Graduate Nursing Students Insights of Student Success Writing Modules

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Introduction

Many students entering graduate programs are increasingly underprepared for the academic rigor and demands of graduate-level coursework. Research suggests a lack of academic skills and abilities is a root cause for poor graduate student success [1]. Most graduate students lack writing skills including understanding the writing process and appropriate paraphrasing, academic integrity, and understanding specific styles of writing academic papers such as American Psychological Association (APA).

Strong writing and literacy skills significantly impact nurses' ability to improve patient outcomes. Effective graduate level writing can help students: demonstrate critical thinking, express creative ideas, discuss patient stories, participate in the learning process, explore nursing literature, demonstrate understanding of learning activities, leave a positive impression on patients and healthcare providers, improve communication skills, and advance the nursing profession. Academic writing is a core element of nursing and is important for professional growth [2].

Informal discussions among faculty revealed that many students were struggling with academic writing skills. This concern became a recurring topic during graduate council meetings. In response, the Student Success Modules were developed to support students in strengthening their academic writing abilities.

Following the premise of the Association of College and University Educators' (ACUE) mission, "to ensure student success through quality instruction", faculty worked with the library staff at West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) to create Student Success Modules that focused on writing skills [3]. In the fall 2021 semester, incoming Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) students were encouraged to complete writing modules via the library website. With the understanding that "quality instruction is critical to motivate students in higher education", faculty made completion of the modules mandatory prior to beginning graduate courses in fall 2022 semester [4]. As of late fall 2025, over 5,094 students from all disciplines throughout WTAMU completed at least one of the learning modules.

Description of Student Success Modules

The five modules included the following concepts: evidence-based practice; the research process; plagiarism and academic integrity; the writing process; and professional communication. Each module required individual work taking 20 to 60 minutes to complete. Initially in 2021, students were asked to complete the writing modules as an option and a year later, students were required to complete the modules. Students were required to turn in certificates as proof of completion.

The Evidence-Based Practice Module

This module helps students grasp how to translate research evidence into practical clinical decision-making. It provides guidance on using the best available evidence to support patient care decisions. Visually engaging videos are included to capture students' attention and enhance understanding. A short quiz is provided at the end of the module to reinforce learning.

The Research Process Module

Designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of nursing research, this module outlines the research process as a means of generating evidence on key issues relevant to nursing practice and profession. Each step in the research process is presented with clickable sections that offer detailed explanations. The PICO framework (Patient/Population, Intervention/Exposure,

Comparison/Control, and Outcome) is explained to help students develop effective clinical questions. The module also covers selecting search terms, conducting literature reviews, evaluating sources, and the importance of using credible and relevant evidence. It includes a section on identifying misinformation and disinformation, along with strategies for evaluating web-based resources. A short quiz concludes the module.

The Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Module
The module features two instructional videos focused on avoiding plagiarism. In 2023, a section on artificial intelligence was added to address its role in academic writing. The topics covered include self-plagiarism, paraphrasing techniques, and proper citation practices. The module ends with a brief quiz to assess student understanding.

The Writing Process and Professional Communication Modules
The final two modules focus on effective writing practices and professional communication skills. The writing module emphasizes the importance of revising written work and includes a 30-minute instructional video presented by the university writing center director, followed by a quiz. The professional communication module features a 24-minute video discussing key principles of communication in professional settings, also followed by a short quiz.

Methodology
Faculty collaborated with library and writing center staff to integrate these modules into the library's Info Guides, specifically targeting library and research resources for Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) students. To assess the impact of this initiative, the authors chose to evaluate the outcomes through a structured inquiry.

A brief, four-question interview was developed, consisting primarily of open-ended questions. This semi-structured interview format was selected as it is well suited for primary qualitative data collection, allowing for follow-up questions to probe further into responses and clarify participant comments as needed. The interviews were centered around participants' perceptions of the Student Success Modules.

Interviews were conducted privately, either in person, via Zoom, or by phone, based on the participant's preference and availability. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to initiating the project. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to explore the lived experiences of participants.

Participants included students at different points in their MSN program, those just beginning, currently enrolled and midway in the program, and those approaching graduation. Faculty members conducting the interviews were provided with informed consent forms and the interview questions in advance.

Results
Instructional modules are valuable tools for students as they provide a structured, engaging, and accessible way to learn. Fifteen graduate students were identified during the course of this study as participants. Of these students, three were at the beginning of their graduate nursing program (see chart 2), two were at the midway point of their graduate program (see chart 3), and the remaining 10 students were in their final semester of their graduate program (see chart 4). Students represented each of the graduate programs offered at WTAMU including FNP, Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, and Comprehensive MSN. Overall, most students believed the student success modules to be helpful. Analysis of interviews revealed four themes of helpfulness: university writing center helpfulness; faculty feedback helpfulness; continuous practice helpfulness; and APA format helpfulness.

