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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PRE-NURSING STUDENTS  
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

KENDALL DARR

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The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

HONORS BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING

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April 29, 2022

## ABSTRACT

### THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PRE-NURSING STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Kendall Darr, B.S. Nursing

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2022

Faculty Mentor: Regina Urban and Leslie Jennings

Today's pre-nursing (PN) students represent the future for pre-licensure nursing program enrollment. Previous studies have explored study habits and predictors of success of PN students, yet little is known about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe PN student perceptions of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected them. Study participants ( $n = 364$ ) offered short-answer responses that ranged from detailed accounts of the effects the pandemic had on them (86.3%) to no effects at all (13.7%). Data analysis revealed four study themes that illustrated participants' experiences: (a) Learning Virtually, (b) Pursuing Work-Life Balance, (c) Feeling Isolated, and (d) Finding a Silver Lining. PN students are key to the continued growth of nursing programs, yet rarely the subject of nursing research. More research is needed to understand their experiences and develop interventions to support their well-being as learners prior to program admission.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Significance

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the importance of pre-nursing (PN) students as the future of the nursing workforce. The experiences of PN students play a vital role in their journey to become nursing students and eventually registered nurses. Each experience, good and bad, creates personal growth and shapes the minds of PN students as they navigate their future in the nursing profession.

While much is known about nursing students and the difficulties they face during their journey to becoming a professional nurse, little is known about PN students and their experiences as they navigate the steps needed to gain admission into competitive nursing programs. PN students are important because they are the future of the nursing workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the nursing workforce in the United States (U.S.) is supposed to grow 9% by 2030, which is faster than average for all other occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). In 2020, 252,399 nursing school graduates from the United States took the National Council Licensure Examination in hopes to become a licensed registered nurse (NCSBN, 2020). Because of the rapid growth of the nursing profession, an increase in the number of PN students is needed across the U.S. to meet the demand of the growing nursing profession.

## 1.2 The Research Gap

Since PN students are not frequent subjects in nursing education research, it is important to discover what is known and not known about their lived experiences to promote success for future nursing students and nurses during these historic times. Research has been conducted over the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the mental and physical health of many college students across the U.S. (Wang et al., 2020). However, little research has been conducted to understand the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on PN students. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to describe the lived experience of PN students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Background

The purpose of this chapter is to identify what is currently known about PN students in the literature. This chapter will also identify the aim of this research study and discuss the gap in literature over understudied PN students.

Limited studies have been conducted to explore predictors of PN students' success in nursing school and to better understand the study habits employed by nursing students during their PN student years. A primary focus of PN student research explores academic factors and how they relate to future nursing program success. For example, Brown and Smith (2019) found a significant positive relationship between the second chemistry course taken by PN students and their success in their nursing classes during the first and second semesters of nursing school. In another study, Stankus et al. (2018) created a dynamic modeling tool that could be utilized with PN students' academic data during the evaluation for admission to nursing school in order to increase the diversity among students within their program. With regard to PN students' study habits, Reynaldo et al. (2017) discovered that at a four-year public Midwestern university, PN students did not spend much time studying and did not integrate useful studying strategies during their prerequisite science courses. More research is needed to determine how to support successful study habits in PN students. Since predictors of success in nursing school include academic performance and study habits formed during the PN student years, it is important to ensure that PN

students are addressed and studied holistically, in order to understand the elements critical to their success and encourage their admission into nursing school.

A variety of other topics related to PN students have been explored using quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative studies involving PN students explored their perceptions of sexual assault (Strunk, 2017) and understanding the relationships among social identity, stereotype threat, and academic success in PN students (Sullivan et al., 2019). One qualitative study explored PN students' perception of caring and the themes of caring that emerged (Grobbel & Rowe, 2014). The themes they discovered were the "language of caring, sharing information, building relationships, role modeling, providing competent care, delivering caring actions and the results of being ill" (Grobbel & Rowe, 2014, p. 8). In 2021, Kwon and Dean described an innovative learning activity designed to help PN students understand and explore how to do research related to nursing topics. These additional research studies add to our understanding of what is known about PN students; however, since PN students are an understudied population, more research is needed to help nursing instructors and academic leaders understand their needs and experiences.

