameron, and Susan all declined to offer any further comments or suggestions for the community. One could interpret this to mean one of two things: either they had shared everything they thought of value or they did not care about helping.

To summarize the recommendations for future Nursing@Nike cohorts, there was a need for:

- better advertising of the program;

- a second course in the spring semester;
- more social events during the entire year; and
- visits to the college and clinical sites;

Implications for Administrators

A common theme throughout the interviews was that during the first semester, when the students were required to be involved with each other in the SLS class, the community seemed to function better. Once there was no common requirement other than classes, things fell apart. During the first semester, students were in class as a group twice a week plus a weekend retreat that kept them together all day and night. The bonds and friendships that were formed during that first semester were not strong enough to keep the larger group together as the year progressed.

The administrators of the nursing program should work to develop a second course offering during the spring semester of the first-year cohort, and consider developing a second-year sequence for those second-year students who want to stay involved as mentors for the new first-year cohort. By integrating the two cohorts on a continual basis, the students who apply to the nursing program will likely have stronger interpersonal, leadership, and teamwork skills. These skills are invaluable in the program as students are often placed in situations that are outside of what they normally encounter.

During the course of the first year, there should be a set pattern to the program. The curricular component should consist of the two courses, student success in the fall semester, and the nursing profession in the second semester. The co-curricular component should consist of the retreat in the beginning of the fall semester, programming activities throughout the year, and an end-of-year program, such as a banquet, to help provide closure to the students as they prepare to move on to the sophomore year.

Finally, nursing administrators should collaborate more with the offices responsible for Housing and Residential Life to develop more effective advertisement and out-reach programs for potential residents of Nursing@Nike. The marketing materials developed by Residential Life and the College of Nursing should also include the admissions statistics that were developed as part of this research to show the increased benefit of participation in the community. Increasing the applicant pool would allow the selection criteria to have a stronger effect on ensuring that students who live in the community are more consistent in their academic abilities and will need approximately the same number of courses for both general education and nursing prerequisites.

Finally, the university administration should work to institutionalize this program, helping to make sure the program continues to successfully help students gain admission to the nursing program. Residential life and the College of Nursing should work to make sure that the program is not changed on the whims of either party, but maintains a static course of operation, with a review

conducted periodically to make sure the program is functioning well, meeting goals, and producing the desired outcomes.

Implications for Faculty and Advisors

Students are more likely to persist with a higher level of faculty support, i.e., functional support, such as advising, mentoring, tutoring, and goal setting (Shelton, 2003). Psychological support is also essential and can be found in approachable faculty; demonstrating respect for and confidence in students, correcting without belittling, listening, being patient, acknowledging success, and have a genuine interest in students. Knowing this, it is critical that students in the living learning community have a direct connection to the faculty in the nursing program, and that members of the faculty are engaged with students. The nursing program should dedicate both a professional advisor and a faculty advisor to the community, individuals who will invest the time and energy to learn who the students are, help them set goals for nursing, and mentor them as they prepare for and participate in the nursing program.

Researchers such as Churchill et al. (1998) have shown that students in learning communities are more committed and involved with classes, develop a sense of community, and create a strong attachment to the institution. By helping students bond with each other and developing a commitment and attachment to the institution, students will become more comfortable working together both socially and academically, using peer study and support groups.

The advisors will need to have a direct role in this process simply by being available to the students and being open and honest about the admission and graduation requirements of the program. This will have an effect on retention, as student problems can be addressed as friendships develop and missed advising/mentoring appointments can be dealt with as needed.

Implications for Living Learning Communities

Living learning communities have been designed to create a sense of community that allows for greater faculty and peer interaction, increased opportunities for coordinated activities, and a socially and academically supported residential living environment (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). This concept for living learning communities should make all students want to live in such a community, yet they do not. Even in the case of Nursing@Nike, during the first year, four nursing students lived in the hall, yet chose not to participate in the community. None of the four have ever applied to the nursing program. One wonders why a student who is pursuing a degree in a field would not want the opportunity to improve the rate of success, whether in nursing or any other career. The answer is that some students are not participators. They have come to the university to take classes, earn a degree, and then move on to working in their field of choice. So how do residential and academic coordinators change the thought process to encourage students to participate?

