

The Personal Faculty Mentor (PFM) Role: Advanced Support for Individualized Student Care

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Abstract

Background: Given the complexity of student responsibilities and backgrounds, the need for additional support during graduate education is evident for overall success. An innovative role that addresses these complexities and mitigates issues facing today's nursing student was developed.

Purpose: The Personal Faculty Mentor (PFM) role was developed to provide one, specific point of contact in an effort to support students throughout their MSN journey by completing new student orientation, individualized student outreach, frequent personal communication, and development of success plans.

The PFM role also supports the faculty or instructor role by providing additional support and outreach with student concerns (low participation or scores).

The overall purpose of the PFM is to improve student outcomes including pass rates, persistence rates, and satisfaction.

Methods: Within the University's Master of Science in Nursing Accelerated Track (MSN AT) Advanced Generalist and Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL), the PFM role was implemented to support student success. The MSN AT has flexible due dates for assignments which lends for more intensive student support.

Results: Since the PFM role has been in place since program inception (July 2019), persistence and program completion are on average 12% higher, as high as 29%, with those students who actively participate with their PFM. Through survey, students report high satisfaction with the PFM role and attribute part of their success to this supportive role. Each session, students who actively participate with their PFM have better persistence than those who do not.

Limitations: While the anecdotal feedback and positive outcomes are noteworthy, this strategy did not involve an empirical research investigation. As a result, a causative relationship may not be concrete. There is clearly an improvement in the retention and persistence of students who engage regularly with the PFM; however, there are additional variables that may be impacting the outcomes that would be helpful to identify.

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Conclusions / Implications for Practice - Student support promotes success. The role of the PFM provides individualized, student-centered support. Students who participate and interact with their PFM are more likely to be successful in the MSN AT.

Key words: Mentor, student-centered, individualized, student support, communication.

Background

Mentoring is not a new concept within education. Many instances of formal and informal mentor relationships are present throughout education settings and programs. Particularly within nursing, the need to support and transition successful nurses into practice is paramount. At the graduate level, assumptions may be present on the preparedness and functionality of nursing practice. Graduate level nursing students are especially vulnerable as many are working full-time in the field and have other personal responsibilities and obligations⁶. Some graduate nursing students are also newer to the field of nursing and may question their own ability to successfully complete a Master's or Doctorate degree. Seasoned nurses may also question their ability to function in a higher-level nursing position. Within this population of graduate nursing the students, the inclusion of formal mentorship programs provides the opportunity to support and nurture our future nursing leaders in education and learning.

Mentoring is crucial to help support the next generation of healthcare providers¹. Mentors play a pivotal role in facilitating both personal and professional growth throughout one's journey⁵. Mentors possess the ability to enrich one's tacit understanding of the "unwritten rules" concerning professionalism, ethics, values, and the art of medicine, which often go beyond textbook teachings³. Additionally, in numerous instances, mentors offer invaluable emotional support and motivation. Implementing a formal mentorship plan at the graduate student level, can improve the educational experience and learning.

Review of Literature

Student mentoring is a concept that has been studied by faculty and administrators in nursing schools. Students can feel the stress of managing their studies combined with clinical components of nursing school. A mentoring program has been shown to positively impact the student's ability to

cope with stress and acclimate to the university⁹. Faculty outreach can help students feel supported and cared for during their college experience.

Literature reviews exploring faculty mentoring and student success has been correlated to positive student outcomes⁴. Another literature review demonstrated a positive impact on students who feel cared for by faculty and had a sense of belonging². Caring behaviors by faculty ultimately improved the student's success in the nursing program². In another study, Students who drop from nursing programs felt they did not have the tools needed to cope with nursing school and the profession of nursing in general¹.

Development of a mentoring program is essential to assist students in getting the guidance necessary to be successful. The Personal Faculty Mentor (PFM) program provides students with faculty mentors who can help and guide students in all aspects of their education providing resources necessary for success.

Intervention

The intervention, PFM role, is supported by Swanson's Theory of caring. Since Swanson's theory of caring serves as a powerful motivation in nurse/patient relationships, it can be extrapolated to the PFM/student relationship in an academic environment. The theory has five tenants that is applied to this intervention: (a) knowing, (b) being with, (c) doing for, (d) enabling, and (e) managing belief⁷. First, the "knowing" tenant pertains to the PFM's knowledge related to guiding the student in every aspect of their education journey from first entering the MSN AT track to completion of the practicum course. The "being with" tenant includes the emotional presence of the PFM in giving support and feedback to help the student succeed. The "enabling" tenant provides the sense of being cared for and understood in the PFM/Student relationship as the goal of the PFM is to empower the student to achieve goals. The "doing for" tenant encompasses the entire PFM role in providing the support the

student needs throughout the MSN AT program. Finally, the “maintaining belief” tenant describes the PFM/student relationship in which the PFM provides encouragement, and the student believes that the PFM cares about the success of the student. For the

PFM to be fully engaged in the caring relationship with the student, all five domains of Swanson’s theory of caring are included in the development and implementation of the PFM role.

