Transforming Post-Master’s DNP Education:

Student Perspectives About Their Educational Experiences

Jana Esden, DNP, APNP, FNP-BC
Mary Nichols, PhD, APRN, FNP-BC

FRONTIER NURSING UNIVERSITY
www.frontier.edu
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Learner Objectives

By the end of this presentation, the learner will be able to:

• List key motives that drive master’s prepared APRNs to obtain a DNP degree.
• Identify and discuss specific facilitators and barriers that may affect success for the DNP student.
• Begin to develop a plan to address barriers for DNP success as well as to indicate a plan to promote key successful strategies for students in post-masters DNP programs.
Background

• 2004: AACN position statement – endorsing the DNP. Recommended as degree to enter into APRN practice by 2015
• 2006: 20 DNP programs nationwide
• 2015: 264 programs nationwide with an additional 60 in development; still no requirement for DNP to practice as an APRN

(AACN, 2004; AACN, 2015a)
DNP Program Development

• DNP Essentials – used to guide development of DNP programs

• Challenges to implementation
  – Focus of programs
  – Program goals
  – Consistency amongst programs

Perspectives Concerning Program Implementation

• Program Administrators
• Faculty
• APRN Community

What about the student perspective?

Purpose

• Qualitative descriptive study
• Explore perceptions of masters-prepared APRNs who completed a DNP degree
• Perceived facilitators and barriers to success in a DNP program
Methods

• IRB approval from Frontier Nursing University

• Subjects
  – APRNs
  – Graduates of post-Master’s DNP programs

• Link to Survey Monkey available through:
  – Doctors of Nursing Practice, Inc. online newsletter
  – Doctors of Nursing Practice community blog
  – Sent to professional colleagues and to the DNP graduates of one university with DNP alumni
Survey Items

Participants were asked:

• Demographic data
• Reasons why they returned for a post-Master’s DNP
• What was particularly useful for success in their programs
• Any barriers/challenges to success
• What advice would they offer to DNP students
Survey Items (continued)

• Described their DNP projects
• Discussed dissemination of their findings
• Indicated whether or not the completion of a DNP increased their yearly salaries
• Selected an overall satisfaction rating re: their decision to earn a DNP degree
Demographic Items

• Age
• Gender
• Years of APRN experience
• Months since program completion
• Length of DNP program in months
• Annual personal income
Data Analyses

• Descriptive statistics – demographic data
• Content analysis – open-ended questions
Results

• 47 individuals were recruited
• 39 met criteria for inclusion
• *one participant did not complete demographic data
## Demographics (N=38)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>Mean: 50.95 years (range 32-66 years)</td>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>89.47% female; 10.53% male</td>
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<td><strong>Years as an APRN</strong></td>
<td>Mean: 14.13 years (range 1-33 years)</td>
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<td><strong>Months since completion of DNP program</strong></td>
<td>Mean: 19.97 months (range 1 month – 8 yrs)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Length in Months</strong></td>
<td>Mean: 19.51 months (range 12-36 months)</td>
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<td><strong>Annual Income (n = 37)</strong></td>
<td>Less than $50,000: 3 (8%)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$50,000-$74,000: 3 (8%)</td>
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<td>$75,000-$99,000: 14 (38%)</td>
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<td>$100,000-$149,000: 14 (38%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Greater than $150,000: 3 (8%)</td>
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<td><strong>Note</strong></td>
<td>*1 participant skipped this item</td>
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Question 1: As a masters-prepared APRN, please list 3-4 reasons why you decided to return for your DNP

4 Themes:

• Professional reasons (38%)
• Personal reasons (27%)
• The desire to teach (19%)
• To earn a terminal degree (16%)
Examples of *Professional Reasons*

- Promoting the profession
- Advancing one’s career
- Earning leadership positions
- Parity with APRN peers
- Improvement of patient care
- Professional satisfaction
Examples of Personal reasons

- Improvement of knowledge of evidence-based practice, research, or a clinical interest area
- The desire to learn
- Personal growth
- Tuition affordability
- The ability to return for a DNP soon after earning an MSN
Question 2: What did you as a student find particularly helpful or useful for success in your DNP Program?