There are academic living learning communities, such as EXCEL, Hospitality, and Nursing, as well as theme communities, such as Honors, Environmental, and Out-of-State Students. The available literature, according to Shapiro and Levine (1999) has indicated that students in living learning communities are more likely to persist, have higher academic achievement, are more involved on campus, and interact more with peers and faculty. With this information, academic and residential coordinators should do more to present the option of the living learning communities to students as an add-on benefit to living on-campus, rather than as an additional requirement to the academic program of study. Students who are helped to understand that the community will increase their likelihood of success to graduate will be more likely to want to participate in this type of program. By providing students with statistics that show this improved likelihood, especially when supported by research, students will make more informed decisions that will have a lasting effect on their academic careers. Additionally, a common course for students in the program for the entire year is a viable way to keep the students connected.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings, methodological procedures, implications, and the existing literature, several important recommendations are suggested for practical future research that would tremendously enhance the understanding of the experiences of first-year students living in an academically-oriented living

learning community. In this study only the experiences of first-year students who lived in a nursing living learning community were examined. A comparison of how the experiences of first-year students differ from second-year students would be valuable. Therefore, it is recommended that this study be replicated with an added variable that permits a comparison between a first-year living learning community and a second-year community.

A second recommendation would be to reconfigure the current study with a comparison between an academic community and a choice community, such as an honors or leadership based community. This comparative study would investigate how the pressures of trying to be competitive for admission to the nursing program may affect the culture of the community.

My final recommendation would be to select a set group of students who have had a considerable impact on the program and develop a longitudinal study to determine what the long term implications of the community are on the students that participate. The four roommates from the second year, Amanda, Jan, Emily, and Alizabeth would be an ideal cohort to select for this research.

Researcher's Reflection

As I contemplated writing my reflection, it occurred to me that I have been working on this doctorate for exactly five years. I enrolled in my first class in August 2008 and will finally finish in December of 2013. This has been an incredible journey with many ups and downs, a few wrong turns, but thankfully no

U-turns. I have been employed at the University of Central Florida in the nursing program for almost, but not quite, the entire five years. I considered a variety of topics, including veteran persistence, faculty relationships, and others; but teambuilding and leadership development are my passion.

During this time, I first developed the Nursing student success course in cooperation with the Office of First Year Experience. I taught that class for the first time during the fall semester of 2009. The nursing program was not getting the number of quality students needed from the UCF population, and I knew that we had to do something different with our first-year students, or we were going to continue to struggle with low admissions numbers for native students. After the first year, I realized that the students were coming to class, but after class was over they were going off in different directions, not really working together on the nursing prerequisites as was planned.

I went “back to the drawing board” and to the office of Residential Life and developed the plans for Nursing@Nike. It was an instant success, and planning was initiated immediately for the first class in the fall of 2010. We had a late start, so recruiting was difficult, but we filled 32 of the 36 beds that were offered for the community. During this same timeframe, my work environment changed dramatically, as the college instituted personnel changes that left a lot to be desired. I found myself finding any excuse to be out of the college and out working with students anywhere else that I could.

In the spring of 2011, I was searching for a dissertation topic and was considering working with military veteran students in the areas of retention and persistence. It finally occurred to me, however, that what I was most interested in was the cohort development of the nursing students and what the effects of a cohort would be on them and their pursuit of admission to the nursing program. I had already wasted a considerable amount of time chasing ideas that had no passion for me, so when I figured out what I was doing, I wanted to get started right away. I started reading about nursing education and cohort development during the spring semester of 2011, after gaining approval of my dissertation committee chair. She certainly seemed happy that I had finally settled on a topic that held interest for me, and might finally move on to conduct meaningful research, write a dissertation, and graduate.