Four Themes of Helpfulness
University writing center helpfulness
Includes utilizing resources offered to students through the University. Resources are funded through student tuition and although optional, they are available during each semester that the student is enrolled in a course. The writing center offers personalized writing support. Each student is given feedback to help promote the improvement of writing skills necessary to a graduate level student. This support may include any of the following: creation of ideas, outlining and/or organization, APA formatting, and proofreading/ corrections, citing sources. Tutoring services are also available through the writing center. As many graduate students are distant learners, these services are conveniently offered online. Other services offered by the writing center include workshops and presentations customized to specific classes or writing topics.

Students are often referred to the writing center by nursing education faculty members once an issue with writing has been identified. A student may utilize the writing center without faculty facilitation. A report is created for each student that utilizes writing center services that supports collaboration between faculty and the writing center. Faculty are then able to measure student progress from the perspective of knowing the type of support a student receives and reviewing their paper submissions.

Faculty feedback helpfulness
Faculty play an important role in helping to shape a student's inner scholarly voice. Graduate school is time for development for each graduate student and the faculty plays a key role through offering formative feedback to each student on assignments. Through offering intentional feedback at every level of the graduate program faculty are able to solidify each student's academic voice. This encourages students to continue scholarly writing as they exit their graduate program and encourages them to contribute to the knowledge body that supports the nursing profession.

Continuous Practice Helpfulness
Through continually writing, students are able to develop

mastery of their writing skills. Weekly writing assignments help to establish a routine that is conducive to supporting skills that are fluent, clear, and show evidence of scholarly writing. Over time students are able to develop and maintain the technical skills involved in academic writing that are consistent with an individual that is educated at a master's level. Developing the habit of writing helps students to solidify and apply the concepts needed to express themselves academically, thus encouraging them to develop long term qualities to support a professional career.

APA Format Helpfulness

Professionalism is a pillar that is taught during the graduate nursing program, a key fundamental concept that establishes professionalism is the ability to write professional papers in APA format. Not only are graduate students able to avoid plagiarism, but they also demonstrate the skill of synthesizing and citing credible sources that they have reviewed. APA help offered by faculty and the writing center support this skill development for students and gives them the confidence needed to support lifelong professionalism and skills necessary for scholarly and academic writing.

Discussion

The study consisted of total sample size of 15 students. These students were given information of the details of the study then asked to volunteer to answer questions on their experience related to the writing modules. Coursework paper grades were viewed as the end point. Overall, eighty percent of the graduate students interviewed completed the modules to their entirety and major paper grades improved from the beginning to the end of the semester (see chart 1).

The objective of this initiative was to judge the success of implementing instructional activities to support student success and build on existing knowledge of writing module use. The interviews were conducted to evaluate and collect information about student experiences. Through this evaluation process, we identified convenience as a major factor. As the student success modules were beginning to be recommended, some students saw completion as a burden. These students were in their last semester of the program and saw the modules as an "added chore" and did not find them to be helpful as they were already used to seeking writing assistance through other artificial intelligence tools. Once the modules were required to be used by faculty, students began to see them as more useful with some commenting on continued use of the university writing center as well as going back to look at information contained in a specific module.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. Specifically, the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, this project does not include the perspective of students who have completed their MSN programs and have left the university. Including a perspective of students currently practicing or who have gone on for additional degrees would be interesting to investigate. Finally, the subjective nature of interview data can make it challenging to generalize findings to a broader student population.

Conclusion

Helpfulness in an academic setting goes beyond simply answering questions or providing solutions. The faculty at WTAMU believes empowering students to learn and grow, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment, and building strong relationships with students is important. Being helpful allows educators and peers to encourage persistence, build confidence, and ultimately help students achieve their full potential.

Findings from this research will be used to refine and enhance the Student Success Modules, with the goal of continuously improving both the content and the delivery process. Completion of these modules will remain a required component for all students entering the MSN programs.

The use of asynchronous virtual modules offers the advantage of addressing targeted areas of student need while providing a flexible learning option [5]. This format supports students without adding additional burdens, particularly for those who may already be adjusting to the demands of graduate-level coursework.

As faculty, we must remain committed to evolving and enhancing our methods for humanizing online asynchronous learning. This includes fostering student-centered support, building a sense of community, and implementing evidence-based best practices to create more engaging and effective learning experiences.

References

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Major Paper Grades
Chart One

Initial Score ■ Final Score

First Semester Students
Chart Two

■ Initial Score ■ Final Score

Mid Program Students
Chart Three

■ Initial Score ■ Final Score

Final Semester Students
Chart Four

■ Initial Score ■ Final Score