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A Comparison of Health Care Recruiters' Attitudes Toward RN-to-BSN Degrees Based on Instructional Delivery Method and College For-Profit/Nonprofit Status

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A COMPARISON OF HEALTH CARE RECRUITERS' ATTITUDES

TOWARD RN-TO-BSN DEGREES BASED ON INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

METHOD AND COLLEGE FOR-PROFIT/NONPROFIT STATUS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: A Comparison of Health Care Recruiters' Attitudes Toward RN-to-BSN
         Degrees Based on Instructional Delivery Method and College
         For-Profit/Nonprofit Status

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Despite the rapid growth of online learning and student enrollment at for-profit colleges, previous research has found that employers are wary of job applicants with credentials earned from these sources. This study compared the attitudes of health care recruiters toward four different RN-to-BSN degree options based on the method of instruction (classroom, online) and the type of college (traditional, for-profit). A sample of 116 health care recruiters from across the United States completed an online survey. The study revealed that there were significant differences in the perceived advantage in the hiring process, credibility, concerns about credentials and likelihood to recommend hiring. Applicants with RN-to-BSN degrees from traditional colleges and via classroom instruction were clearly most favored and those with degrees earned through online instruction at for-profit colleges were perceived the least favorably. An online degree from a traditional college was determined to be more acceptable than an online degree from a for-profit college but still less acceptable than a degree earned through classroom instruction at a traditional college. The implication of these findings is that the return on education for students earning college degrees online or from for-profit colleges may be inhibited by employer perceptions regarding the quality of credentials earned in these environments.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has transformed many aspects of how people communicate and

exchange information. This change is abundantly evident in higher education. The adoption

of online learning, which has become a mainstream practice in postsecondary education, has

evolved as an integral strategy at even the most prestigious institutions of higher learning

(Allen & Seaman, 2013). For-profit colleges were among the early adopters of online

learning technologies on a large scale and online learning has contributed to their rapid

growth (Christensen, Horn & Caldera, 2011). Traditional colleges have also accelerated their

own efforts in the expanding online degree market. Online degrees are now offered by both

for-profit and nonprofit public and private colleges (Allen & Seaman, 2013). As a result,

adult students seeking to further their education have a diverse range of choices for online

degrees (Levine, 2000). Although online learning and for-profit colleges continue to grow, it

is unclear whether the acceptance among employers of credentials earned in these settings is

increasing at a similar pace. The focus of this study is to explore the acceptance of online and

for-profit education among health care recruiters. This chapter describes the background of

the problem, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions,

the significance of the study, the theoretical framework of study, delimitations, assumptions,

and the definition of terms.

Background of the Study

Disruptive Innovation in Higher Education

The environment of higher education is rapidly changing through the adoption of

advancements in instructional technology to drive innovation that simultaneously increases

access while reducing costs. As new education options have entered the higher education landscape, traditional colleges and universities are compelled to compete with their for-profit rivals (Christensen, Horn & Caldera, 2011).

Online education appeals to many adult learners because it provides a method of pursuing higher education while also balancing personal and work responsibilities and removing barriers associated with time and geographic location (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). Students pursuing higher education are no longer limited to the options available at the closest traditional college. A growing number of students are choosing to pursue their college education at for-profit colleges and often complete degrees at a distance, either entirely or almost entirely online (Wilson, 2010).

Although enrollment in online and for-profit educational alternatives continues to expand, the debate regarding these options continues. Common concerns regarding online learning include academic rigor, lack of social interaction and academic integrity (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). Despite these doubts, numerous studies have found that outcomes and student performance in online learning are comparable to traditional classroom instruction (Russell, 1999; Shachar and Neumann, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). For-profit colleges have also faced criticism for their recruitment practices, mass production model of instruction, and a high level of student loan default among graduates (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013).

Employer Attitudes

Over the past decade online learning and for-profit college enrollment has increased with a steady trajectory; however, it appears that, overall, employers still prefer job applicants with traditional college degrees earned through classroom instruction (Carnevale,

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2007). An early qualitative study by Chaney (2001) found that employers were suspicious of online degrees. Adams and Defleur (2005; 2006; Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007) have made significant contributions to this line of inquiry. Their research design involved asking hiring representatives to make a forced choice from hypothetical job applicants holding college degrees earned through either classroom instruction or online instruction. Job applicants with degrees earned through classroom instruction were overwhelmingly favored. Several other studies have attempted to build on the work of Adams and Defleur and have found similar results (Danzinger, 2008; Jeancola, 2011; Thompson, 2009). Many of the existing research studies compared traditional, residential degrees to online degrees from virtual colleges. Research regarding the effect of the for-profit or nonprofit status of the college has yielded contradictory findings. Seibold (2007) and Lamer (2007) found that employers did not regard for-profit colleges to have the same degree of rigor as nonprofit colleges. However, Bailey (2011) concluded that hiring managers did not perceive a significant difference if a degree was obtained through classroom or online instruction nor was there a significant difference based on the for-profit / nonprofit status of the college.

Nursing Education Imperative

Nursing offers an interesting context for this study. Online education and for-profit colleges are possible solutions to a critical shortage of baccalaureate degree registered nurses. Although a baccalaureate degree is the minimum entry-level education for most health professions, in 2008 only 50% of registered nurses held a bachelor degree or higher (Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2010). While the plea for nursing to increase its entry-level education requirements has lingered for years, it has gained renewed vigor in light of research that supports the relationship of registered nurse educational

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attainment to patient safety and clinical outcomes (Aiken, Clarke, Cheung, Sloane & Silber, 2003; Estabrooks, Midodzi, Cummings, Ricker & Giovanetti, 2005; Friese, Lake, Aiken, Silber & Sochalski, 2008). This research has increased the demand for registered nurses with baccalaureate degrees (Boyd, 2010) and has likewise amplified the call to increase the number of registered nurses with baccalaureate degrees. The Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2010) advocates increasing the percentage of registered nurses with a bachelor degree to 80% by 2020. Several other organizations have added their voices to this appeal, including the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the American Nurses Association, the American Organization of Nurse Executives and the National League for Nursing (Tri-Council for Nursing, 2010).