Of course, I went through several iterations as I determined how to actually conduct the research. I thought I would use the ethnographic method, but that was quickly ruled out since I was the program advisor and an instructor for the group. I knew it had to be a qualitative approach, but it took me some time to come to the realization that a narrative analysis would give me the chance to bring the story to life when it was completed. It has always been very important to me that I give voice to those students that were involved in the research study, rather than just treating them as numbers or statistics.

I then had to tackle the theoretical framework, which took me way too long to understand. Two of my favorite researchers and authors are Tinto and Astin,

but just looking at involvement and retention seemed to leave too much of the community dynamic laying on the cutting room floor. I also considered using Psychological Sense of Community by McMillan and Chavis; however, other dissertation students had recently conducted vaguely similar research studies, and my dissertation committee chair and I did not want to take the risk of being repetitive or unoriginal in the design of the study. I eventually chose Tuckman's Stages of Group Development as my framework, and this turned out to be the best choice as it really highlighted how this community developed.

By the spring semester of 2012, I had completed my literature review and had discovered approximately 100 books, articles, and stories that I wanted to use in my dissertation. I proceeded to thoroughly organize, synopsise, and deconstruct each of the articles into seven massive spreadsheets. They required 9x13 size pages to be printed and readable. After submitting this information to my dissertation committee chair, I was quickly asked to share this method with all of the students following in my footsteps, as it made it easy to categorize the information and help to create a flow of information for Chapter 2 of the dissertation. All I had to do was the most difficult part, start writing.

In early 2012, even though I did not have much written, with my dissertation chair, I submitted a proposal to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) about the Nursing@Nike community and what we were able to do with it. Surprisingly, the proposal was accepted and in March, I travelled to Phoenix and delivered the presentation. At the same time, I

began actively searching for a new employment opportunity and completed more than 40 interviews at the Placement Exchange Job Fair during the conference. Though several of the opportunities seemed to go well, none of them came through, and I remained here at the university.

In April of 2012, I attended a writing retreat for the first time and had an experience like no other. I walked into the room with nearly 100 articles and books in my wheeled tote, ready to find out what to do with them. One of the students who was a few semesters ahead of me suggested that I just write a one page summary for each, nothing more. By the end of that six hour retreat, I had written summaries for nearly half of my articles. Two weeks later, I had all of them completed and started to determine where they might be most appropriately used in the first three chapters of my dissertation (the proposal). By the end of May, I was being told that I was nearly ready to defend my proposal. That was not to be, however. I was struggling to motivate myself to complete the dissertation, dealing with my experiences in the failed search for a new employment opportunity, and working through the challenges I was having in my office, all of which effectively derailed my timeline. It was also during this period when my new supervisor made a decision to have another advisor in the office be responsible for the Nursing@Nike community for the fall semester of 2012. At the time I was informed, I was okay with it since I expected to be working somewhere else by then, but that was not to be.

In August, I pulled things back together and got busy. My plan was to finally defend my proposal in September or October and finish the dissertation by the end of the spring semester of 2013. Things of course did not progress the way I hoped. In September, I received comments back from the dissertation committee chair that left a lot of work for me to do in order to defend my proposal (in November, at this point). I was not happy with this turn of events because the last time I had submitted the proposal for review I did not get many edits. I spent an entire weekend doing nothing but making the requested corrections, and it was well received upon further review. In October, I had another surprise when a student who had graduated asked if what I was doing was too close to her research, since we were using the same theoretical framework. Because her dissertation was quantitative and investigated different factors, I did not think so, but I was instructed to find a new framework. That is how I came to use Tuckman's Stages of Group Development.

When the defense date, December 13, 2012 finally arrived, I was a wreck. Despite having taken notes at another student's proposal defense and knowing what was coming, I was afraid that I would not have any idea as to how to answer the questions that would be posed. I also knew that my dissertation committee chair would never allow me to defend the proposal if she was not 100% certain that it would be approved, yet I was still nervous, sweating bullets the entire time as I waited for the defense to begin. Once things were underway, I was fine. There were very few questions and only minor changes that needed

to be made. I submitted my IRB application as soon as the university reopened in January and received permission to begin my interviews on January 22, 2013.