5 Themes

- Faculty/mentor support (30%)
- Program-specific characteristics (24%)
- Peer support (24%)
- Personal attributes (16%)
- Family and community/employer support (6%)
Examples of *Faculty/mentor support*

- Supportive faculty
- Supportive DNP Project Team (committee) chairs
- Supportive program directors
Examples of *Program-specific characteristics*

- Structure of courses
- Ability to learn online
Examples of *Personal attributes*

• Organizational skills
• Self-motivation
• Focus
Question 3: Please list any barriers or challenges to your being successful in your program

3 Themes

- DNP program issues (51%)
- Personal barriers (36%)
- Professional issues (13%)
Examples of *DNP program issues*

- Less than supportive faculty, chairs, and/or program directors
- Perception of “chaos” within the program
- Perceived educational inconsistencies
Examples of *Personal barriers*

- Time management
- Maintaining work/school/home balance
- Sustaining a rigorous academic workload
- Family emergencies
Examples of *Professional issues*

- Lack of clear professional goals for DNP-prepared APRNs
- Negative attitudes regarding the DNP from APRN colleagues due to the lack of salary increase
- Lack of DNP-prepared mentors
Question 4: What advice for success would you offer current DNP students or students considering returning for the DNP?

3 Themes

• *Educational and study strategies for success* (45%)
• *Personal recommendations* (42%)
• *Program selection recommendations* (13%)
Examples of *Educational and study strategies for success*

- Stay focused; be organized; work ahead; do not give up
- Select a topic of interest for the DNP project
- Be realistic about project time constraints
- Develop effective relationships with school peers/the DNP cohort
Examples of *Personal recommendations*

- Expect a deep time commitment
- Consider work reductions
- Ask for family support
- Delegate home responsibilities
Examples of *Program selection recommendations*

- Research DNP programs for:
  - Reputation
  - Stability
  - Fit to the student
Question 5: Please describe what type of capstone project you completed

- Evidence generation projects (39%)
- Practice change/quality improvement projects (27%)
- Literature reviews (14%),
- Other projects (20%)
Examples of Other projects

- Continuing education modules
- Community health projects
- Strategic plans for future projects
- Case studies
Dissemination of Scholarly Work

76% of participants disseminated the findings of their DNP projects in some way:

- Podium or poster presentation (55%)
- Presented AND published (13%)
- Published without presenting (8%)
Salary and Satisfaction

Salary:
• No salary increase (64%)
  – Reductions to work in academia

Satisfaction:
• Mean: 8.44 on scale of 1-10
• 56% responded with 10/10
Discussion

• More facilitators identified than barriers to success (67 responses versus 47)

• Uses for this data:
  – Student and faculty education
  – Strategic planning
  – DNP program development and implementation
Initial Recommendations

• Consistency in academic requirements
• Consensus of vision for the overall goal of the DNP as a terminal degree
• Evidence-based practice and the *DNP Essentials* as the basis for curricula
Program Length

• Range 12 – 36 months – consistent with the findings of Udlis and Mancuso.

• AACN: Minimum 12 months of full time study for post-masters DNP programs

(AACN, 2015b; Udlis & Mancuso, 2015)
DNP Projects

Variation in types of DNP projects consistent with the literature

• Vary widely in quality
• May not be consistent with the AACN’s *DNP Essentials*

DNP Projects

• Faculty consensus on DNP project outcomes is needed
• Should reflect the *DNP Essentials*
• Focus on translation of the evidence, quality improvement, and practice change
• Positively influence patient outcomes

(AACN, 2015b; Nelson et al., 2013; NONPF, 2015)
Student Perspective on DNP Programs

- Faculty/mentor support and program-related characteristics – most cited as facilitators to success
- Program issues were the most frequently cited barrier to success, even above personal issues
Capitalizing on Facilitators

• DNP Project Team Leader (chair) mentoring by experienced faculty who are:
  – Knowledgeable in evidence-based practice
  – Familiar with the *DNP Essentials* and current AACN recommendations for project implementation
  – Experienced in fostering an encouraging environment for students
Capitalizing on Facilitators

• Incorporating information on strategies for program success at student orientation
• Dialogue re: professional and personal obligations
• Balancing the demands of a program
• Team-building activities
Study Limitations

• Convenience sample
  – One online professional site
  – Snowballing from one university
• Written responses to open-ended questions
  – Anonymity and online format
Conclusions

• More facilitators identified than barriers to success

• DNP program factors contribute to both the perceived facilitators as well as perceived barriers to student success in post-master’s DNP programs
Conclusions

• Faculty must develop and maintain high quality curricula that focuses on translation of the evidence, quality improvement, and practice change to positively influence patient outcomes
Conclusions

• DNP program administrators must continue to strive for consistency both within and among programs using the *DNP Essentials* and the AACN white paper to guide DNP curriculum, project requirements, and terminology.
Conclusions

• Quantitative and qualitative data is needed
  – Educators
  – Students

• Enhance and refine DNP curricula to meet the needs of future students
References


