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# INCREASING FLEXIBILITY FOR ADULT LEARNERS: MERGING A HYBRID COURSE WITH A FULLY ONLINE COURSE

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by a  
Sloan Consortium grant to the University  
of Massachusetts.



# OBJECTIVES

1. Examine the processes and outcomes of a project aimed at increasing enrollment into two nurse educator courses at UMW GSN
2. Discuss the pros and cons of the strategy selected for the project.

# BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

## Critical shortage of nursing faculty in U.S.

- 587,000 new nursing jobs available by 2010 (Aiken, Cheung, Olds, 2009).
- Expected nursing shortage between 300,000 and 1,000,000 by 2020-2025 (Aiken, Cheung, Olds, 2009).
- Nursing schools turned away 49,948 qualified applicants in 2008-2009 (AACN, 2009).





# NURSE EDUCATOR CURRICULUM AT UMW GSN

- BS prepared registered nurses
- Limited enrollment; range 2-11 students
- Students
  - ages varied - new college grads to nurses 40s, 50s, and older
  - working outside the home
  - raising families, sending children to college
  - varied technological skills
  - varied views of technology

# FORMAT OF NURSE EDUCATOR COURSES

- ◉ GSN does not offer any fully online programs.
- ◉ Use a combination of traditional classroom, hybrid, and fully online courses.

Nurse educators benefit from experience and skills in online learning and teaching.



# STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

- ◉ Some love traditional classrooms.
- ◉ Others prefer online format but want at least some face to face, i.e., hybrid course.
- ◉ Others prefer fully online.







# PROBLEM

- Our NE course enrollments were small.
  - We could not offer both hybrid and fully online course sections.
  - How could we increase enrollment by meeting the learning preferences of potential students?
- Premise: most students were satisfied with either hybrid or fully online
  - Loved the time management flexibility, not driving to campus, learning the technology



# POSSIBLE SOLUTION

Think outside the box, i.e., allow students the option within a single course of completing the course either as hybrid or fully online.

- ✓ Sloan C funding provided opportunity to consult with experts.

# STUDY AIMS

- ◉ Describe the experience and satisfaction of enrolled students in a fully online course versus a hybrid course.
- ◉ Identify the characteristics of students who select the fully online versus the hybrid options.
- ◉ Compare changes in course enrollment to previous semesters.
- ◉ Identify student outcomes.
- ◉ Describe faculty perceptions of workload when teaching this type of course.



# STUDY DESIGN


- ◉ Exploratory prospective design.  
Exempted from full IRB review
- ◉ Chen's theory-driven model of program evaluation.
- ◉ Target population - BSN prepared registered nurses, matriculated or non-matriculated students.

# STUDENT RECRUITMENT

- ◉ Face to face presentations at student assemblies.
- ◉ Special mention during open house events.
- ◉ Face to face presentation to local nurses.
- ◉ Special course flier.
- ◉ Special advertisements in local Sunday paper for 4 consecutive weeks (very effective for recruiting non-matriculated students).
- ◉ School web site.

# STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Upon enrollment, each student sent  
welcome letter  
informing of opportunity to voluntarily  
participate by  
completing one online demographic survey and  
participating in a focus group or  
telephone interview.



# GETTING STARTED: COURSE REDESIGN

- ✓ Began with two hybrid courses.
- ✓ Re-examined course outcomes and revised course content to better reflect 3-credits.
  - ✓ “What is this course really for?”
- ✓ Identified learning activities that would allow students to demonstrate how each course outcome was achieved
  - ✓ “What do we want the students to be able to do?”



# GETTING STARTED WITH COURSE REDESIGN

- ✓ First redesigned both courses as fully online courses.

Content divided into learning modules each with

- Objectives

- Time frames

- Readings

- Narrated slides

- Activities

  - written assignments

  - application exercises

  - peer critiques

  - online discussions





# MERGING A FULLY ONLINE WITH A BLENDED

- ◉ Identified content confusing or would lend itself to F2F interaction.
- ◉ Created F2F schedule from this.
- ◉ Students select fully online or hybrid option during first two weeks.
- ◉ Students not allowed to change format during a course.
- ◉ Major assignments the same.
- ◉ “Muddiest point” discussion board



# MERGING A FULLY ONLINE WITH BLENDED

- ◉ When hybrid option students attended class, fully online students engaged in an additional online discussion.

# MERGING A FULLY ONLINE WITH BLENDED

- ⦿ All students progressed through the course modules during the same time frames.
- ⦿ To provide a one-class experience, did not separate fully online students from hybrid course students except during week of a F2F class.

# DATA ANALYSIS

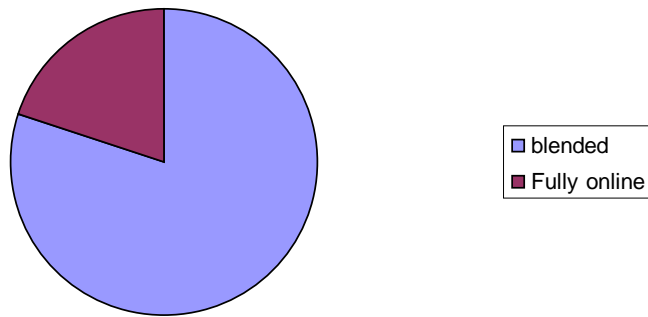
- Descriptive statistics were used to examine student enrollment, grades, and survey data.
- Focus group and telephone interview responses were analyzed by identifying overall themes for the data.