The very next day I sent an email to all of the students who had lived in the Nursing@Nike community during their first year on campus, a total of 68 students. Of those 68, 16 responded, indicating a desire to participate. Of those 16, a double blind draw was conducted to randomly select 12 participants. The first interview, Susan, occurred on February 6, and the last was with Emily on February 20. I used an Android application for voice recording to record the interviews, creating digital files which were then stored in a password protected Dropbox account. My transcriptionist, a senior administrative assistant, with nearly 20 years of experience in transcription of both individual and group recordings, finished the first transcription on February 27 and the last one on May 19, 2013. Once the transcriptions were finished, the hard work finally began.

Once I had all of the transcriptions, I began reading them over and over again, trying to gain insight into the true meaning of their words. My dissertation committee chair instructed me to allow the students' words to ruminate, almost like letting a fine wine mature, so that when I had time to truly absorb their meaning, the themes would come to me. This was truly the most difficult part for me. What I really wanted to do was to find the common language and meanings in the interviews and use that to find the themes. As one might expect, my dissertation committee chair had good reason for giving me the direction that she did. In early June, I proceeded to give her the processed documents that

included the original transcripts, along with each question and all 12 answers summarized, including my thoughts on the thematic references for each question. I did not provide what I believed the themes would eventually be, as I did not want to influence her thoughts on the subject. While I waited on her reply, I collected other recently completed qualitative dissertations to use as a guide for the structure of my last three chapters.

Of course, as my dissertation finally came together, life outside got very interesting. In June, the dean of the college had to complete her five-year review. During this process, my supervisor was placed on administrative leave after eight of his employees filed a hostile work environment claim. At the same time, I asked for and was given the responsibility of the Nursing@Nike program again for the fall semester of 2013. I immediately implemented a new advertising campaign to recruit as many students as possible. The program had suffered the previous year as the other advisor did not do any teambuilding activities, including the retreat. The members of the community were also not required to participate in the SLS class, leaving the community without a common course to use for bonding and relationship building. In late July, the college learned that the dean would not be reappointed for a new term. The associate dean also announced her retirement, and approximately one week after the last day for both the dean and the associate dean, the university officially terminated the director after the hostile work environment investigation was completed.

I took advantage of this time to get my writing completed. My dissertation committee chair also took the summer off to pursue her own research agenda, something that she needed to do for herself personally and for the graduate program. I began working two hours every night after work before going home and was able to complete the first draft of the final three chapters for her review by the first day of the fall semester of 2013.

During my entire Ph.D. program, through the coursework, the comprehensive examinations, and finally the dissertation, I have often believed that I was on an amusement park ride. Though most of the ride was self-constructed, it often seemed that for every step I took forward, I would take two steps backward. My position at the college constantly seemed at risk which made life stressful and led me to constantly search for new employment opportunities. With the departure of the dean, the associate dean, and the director, it finally seemed as though things were working in my favor. The interim dean and interim associate dean appeared to be interested in the ideas and suggestions that I offered, but the outcome remains to be seen. At the same time, I have moved as close as I have ever come to taking a new position outside of the college. I have completed two rounds of interviews and had my references checked. It is now a waiting game to see if either opportunity will come to fruition and what choice I will make if they both do.

Afterword

Soon after concluding my reflection, I was offered the new position as Director of Enrollment Services at the state college in my hometown. It was a difficult and bittersweet decision to make, and while I was hoping that there would be some negotiation to keep me at the university, that did not happen, and so just three weeks into the new semester I am leaving the university. The new Nursing@Nike students were disappointed to say the least, as well as many of my coworkers and current nursing students. I will be returning on contract for the weekend retreat for the new students, as the new interim dean feels very strongly about the importance of the program and its success. I can only hope that this will continue in future years, because this research has shown without a doubt that there is value to the community. I believe it does help attract better quality students for the nursing program. A member of the faculty volunteered to be the faculty advisor for this year, and this, I believe, will keep the students engaged. I also believe the student success class that the university is developing will not be advantageous for this type of program, so I also hope to work as a consultant with the program administration to develop a specific student success class for the students in the Nursing@Nike Living Learning Community.

