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An exploration of the nonacademic factors influencing nursing student persistence

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Increasing the production of nurses is essential to meet the current and future, the healthcare needs of our society. As such, schools of nursing are facing heightened pressure to increase their production of nurses in order to meet this demand. One of the main priorities for these institutions is in improving their effectiveness in admitting students who can successfully complete the nursing program. There are a number of factors influencing this shortfall including the process by which schools of nursing assess applicants. Traditionally, colleges and universities have relied solely on academic criteria to assess nursing school applicants. However, despite this practice, the majority of nursing programs have struggled with below average completion rates over the past twenty years. Despite these struggles, there is little research regarding the potential impact nonacademic factors have on nursing school persistence rates and schools of nursing continue to rely on academic factors when assessing applicants. Previous studies of nursing student retention indicate that there is a gap in the knowledge regarding the effectiveness of traditional nursing school admissions standards in predicting program completion. The purpose of this two-phase, sequential explanatory mixed-method research study is to answer the overarching research question: How well do standard admission variables (GPA and TEAS) accurately distinguish program completers from non-completers among students who were conditionally admitted to the Bachelor of Science in the nursing program? The first phase of this study used discriminant analysis to examine the relationship between a number of academic and nonacademic factors and student persistence among a sample population of 174 former students. The second phase of research utilized qualitative interviews to investigate the experiences of former students to enhance our understanding of the factors that were involved in their persistence. Findings from this study identified a statistically significant relationship between financial need and the number of transfer credits awarded with student persistence. In addition, the non-academic factors of self-efficacy, grit, institutional support and peer support were found to influence student persistence. Recommendations based on these findings include replication of the study with a different population of nursing students and a larger sample size. As nursing schools look to improve their completion rates, adding the nonacademic factors of grit and self-efficacy to their admission criteria may help enhance the effectiveness of their admission criteria and increase the production of nurses.