A major life event that has affected not only PN students, but also college students across the globe, is the COVID-19 pandemic. To mitigate the spread of COVID-19 during the first year of the pandemic, university students had to switch to online learning. Research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the mental health of undergraduate college students in the U.S. In a survey of undergraduate students at Texas A&M University, results revealed that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, 71.26% of study participants experienced an increase in anxiety and stress (Wang et al., 2020).

Similarly, a study conducted at a large university in Texas showed that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 71% of participants reported an increase in stress and anxiety (Son et al., 2020). Another study by Kecojevic et al. (2020) at a university in New Jersey revealed that a majority of students reported having difficulties with academics, including troubles focusing on work and navigating online learning. These findings regarding the effect of COVID-19 on undergraduate college students may be similar to those experienced by PN students; however, no studies have been conducted that specifically focus on PN students' experiences during COVID-19.

## 2.2 Research Purpose

We know that PN students' academic performance and study habits that occur prior to admission into a nursing program are important because they set them up for success in a nursing program. Since the PN student years are critical to admission into nursing school, it is essential to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the academic and personal lives of PN students. Studies are beginning to emerge that focus on the effect of COVID-19 on undergraduate college students, but there is little in the literature addressing the impact of COVID-19 on PN students. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of pre-nursing students in a large public university in the southwestern U.S. during COVID-19.

This chapter reviewed what is known in the literature about PN students such as study habits, predictors of success, and perceptions of caring. This chapter also discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a change in the way education was provided during the first year of the pandemic on university students, which was challenging for these students to navigate. As a result of reviewing the related literature, a gap in the literature was identified and a purpose statement was developed.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Sample

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology used for this qualitative research study. The chapter describes the research design utilized in this study, as well as the study questionnaire, sample characteristics, methods of data collection, and data analysis. This chapter also explains how rigor was ensured during the analysis of the short answer qualitative data used for this research study.

A research study was conducted in the Fall of 2020 that utilized a mixed methods descriptive-comparative research design to explore relationships among stress, resilience, and persistence in traditional campus-based and accelerated online program pre-nursing students. After obtaining IRB approval, a convenience sample of PN students who were enrolled in an online Introduction to Nursing course at the University of Texas at Arlington were invited to participate in the study. Students were excluded from participating in the study if they were younger than 18 years old or already accepted into the nursing program. A total of 1395 pre-nursing students were contacted and invited to participate in the study. The final study sample had a 26.09% response rate and consisted of 364 participants. The findings from the initial quantitative research data are reported in Urban et al. (2022).

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The original study consisted of questions regarding the participants' demographic and academic characteristics, three Likert-scale surveys designed to measure stress,

resilience, and persistence, and four short answer questions that were delivered using a web-based survey. The demographic section of the survey consisted of questions about participants' age, gender, and race/ethnicity. The academic section of the survey consisted of questions about participants' total number of undergraduate hours completed, if they had a previous degree, and if they were a first-generation college student. In addition, they were asked how many semester hours they were enrolled in, whether they were concurrently enrolled in more than one academic institution, and how many hours they typically worked per week. Finally, participants were asked to identify which semester they were intending to start in the nursing program and whether they were applying to the traditional campus-based program or the accelerated online program.

Of the 364 individuals who participated in the larger study, 289 chose to answer the study's open-ended qualitative questions. The first three short answer questions sought to gain an understanding of PN students' lived experiences by asking for three words that describe their current experiences as a PN student and for respondents to identify the positives and negatives of being a PN student. The findings from these first three qualitative questions are currently being analyzed by the study principal investigator (Dr. Urban and L. Jennings). The purpose of this senior Honors thesis was to analyze the demographic and academic data from the qualitative sample and the short answer responses ( $n = 289$ ) from the fourth short answer question: "How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you as a pre-nursing student?"

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The demographic data were analyzed using descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations, and ranges for continuous variables and frequencies and percentages for other

nominal and ordinal demographic and academic data. For analysis of the qualitative data the study team utilized inductive thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). This is a ground-up qualitative approach where codes and themes are derived from reviewing and reflecting on the short answer data collected. Rather than approaching data analysis with preconceived ideas about what it is like to be a PN student, the study team allowed the narrative, codes, and themes to emerge from the raw data itself. To help ensure qualitative rigor, two of the researchers (KD and RU) analyzed the qualitative study data independently and then met weekly and compiled the findings into a single narrative.