VIGNETTE FINALE

When we left Laura, she was filled with apprehension about coming to the university and whether or not she would be successful. She was concerned about whether she would be competitive with her peers, if she would get along with her roommate or suitemates, and her mother's reaction if things went badly.

Laura arrived at the university and moved into the living learning community the weekend before classes started. She met her roommate the same day and her suitemates moved in the next day. By the end of the weekend, they all knew they had been placed with people that they could not only get along with but would hopefully become the best of friends as they pursued their careers in nursing. .

Once classes started, they discovered they had both a nursing advisor for their student success instructor and a nursing faculty advisor available for mentoring. They knew this would help them even more as they traveled along the road to the nursing program. They took the immersion experience to heart, including their weekend retreat, making the most of every experience to improve both academically and personally. They helped organize study sessions and social outings for the community. When classes became challenging and they felt discouraged, they reminded each other about why they were working so hard and what it would be like to all graduate together and become nurses. Laura finally knew she was in the right place and was happy for it.

APPENDIX A
ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPARATIVE INSTITUTIONS

| Institution | Minimum Requirements | Allow course repeats? | NCLEX Pass Rate |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|-----------------|
| University of Central Florida (2012) | Eight Prerequisites with C grade or better; Minimum GPA of 3.0; 78 on TEAS; interview | One course repeated before removed from program | 97% |
| Brigham Young University (2012) | Prerequisites with C or better; Essay; 5 years of community service | Unknown | 96% |
| Ohio State University (2012) | High school graduate; 30 credit hours completed; C+ or better in prerequisites; Minimum GPA of 3.2 | Unknown | >90% |
| University of Tennessee (2012) | Minimum 3.2 GPA; Minimum grade of "C" or better in all courses. | Unknown | Unknown |
| Auburn University (2012) | Sciences completed within five years; minimum GPA of 2.5; interview | Unknown | 100% |
| University of Nebraska (2012) | Minimum 2.5 GPA; Minimum grade of C or better for prerequisites; two reference letters; interview | Unknown | Unknown |

Note. Data acquired from university undergraduate catalogs

APPENDIX B
NURSE PENDING ROADMAP

Two-Year Plan of Study for Nurse Pending Students

Name _____
Signature _____

Wanna be a nurse? Begin here!

Fall

| Course | Title | Hrs. |
|-----------|--------------------------------|------|
| BSC 2010C | General Biology | 4 |
| M&F 1106 | Finite Math or College Algebra | 3 |
| MAC 1105 | College Algebra | 3 |
| PSY 2012 | Intro to Psychology or | 3 |
| SV6 2000 | Intro to Sociology | 3 |
| SLS 1501 | Student Success | 3 |

How did you do? Ready for round two? Go here!

Spring

| Course | Title | Hrs. |
|-----------|-----------------------------|------|
| STA 2014C | Principles of Statistics OR | 3 |
| STA 2023 | Statistical Methods | 3 |
| CHM1032 | General Chemistry | 3 |
| DEP 2004 | Developmental Psychology OR | 3 |
| SOW 3104 | Assessing Human Development | 3 |
| | Gen Ed | 3 |

If you haven't taken the TEAS, you better think about it...

Still hangin' in there? Some light work for you!

Summer

| Course | Title | Hrs. |
|----------|--------------|------|
| MCB2004C | Microbiology | 4 |
| | Gen Ed | 3 |

Have you been to see an advisor recently? If not, put the brakes on, and sign up for an appointment!

You're almost ready to apply!

Fall

| Course | Title | Hrs. |
|-----------|------------------------|------|
| ZOO 3733C | Human Anatomy or A&P I | 4 |
| HUN 3011 | Human Nutrition | 3 |
| | Gen Ed | 3 |
| | Gen Ed | 3 |

Time to apply!

Application Windows

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Accelerated 2nd Degree: | Nov 1 - Jan 15 |
| Basic BSN Orlando: | Dec 1 - Feb 15 |
| Basic BSN Cocoa/Daytona: | July 1 - August 15 |

Now finish the rest of gen ed classes and prereqs...