# Demographics

N=19

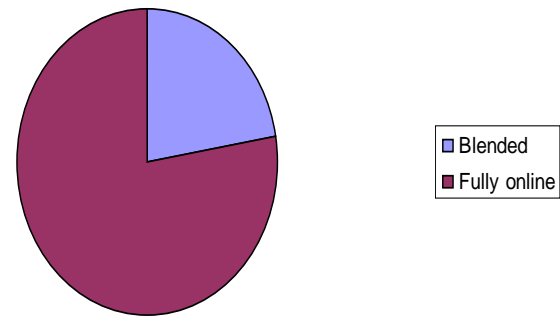
N 620 Fully online versus blended option



Year 1 students/non-matriculated

Mean age: 45.6 years

N 623 Fully online versus blended students

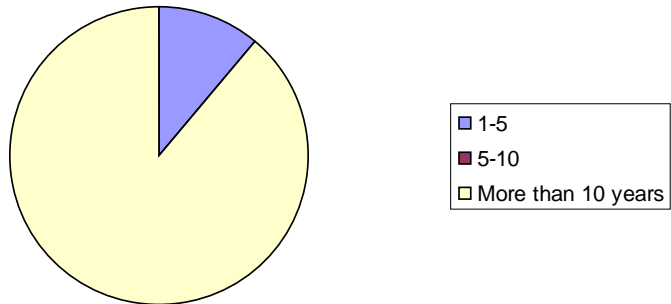


Year 2 students

Mean age: 37.8 years

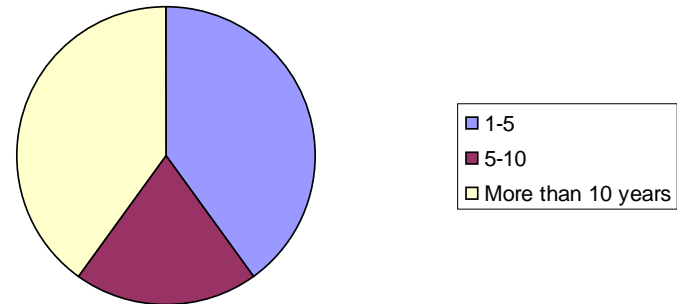
# DEMOGRAPHICS

N 620 Years in nursing



Year 1 students/non matriculated

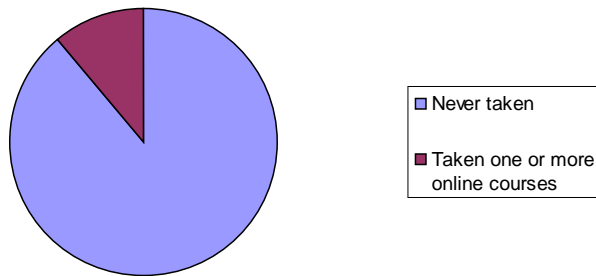
N 623 Years in nursing



Year 2 students

# DEMOGRAPHICS

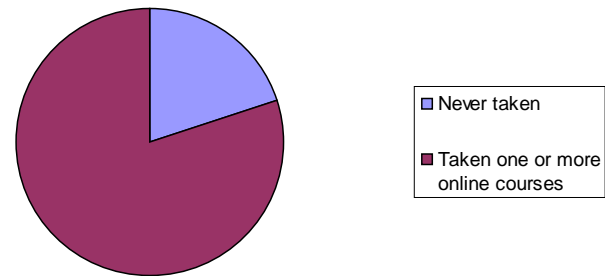
N 620 Previous experience with online courses



Year 1 students/non-matriculated

Majority selected blended option

N 623 Previous experience with online courses



Year 2 students

Majority selected fully online option

# RESULTS

<b>Study aim</b>	<b>Data source</b>
Experience and satisfaction of enrolled students in a full online course versus a blended course.	Focus groups Interviews
Characteristics of students who select the fully online versus the blended options.	Focus groups Online demographic surveys
Changes in course enrollment compared to previous semesters.	Course data
Student course outcomes.	Course grades
Faculty perceptions of workload when teaching this type of course.	Course faculty





# RESULTS

## ○ Major themes

- Preferred learning style
- Skill and experience for learning in an online environment
- Social interaction
- Instructor characteristics
- Accurate course marketing



# RESULTS

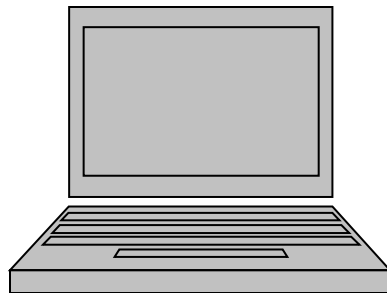
- ✓ How is the course going for you?
  - ✓ “ I feel positive about what I learned,” “I was expecting more structure,” “Many multiple visits to the computer over the week” .
- ✓ How satisfied are you with your decision to take the course in this format?
  - ✓ “I like the travel - not having to drive each week,” “I liked the flexibility - to be able to work in my PJs,” “More personal feedback, especially if this is your first stab as graduate course,” “4 classes weren’t enough” .