This chapter summarized and explored the methodology used in this study and approaches used to ensure rigor. This included study design, subject recruitment, and methods of data collection and analysis. The next chapter will explain the results of the study that emerged using inductive thematic analysis.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the demographic and academic characteristics of the sample and the results of qualitative data analysis of the study question “How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you as a PN student?” Interestingly, 13.7% of participants reported that they did not feel negatively affected or stressed by COVID-19 as a PN student, while the remaining 86.3% shared, in great detail for some, how the pandemic affected them. Using inductive thematic analysis, four themes emerged from the study data: Learning Virtually, Pursuing Work-Life Balance, Feeling Isolated, and Finding a Silver Lining.

#### 4.2 Demographic Characteristics

The sample demographics of this study included 289 PN students, of which 89.7% were female. The average age of participants was 28 years old. The study participants represented diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds with 15.2% of participants identifying as Asian, 26% identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 23.3% identifying as Black, 30.5% identifying as White/Non-Hispanic, and 5% identifying as other. The majority (86.8%) of participants had completed greater than 25 undergraduate credit hours. Almost half (44.6%) of participants held a previous degree and 44.9% of participants were first-generation college students. The average semester hour enrollment was 11 hours, with 14.9% of participants currently enrolled in more than one academic setting. Nearly half of

the participants (48.1%) worked 25 or more hours per week. Most (86.1%) intended to start the upper-division nursing program during the Fall 2021 semester or later. The accelerated online BSN program was the intended nursing program for 57.4% of participants (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Demographic and Academic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	Sample Characteristics ( <i>n</i> = 289)	Mean (SD) Range
Age in years <i>m, (sd), range</i>		28 (9.1) 18 - 60
Sex	Male 30 (10.3%) Female 259 (89.7%)	
Race / Ethnicity %	Asian 44 (15.2%) Hispanic / Latino 75 (26%) Black 67 (23.3%) White / Non-Hispanic 88 (30.5%) Other 14 (5%)	
Total UG Hours Completed	0 – 24 = 38 (13.2%) 25+ = 250 (86.8%)	
Previous Degree	Yes = 129 (44.6%)	
1 <sup>st</sup> Generation College Student	Yes = 130 (44.9%)	
Semester hours enrolled <i>m, (sd), range</i>		11 (3.8) 3 - 23
Concurrently enrolled in more than one academic setting	Yes = 43 (14.9%)	
Hours worked per week	Not working this semester = 81 (28%) 1 – 24 hours / week = 69 (23.9%) 25+ hours / week = 139 (48.1%)	
Semester intending to start program	Spring 2021 = 40 (13.9%) Fall 2021 or later = 167 (86.1%)	
Intended Nursing Program	Traditional Campus-Based BSN = 123 (42.6%) Accelerated Online BSN = 166 (57.4%)	

### 4.3 Study Themes

Table 4.2: Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
Learning Virtually	Losing Motivation
	Increased Distraction
	Technical Difficulties
	Difficulty Completing Assignments
Pursuing Work-Life Balance	Experiencing Pay-Cuts
	Picking Up an Extra Job
	Balancing Work and Family
	Getting Furloughed
Feeling Isolated	Missing In-Person Contact
	Losing Interpersonal Skills
	Feeling Stuck at Home
Finding A Silver Lining	Finding Hope and Gratitude
	Greater Appreciation for Nurses
	Room to Breathe

#### *4.3.1 Learning Virtually*

In the Fall 2020 semester, all PN students attended classes in a virtual format to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Some students reported that they did not mind learning virtually and were planning to apply to the Accelerated Online nursing program; however, many respondents struggled with online learning and felt as if they could not be as successful in their online courses as they were in person. PN students experienced difficulties with staying focused on their studies, which may have been due to the online course format or other stressors encountered because of the pandemic. Because online learning has an asynchronous learning structure, some PN students reported a lack of motivation and feelings of having less accountability than they felt in traditional face-to-face classes. One student expressed:

With all the classes being switched to online, it has made it much more difficult for me to actually do work and study. It doesn't feel as though I am in school

because I do not need to attend classes, which makes it very difficult for me to stay on track with all my classes and actually learn.