Spring

| Course | Title | Hrs. |
|-----------|---------------------|------|
| PCB 3703C | Physiology or A&P 2 | 4 |
| | Gen Ed | 3 |
| | Gen Ed | 3 |
| | Gen Ed | 3 |








Take the summer off! You deserve it!

Here are the next steps if you are interested in an Accelerated 2nd Degree BSN:

| |
|---|
| Decisions Announced |
| MoA Submission Deadline |
| Certified Background due |
| UCF Orientation (if necessary) |
| Nursing Program Orientation |
| All Gen Ed and Prerequisite Courses completed |
| Nursing Program Begins |

Here are the next steps if you are interested in a Basic BSN:

| |
|---|
| Decisions Announced |
| MoA Submission Deadline |
| Certified Background Due |
| UCF Orientation (if necessary) |
| Nursing Program Orientation |
| All Gen Ed and Prerequisite Courses completed |
| Nursing Program Begins |

APPENDIX C
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

On Jan 22, 2013, at 15:37, "Alton Austin" <altonaustin@knights.ucf.edu> wrote:

Hello,

I am conducting research for my dissertation with the College of Education at the University of Central Florida. I'd like to speak with you about your perceptions on the experiences you had during your time living in Nursing@Nike.

I think the conversation will take between 60 and 90 minutes. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. It would be a confidential interview. Do you think this is something that you would be willing to do?

If so, please reply to this email and I will randomly select a group from those interested in participating. The explanation of my research and the process is below.

Thanks,

Alton

APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student working on a research project to help understand the challenges our students are facing as they prepare for admission into the nursing program at UCF. The title of this project is Nursing Students and Tuckman's Theory: Building Community using Cohort Development. The following paragraphs detail some of the evaluative research you may be involved in.

You may be asked to participate in a survey in order to provide feedback about your experience during the period of time in which you participated in the living learning community. You will also be asked about your experiences in higher education and what support you may or may not have received.

There is no compensation or other payment to you for taking part in this survey.

Your identity will be kept confidential. The researcher will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from the information you give, and these two things will be stored in different places.

Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office or in a password protected computer. When the study is done and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your information will be combined with information from other people who took part in this study. When the researcher writes about this study to share what was learned with other researchers, she will write about this combined information. Your name will not be used in any report, so people will not know how you answered or what you did.

There are times when the researcher may have to show your information to other people. The researcher may have to show your identity to people who check to be sure the research was done right. These may be people from the University of Central Florida or state, federal or local agencies or others who pay to have the research done.

There are no anticipated risks for you participating in this research other than the small amount of risk associated with confidential studies where a breach of confidentiality might occur but measures, explained in detail above will be taken so that this is very unlikely to occur. There is also the possibility that participants may become upset due to the nature of interview questions and their feelings about life in the living learning community. Contact information for the UCF Counseling Center is included below should their services be needed. You may

refuse to participate in the data collection/research portion of this study and are free to withdraw from it at any time.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact me using the information below my signature. Questions or concerns about research participants' rights may be directed to the UCF IRB Office, University of Central Florida Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246. Or you may call 407-823-2901.

The UCF Counseling Center can be found in Building 27 on the Campus Map. Their phone number is 407-823-2811 and they can also be reached by email: counctr@mail.ucf.edu. Their office hours are: MWThF 8:00am - 5:00pm and Tuesday 8:00am - 7:00pm.

Please sign and return this consent form in the enclosed envelope. A second copy is provided for your records. By signing this letter, you give me permission to report your responses anonymously in the final manuscript to be submitted as part of a doctoral dissertation.