PFM role based on Swanson’s Theory of Caring

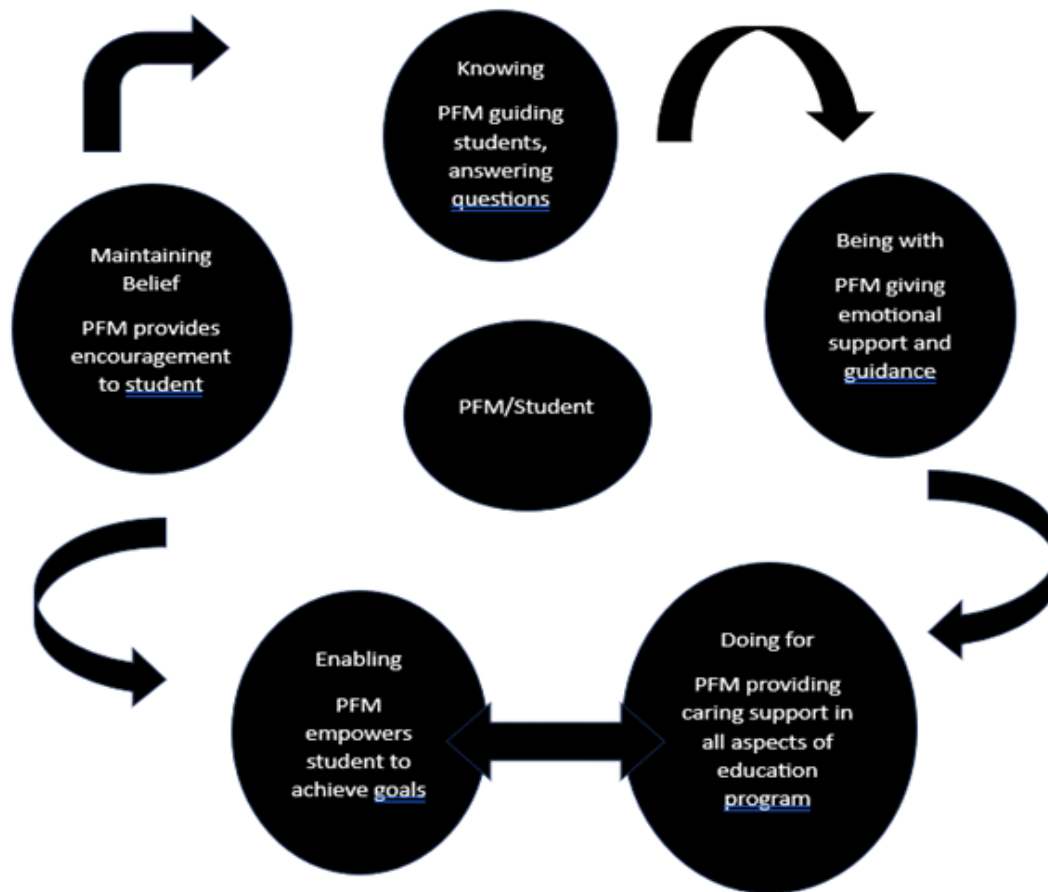


Figure 1: PFM role based on Swanson’s Theory of Caring – Incorporation of Swanson’s Theory of Caring with the Personal Faculty Mentor (PFM) role.

The setting for implementation of the PFM role took place in an online Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program. This MSN program has an accelerated option in which students can potentially complete within 24 weeks if they enter the program with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). There is also an option to start the program with an Associate’s Degree in Nursing (ADN) in which students have additional courses to meet the BSN essentials. The program is fully asynchronous except for a practicum session or sessions when

the student will be onsite with a MSN prepared mentor. In addition, due dates are flexible related to assignments and course participation. Two focus options are available in the program: Clinical Nurse Leadership (CNL) or Advanced Generalist. With the asynchronous format, flexibility, and accelerated option, the need for a PFM is warranted. Particularly in the online environment, students may feel “alone” or lacking support which, more urgently, supports a formal mentorship program.

The Personal Faculty Mentor (PFM) role was developed to provide one, specific point of contact in an effort to support students throughout their Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) journey by completing new student orientation, individualized student outreach, frequent personal communication, practicum-preparedness, and development of success plans. The PFM's also function as the full-time program professors. This dual role supports deeper understanding of the nursing community and program insights. The program of implementation is an online MSN program with concentration options as an Advanced Generalist or Clinical Nurse Leadership.

The development of the role has been a fluid process. Program leadership met with faculty to outline specific duties and responsibilities. As the role advanced, input from students and visiting professors was incorporated or removed from the routine of the PFM. The role continues to remain fluid and flexible to the needs of the students and greater program.