As PN students navigated their way through online tests and assignments they also encountered occasional technical difficulties, causing increased stress and frustration. Time management was another challenge for study participants as they learned to juggle their coursework with at-home distractions. As one student explained, “It has affected me significantly. I personally do not enjoy online learning. You pretty much have to teach yourself and have way more free time, but have to know how to manage your time wisely.” PN students who preferred classroom-based learning struggled with the remoteness of online courses and felt their learning was impaired due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. One student conveyed:

I genuinely strongly dislike having anything to do online. In person lectures, tutoring, labs, study groups, projects, help me understand whatever material I need to learn for a course. With online, I often feel like I'm learning nothing and I'm jealous of those who don't become negatively affected by it.

#### *4.3.2 Pursuing Work-Life Balance*

COVID-19 heavily impacted the work-life of many people across the globe, including PN students. PN students in this study experienced getting laid off due to business closures and reduced availability of work during the pandemic. Having to pick up an extra job was a burden many PN students had to take on during the school year. One student shared, “The beginning of the pandemic was very tough. I had two part-time jobs and one was able to transition to work from home but business for the second job closed

down.” Participants reported financial struggles as their jobs became more unstable, forcing some to live paycheck to paycheck. As described by one PN student:

Financially it has been difficult for me because during this period I have experienced pay cuts at my place of work. The pay-cut has increased my stress level due to difficulty in paying some bills that are due. This also has some effect on my study time and during study times.

Some PN students reported having increased work responsibilities during the pandemic which resulted in increased stress and less time to complete and focus on coursework. Although working from home allowed some participants to meet their financial needs, it created additional challenges for those with children. Younger children needed around-the-clock care at home and school-aged children were also learning from home and needed support from their parents. As one participant explained:

It has made it a little difficult to get studying and homework done throughout the day because my son is doing virtual school during the day and I’m working from home. I usually get all of my studying done in the evenings and weekends.

#### *4.3.3 Feeling Isolated*

Because social distancing and remaining home was encouraged to reduce the spread of COVID-19, PN students frequently identified feeling isolated, lonely, and missing in-person contact with others. The isolation that came with the COVID-19 pandemic made some students feel disengaged from their classmates and friends. One student explained, “I liked interacting with new people within my major and making new friends and connections. Also, feeling the same frustrations with a professor in person. It makes you feel connected to your classmates.” Others felt as if their interpersonal skills were reduced

due to the lack of human contact. As conveyed by one PN student: “I feel isolated and suffocated at times because I can't really be involved and interact with society which does take away social skills.” PN students who enjoyed utilizing study groups to learn course material and prepare for exams experienced additional frustration and had to find alternate ways to learn while socially isolated and in online classes. One PN student expressed, “Transitioning to online learning is hard for me. I am a kinetic learner and not physically being in class is challenging. I miss being with my peers and working in study groups together.” The freedom to study when and wherever the students wanted to was taken from them as the pandemic surged. One student shared, “It significantly changed my study habits as I typically went to coffee shops and libraries to get away from everything at home, but I was forced to stay home.”

#### *4.3.4 Finding a Silver Lining*

Despite the hardships that came with the COVID-19 pandemic, many PN students found hope amongst the adversity. Study participants reported feeling increased motivation to become a registered nurse to help the fight against the raging pandemic. One student expressed an optimistic view: “COVID has also made me more determined than ever to be a nurse. I want to be there to help people get through times like this.” A greater appreciation for healthcare workers was found amongst some PN students. Others felt as if they had more time to focus on their studies and complete needed tasks and shared a sense of gratitude for the increased time in their schedule. One student shared that the “impact has been positive since I am now able to work from home and do other things during the day such as study, homework, sign up for next semester courses.” PN students discovered a greater appreciation for life and what it brings through the hardships. Although struggling

with time management and work-life balance was commonly reported, some participants were able to see the benefit of having unanticipated additional time in their schedule which they used for self-care and getting the space they needed during the busy school year. One student explained “It has allowed me to give some time to myself and breathe, since I was overwhelmed with classes and work before COVID-19.”