This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Rosa Cintron. She can be contacted at:

Rosa Cintron, Ph.D.
Department of Educational and Human Sciences
College of Education
P.O. Box 161250
Orlando, FL 32816-1250
Office: 407-823-1248
Fax: 407-823-4880
Rosa.cintrondelgado@ucf.edu

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

George A. Austin
PI/Graduate Student
College of Education
4000 Central Florida Blvd.
University of Central Florida
Orlando, FL 32816-1250
Office: 407-823-1947
alton@ucf.edu

___ I have read the procedure described above and I voluntarily agree to take part in the research.

___ I am at least 18 years of age or older.

Signature of participant . . . Printed name of participant . . . Date

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Nursing@Nike Cohort Development Study Interview Protocol

Hello. My name is Alton Austin. I am a graduate student with the College of Education at the University of Central Florida. I'd like to speak with you about your perceptions on the experiences you had during your time living in Nursing@Nike.

I think the conversation will take between 60 and 90 minutes. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. It would be a confidential interview. Do you think this is something that you would be willing to do?

Is this a convenient time or would you prefer to make an appointment for me to call you back?

(If no, ask for the interviewee to suggest a time you could return the call)

I just want you to know that I am required to read a script so my language might seem a little awkward.

I really appreciate that you have taken time out of your busy schedule to talk to me about your experiences.

There is no right, wrong, desirable or undesirable answer. Feel free to express your opinions, whether they are positive or negative. I just want you to openly share with me what you really think and feel. There are no anticipated risks, to you as a participant in this interview other than the small amount of risk associated with confidential studies where a breach of confidentiality might occur but measures will be taken so that this is very unlikely to occur. With your permission, I will be audio-tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. When we are finished with any audiotapes will be erased and all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your responses will be kept confidential and no one will know who said what as a code will be used as identifiers instead of your name.

There is no compensation, or other direct benefits to you for participating in this research you may also choose not to respond to any or all of the questions without an explanation. You may also decline to participate in this interview without any consequences.

If you have any questions about participants' rights, you can direct those to the UCF-IRB Office. I'll give you all that contact information at the close of our call today.

Do you have any questions before I begin asking questions?

Procedure

Pause

I. Initial Survey Questions

1. How do you feel about your decision to live in Nursing@Nike?
2. Are you a first generation student?
3. How is your relationship with family/significant others?
4. Did you work on or off campus while in Nursing@Nike?
5. Were you involved on campus? Sports? Band?
6. What had the biggest impact, work or involvement?

II. Research Question 1

1. What made you decide to live in Nursing@Nike?
2. How did the group develop as a community?
3. What was it like living in Nursing@Nike as the community formed?
 - a. Did you have any challenges with other members of the community?
4. What is the importance to you of living with other students on the same career path?
 - a. Can you describe the sense of community among your peers?
 - b. Did you have interaction with other Nursing@Nike students outside of the residence hall?
5. How was it different from not living in a learning community?
6. Have you ever been involved in a cohort group before this experience?

II. Research Question 2

7. Did you have any interaction with faculty outside of the classroom?

- a. How would you describe that interaction?
8. Did the living learning community help you prepare for admissions to the nursing program?
 - a. How?
 9. How did you feel when you moved out of the community?
 10. What did living in the community do for you, if anything?
 11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Okay, well, thank you very much for letting me talk to you today. Your time is very much appreciated, and your comments have been very helpful.

Now I'd like to give you some contact information. If you have any questions about this research please contact George Austin at 407-823-1947. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Rosa Cintrón. She can be contacted at:

Department of Educational and Human Sciences
College of Education
P.O. Box 161250
Orlando, FL 32816-1250
Office: 407-823-1248
Rosa.CintronDelgado@ucf.edu

If you have any questions or concerns about research participants' rights they may be directed to the UCFIRB Office, UCF Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246. The phone number is 407-823-2901.

Would you like for me to repeat any of that so you can write it down? I know I said it rather quickly.

Thank you so very much for letting me talk with you today. Your time, which I know is valuable, is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.

APPENDIX F
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA0000351, IRB00001138**
To: **George A. Austin**
Date: **January 22, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 1/22/2013, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Type of Review: | Exempt Determination |
| Project Title: | Nursing Students and Tuckman's Theory: Building Community Using Cohort Development |
| Investigator: | George A. Austin |
| IRB Number: | SBE-13-09073 |
| Funding Agency: | |
| Grant Title: | |
| Research ID: | n/a |

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewska, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 01/22/2013 12:52:29 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

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