# RESULTS

What attracted you to either the online or blended format of graduate nursing courses?

Fully online: “did not want to make the drive,”  
“I am tech savvy - the wave of the future.”

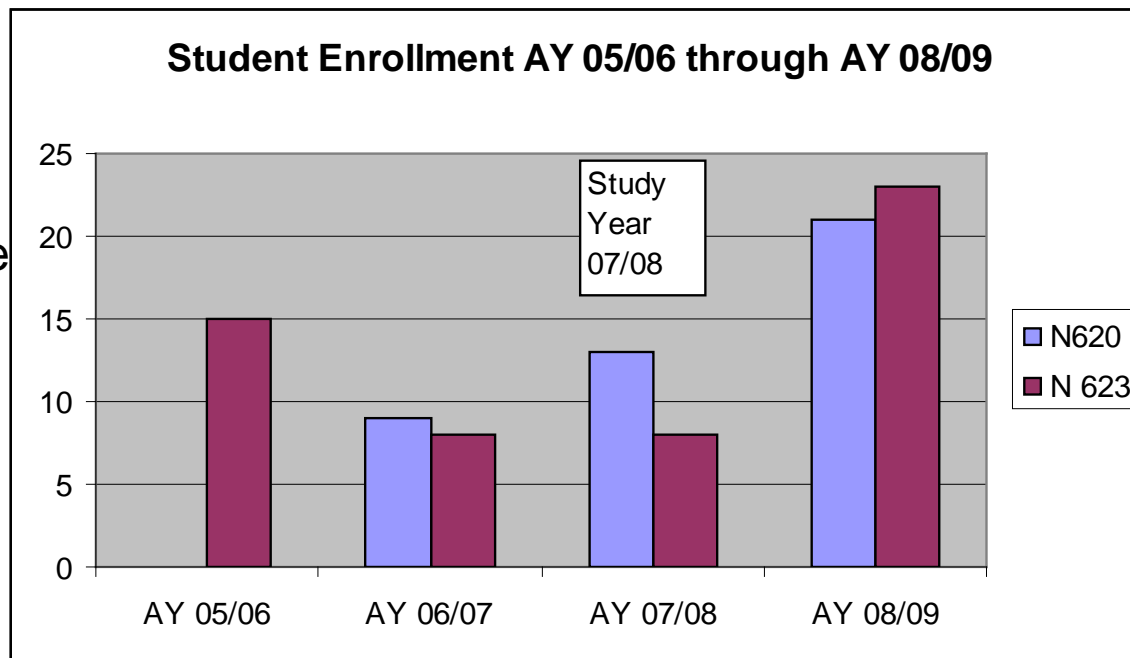
Hybrid: “I’m a social butterfly,” “I thought we  
may have more information available to us.”



# CHANGES IN COURSE ENROLLMENT COMPARED TO PREVIOUS SEMESTERS

Enrollment into Year 1 N 620 increased from 8 (Jan 07) to 10 (Jan 08) students. One non matric blended student dropped week 2 because frustrated with time commitment and inexperience with basic computer software.

Enrollment in Year 2 N623 did not increase remaining at 9 students. Expected because only matric students who completed N620 could enroll. One fully online student dropped in week 2 due to family events.



However, the extended story is better!

# STUDENT COURSE OUTCOMES

- No differences noted between the fully online and hybrid student grades.
- All students who remained in the courses passed with at least a grade of B.

# FACULTY PERCEPTIONS

Course faculty perceived an increased workload.

Why?

During a week of a F2F class, instructors also participated in and graded the fully online student discussion.





# DISCUSSION

- ◉ Year 1 students may benefit from hybrid courses with more F2F classes.
- ◉ In hybrid courses, offer F2F first class.
- ◉ Offer students assistance in gaining skill with LMS. Highly visible proactive instructor until students gain comfort with tech.
- ◉ Stronger student advisement system for non-matriculated students.
  - Often older, may have graduated years ago.
  - Be more explicit about use of technology in course advertisements and descriptions.
- ◉ Be flexible, we changed to allowing students to switch option during the course in N 620 from fully online to hybrid.
- ◉ Course enrollments AY 09/10.
  - N 620 has 10 enrolled students this Fall which is an increase from 4 students Fall 08.
  - Will we continue to increase NP enrollment into NE courses ? (important to ease faculty shortage).



# LIMITATIONS

- ◉ Exploratory design
- ◉ Small sample size
- ◉ Study conducted by course faculty hence unable to attend focus group meetings to probe more deeply.
- ◉ Lack data from students who dropped a course.
- ◉ Sloan C funding permitted enhanced course marketing of N 620 - did not measure impact on enrollment.



# QUESTIONS?



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ◉ Judith Abbate, PhD, RN
- ◉ We are very grateful to students who participated in the project.

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