The purpose of this chapter was to expand the knowledge of the lived experiences of pre-nursing students taking only online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic through the analysis of their short answer responses to the study question: “How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you as a PN student?” The four study themes are important because they provide evidence of students’ self-reflection about their learning preferences, explore feelings of isolation, stress, and frustration due to the pandemic, and identify unanticipated hope as PN students navigated the ever-changing COVID-19 landscape. The next chapter will include a summary of the study’s key findings and connect them to existing research, identify clinical implications for educators working with pre-nursing students, list limitations of the study, and share recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the qualitative results, discuss clinical implications for PN students and educators working with these students, identify limitations, and offer recommendations for future research. This qualitative study was designed to gain insight into PN students' lived experiences during COVID-19. Four themes emerged from the study short answer data: Learning Virtually, Pursuing Work-Life Balance, Feeling Isolated, And Finding a Silver Lining. Since limited research has been conducted with PN students, this study revealed novel findings about their lived experiences during the pandemic.

#### 5.2 Significant Findings

##### *5.2.1 Learning Virtually*

The first study theme was Learning Virtually, where students expressed feelings of stress and frustration with the shift to completely online learning. Students reported difficulties with staying focused, frustration with technical difficulties, problems with self-motivation or lack of face-to-face accountability. These findings are similar to those of Kecojevic et al. (2020) who found that university students struggled to focus on academic work in an online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another study conducted over undergraduate nursing students revealed a similar finding in that the students reported



a decreased ability to learn and retain information in an online environment, as well as difficulty completing assignments and staying engaged (Michel et al., 2021).

### *5.2.2 Pursuing Work-Life Balance*

The second study theme was Pursuing Work-Life Balance, where PN students conveyed difficulty in pursuing their personal lives with the new job and income changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The students discussed the financial challenges and struggles they faced while trying to adapt to working from home with and without children. Some students were laid off from their jobs while others had to pick up an extra job or experienced increased work responsibility. These findings are similar to a study by Son et al. (2020) in which undergraduate college students indicated that the pandemic has or is likely to impact their current and future work-life. Another study that examined undergraduate nursing students and their school, work, and personal environments during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that the nursing students experienced a variety of work-based changes including increased work demands, furloughs, and getting laid off (Emory et al., 2021).

### *5.2.3 Feeling Isolated*

The third theme was Feeling Isolated, in which PN students grieved the social atmosphere they previously enjoyed before the COVID-19 pandemic began. The students reported feeling detached from their friends and classmates, while also missing studying with others in places outside the home. Some students felt as if their social skills decreased along with a decrease in human contact due to the isolation the pandemic brought. These findings are similar to a study by Kecojevic et al. (2020) in which graduate and undergraduate students reported staying home with few social outings since the start of the

pandemic. The students expressed that due to these new life changes during the pandemic, they experienced increased stress, anxiety, and depression. In a research study that compared stress and depression amongst non-nursing undergraduate students versus nursing majors during the COVID-19 pandemic, nursing students indicated that one of the biggest factors that helped them to persevere through the pandemic was social support (Thomas, 2022). Nursing students may experience increased social support in their major because of the use of cohorts or small groups with an instructor to engage in clinical activities, which occurs once they begin nursing school. Required courses for PN students do not offer clinical experiences and thus do not have the benefit of small group assignments.

#### *5.2.4 Finding a Silver Lining*

The last theme was Finding a Silver Lining, in which the PN students discussed the positive effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on them, despite the hardships they experienced. Some students described a newfound appreciation for nurses, and even an increased desire to become a nurse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other students felt as if the pandemic allowed them more time for self-care and to focus on their studies. These findings are similar to a narrative analysis study conducted with third year nursing students which revealed that during the pandemic, nursing students were able to identify positive outcomes such as increased perseverance and making progress towards their goals (Heilferty et al., 2021). In another qualitative study by Wallace et al. (2021), nursing students reported experiencing increased creativity, gratitude for schedule flexibility due to online-learning, and increased time for self-care despite the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic brought.

### 5.3 Clinical Significance

Although the results of this study are similar to the results of research conducted with nursing students and general college students, research conducted on PN students is missing. PN students are the future of the nursing workforce and their experiences both shape and help them discern whether the nursing field is right for them. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2020), as the U.S. population ages, the nursing workforce is predicted to experience a shortage of nurses. The median age of RNs in the U.S. is 52 years, and the demand for nurses is expected to continue to increase (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2022; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Because of both the aging nursing workforce and the aging patient population, it is likely that the need for future nurses will continue to increase. This makes PN students' successful transition into nursing school and then into the nursing workforce crucial for the success of the healthcare field.