The categories of student support include new student orientation, course-specific progress, return student outreach, specialty webinar development, and practicum-preparedness. Within the categories of support, the first interaction starts with a detailed student orientation that is available live and recorded. Students are then sent a link to sign up for a personalized phone call. The PFM provides course-specific support and progress through weekly monitoring of the courses, biweekly meetings with Student Services to review and provide additional support to at risk students, individualized plans

to support student success, bookstore issues or questions, and simulation support. Through course-specific support, the PFM also assists the faculty or instructor role by providing additional support and outreach with student concerns (low participation or scores). The PFM reaches out, initially, to all students via email with a request to schedule a phone call. Calls are optional with around 50-70% participation each session. Specialty webinars are created on an as needed basis. Subjects are determined through program assessment of needs. These webinars are offered both live and recorded. Examples of topics include program concentration options, practicum project development, and continuing education opportunities. Practicum-preparedness support includes mentor and site support, application process, and project development.

The goal of the PFM is to improve student outcomes including pass rates, persistence rates, and satisfaction.

Evaluation/Results

The PFM role has been in place since program inception (July 2019). Data was tracked starting in March of 2020 specific to those students who interacted with their PFM as opposed to those who did not. Persistence and program completion is on average 12% higher, as high as 29%, with those students who actively participate with their PFM (Figure 2). Each session, students who actively participate with their PFM have better persistence than those who do not. Active participation is defined as those students who completed a phone call with their PFM.

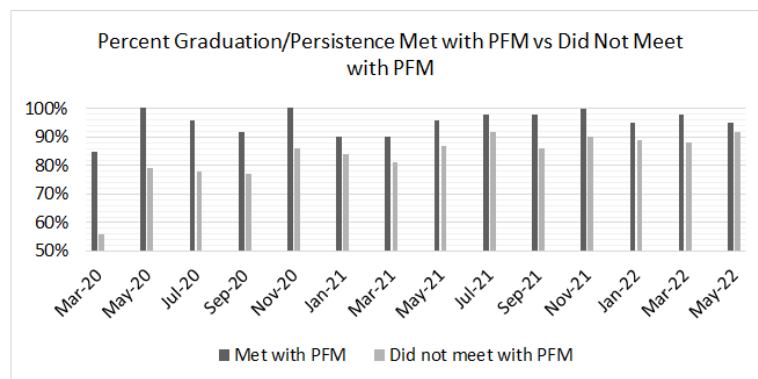


Figure 2: Percent Graduation/Persistence met with PFM vs Did Not Meet with PFM - Persistence and program completion is on average 12% higher, as high as 29%, with those students who actively participate with their PFM.

A survey was also administered to students in the program. Overwhelming positive feedback was received. Students felt supported by their PFM, felt the PFM promoted success, and multiple positive comments were shared. Within the survey of 98% or participants felt their PFM promoted their success in the program (Figure 3).

Do you feel your PFM has promoted your success in the program?

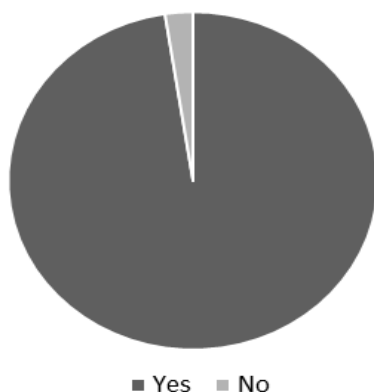


Figure 3: Survey question: Do you feel your PFM has promoted your success in the program? 98% or participants felt their PFM promoted their success in the program.

Conclusion

As a quality improvement (QI) project, full IRB was not pursued. Permissions through the university following the system policy and protocol were completed for permission. Ethical and legal risk is absent given the project topic and related components.

Student support, through mentorship, promotes success. Positive mentoring experiences in nursing academia can lead to retention of students and improve mentee satisfaction⁵. The role of the PFM provides individualized, student-centered support. The PFM role improved academic outcomes through increased persistence rates and student satisfaction in the program. Students who participate and interact with their PFM are more likely to be successful in the MSN program.

Swanson's theory of caring provided the theoretical framework for the project by streamlining the PFM role to provide caring support for the student. Just as the perception that someone cares

can impact an individual's emotional needs, online MSN students also need to feel that there is someone with focused attention on them who is also listening to them; thus, the PFM role.

While the anecdotal feedback and positive outcomes are noteworthy, this strategy did not involve an empirical research investigation. As a result, a causative relationship may not be concrete. There is clearly an improvement in the retention and persistence of students who engage regularly with the PFM; however, there are additional variables that may be impacting the outcomes that would be helpful to identify. The PFM role maintains consistent efforts within the program. Based on current positive data of persistence and satisfaction, the PFM role is a selling point of the program and future of the role is bright. The fluidity of the role continues to be present as the needs of the student population and program flex over time. Additional programs within Chamberlain, have explored adding the role and supportive data continues to be evaluated.

Funding Sources: N/A

Ethical Clearance/Statement of Ethics: quality improvement project approved by Chamberlain University following the organization policy and protocol. Ethical and legal risk is absent given the project topic and related components.

Conflicts of Interest Statement: N/A

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