Gaining a deeper understanding of PN students' experiences during the pandemic when all courses were completely online allows academic instructors and advisors to craft effective interventions for future issues that may arise as the pandemic continues. Instructors may also use their platforms to advocate for PN students who experience these issues and promote validation of their emotions during unprecedented times. PN instructors are uniquely positioned to be able to refer PN students to receive additional academic and mental health support when their academic progression seems to be at risk. Additionally, when PN students see themselves reflected in qualitative studies it may also help to normalize their experiences and make them feel recognized as an important group.

#### 5.4 Study Limitations

There are a few limitations to consider when evaluating this study. Convenience sampling was utilized in this research, making it difficult to know if the sample was representative of the target population. Due to the strong emotional response the pandemic may evoke, PN students who felt very strongly about the subject and their experiences may have felt more inclined to answer rather than one who may be more neutral on the subject. This may have caused their responses to be less representative of the general population. Another limitation is the usage of qualitative short answer data, which made it impossible to ask follow-up questions to clarify student responses if the data was unclear.

Despite the study limitations, there were also a few strengths to this study. The sample size was 288 PN students who provided a variety of responses to the study question. Another strength of this study was the racial and ethnic diversity of respondents (see Table 4.1), which allowed for a greater understanding of how the pandemic was experienced by all types of PN students. A third strength was that the data was analyzed independently by two researchers, who kept records of their steps of analysis and then reviewed collaboratively to determine the study themes and content. This helps to ensure rigor and reduces researcher bias in the data analysis process and encourages an increased perspective while analyzing themes and codes. Additionally, this data includes novel findings that provide a foundation for future studies with PN students.

#### 5.5 Recommendations

In order to increase advocacy for PN students, one recommendation for educators and nursing programs is to assist PN students to improve time-management skills, provide resources to help students tackle technology-related issues, and add additional orientation

opportunities for online courses to increase student comfort in online settings. Additionally, due to the social isolation experienced by PN students, nursing programs and educators can develop methods to increase connectivity among classmates and instructors. This could include online learning communities, in which students gather in an online environment to learn about certain topics, collaborate and share new ideas, and express their thoughts and feelings about their current situation. Instructors can also promote mental health resources that are available through the institution or external resources to increase well-being.

Research should continue to build the body of knowledge that exists around the needs and experiences of PN students. Additional research is needed to gain a better understanding of what contributes to PN student academic success and well-being. An example for future research could be to develop an interventional study that focuses on improving time and stress management skills, nursing student well-being, and connection with peers while taking online classes. Another example for future research is to identify which factors in PN classes contribute to their successful completion of nursing school since this achievement is crucial to meeting the need for more nurses in the U.S.

This chapter discussed the study's significant results, clinical implications, and possible limitations which prompt ideas and implications for further research that explores PN students and their lived experiences. The next chapter will provide concluding thoughts related to this study.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

During the surging COVID-19 pandemic, PN students faced challenges of transitioning to online classes, social isolation, and struggles with work-life balance as they navigated the ever-changing social and academic atmosphere. Despite all the hardships they faced, PN students found reasons to remain hopeful amongst the difficulties. They faced the barriers created by COVID-19, and many shared thoughts that demonstrated persistence and resilience. Since PN students represent the future of nursing program enrollments and the nursing workforce, research with PN students should be continued to better understand their lived experiences and identify factors that may lead to their success and persistence in nursing programs.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Kendall Darr is a nursing student finishing up her first semester of her senior year in the nursing program at UT Arlington. She anticipates graduating in August of 2022 with an Honors Bachelor of Science in Nursing and a minor in Neuroscience. She joined the Honors College at UT Arlington in the Fall of 2018. By taking part in this opportunity, she has been able to collaborate with many amazing professors and complete projects over different health-related subjects such as Alzheimer's disease, Antidepressants, Trisomy 21, Schizophrenia, and the experiences of pre-nursing students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once Kendall graduates with her Honors Bachelor of Science in Nursing, she plans to become a critical care nurse. Critical care is one of her biggest passions, and she is extremely excited to graduate and apply all the skills she learned during nursing school in the hospital setting. She credits everything she has achieved during her undergraduate studies to God, her family and friends, and the continuous support she received from Dr. Regina Urban and Ms. Leslie Jennings. She is beyond grateful to have had such wonderful experiences with UT Arlington's Honors College.