In its report entitled, *The Future of Nursing: Focus on Education* the IOM (2010) proposes that increasing the number of registered nurses can be accomplished in multiple ways. It specifically cites the potential for distance education through online courses as one of those methods. It also suggests that for-profit colleges have an important role as new providers of nursing education. While there is an abundance of literature regarding the nursing shortage and the nursing education imperative, there has been an absence of research regarding employer perceptions of online nursing degrees and the credibility of nursing degrees from for-profit colleges and universities. As nursing educators in both traditional and online institutions mobilize their efforts to increase the educational attainment of registered nurses, it is imperative to understand the perceptions of health care employers regarding these models of workforce development.

Statement of the Problem

The growth of enrollment in online education has consistently outpaced the overall growth of enrollment in higher education. According to the 2011 Survey of Online Learning, over six million students took at least one online course in the Fall of 2010 (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Registered nurses are among the learners that are attracted to online learning. According to the American Association of the Colleges of Nursing, from 2010 to 2011, enrollment in RN-to-Baccalaureate programs increased by 15.8%, marking the ninth year of consecutive enrollment increases. There are currently 646 RN-to-Baccalaureate degrees programs offered nationally and many of these programs are offered entirely online (AACN, 2012a). Online nursing degrees programs are marketed to students with the promise of convenience and flexibility and the potential for career advancement. While there is an urgent call for registered nurses to pursue baccalaureate degrees and increasingly more nurses are opting for online options to balance family, career and other commitments (Talbert, 2009), it is still unclear if employers value the job applicant with a nursing degree earned entirely online or from a for-profit college to the same extent as a job applicant with a nursing degree earned in a traditional college setting. A significant gap in the literature exists regarding this vital question. This is a critical issue given the significant time and resources that a registered nurse expends to earn his or her baccalaureate degree. According to GetEducated.com (2013), a distance education research firm, the average cost of an online BSN program from an accredited college is approximately $44,000.

The current research regarding employer perceptions of online learning and for-profit college degrees is deficient in several ways. Several prior studies asked respondents to make a forced choice between job applicants with a degree earned either in the classroom or online

(Adams and Defleur, 2005; 2006; Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007). Respondents could not indicate that there was no difference or that other factors would prevail in their consideration. Most of the research has compared a traditional college degree earned through residential study to a college degree earned at a virtual college. As an increasing number of traditional colleges offer options to complete the same degree online or on-campus, there is a lack of knowledge regarding differences between perceptions of college degrees earned online from a traditional college compared to residential degrees earned at the same college. There are also contradictory findings related to the impact of the for-profit and nonprofit status of the school (Bailey, 2011; Lamer, 2007; Seibold, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive study is to compare the perceptions of health care recruiters regarding the RN to Baccalaureate degrees based on the method of instructional delivery (classroom, online) and the type of college (traditional, for-profit) to determine if significant differences exist.

Research Questions

An extensive review of the current literature was undertaken to understand the major issues regarding degrees earned online and from for-profit colleges. In addition, it was important to comprehend thoroughly the current challenges in the nursing workforce and the current literature regarding nursing distance education. The following research questions emerged and guided this study:

RQ#1: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived advantage of an RN-to-BSN

degree in the hiring process across four degree options (TRADITIONAL

COLLEGE+CLASSROOM, TRADITIONAL COLLEGE+ONLINE, FOR-

PROFIT COLLEGE+CLASSROOM, FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE+ONLINE)?

RQ#2: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived credibility of an

RN-to-BSN degree across four degree options (TRADITIONAL

COLLEGE+CLASSROOM, TRADITIONAL COLLEGE+ONLINE, FOR-

PROFIT COLLEGE+CLASSROOM, FOR-PROFIT

COLLEGE+ONLINE)?

RQ#3: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived concerns

about credentials of a job applicant holding a RN-to-BSN degree

across four degree options (TRADITIONAL COLLEGE+CLASSROOM,

TRADITIONALCOLLEGE+ONLINE, FOR-PROFIT

COLLEGE+CLASSROOM, FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE+ONLINE)?

RQ#4: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' likelihood to recommend

hiring a job applicant based on type of RN-to-BSN degree across four

degree options (TRADITIONAL COLLEGE+CLASSROOM,

TRADITIONAL COLLEGE+ONLINE, FOR-PROFIT

COLLEGE+CLASSROOM, FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE+ONLINE)?

Significance of the Study

This descriptive study has merit and significance to online learning professionals, for-

profit college administrators, nursing educators and employers, and registered nurses

contemplating earning an RN-to-BSN degree.

Online Learning Professionals

Allen and Seaman (2013) state that one barrier to widespread adoption of online learning is the lack of acceptance of online education by potential employers. This study will expand knowledge regarding employer attitudes toward online and for-profit college degrees. Adams and Defleur (2005) encouraged further research on this topic and specifically suggested that their line of research be continued in several fields, including nursing. This research will also help to determine if employer attitudes regarding online learning are changing over time.

For-Profit College Administrators

There is a significant controversy regarding the value of degrees awarded by for-profit colleges. A substantial portion of government grants and loans are used to fund for-profit college attendance (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013). This study will contribute to an understanding of employer perceptions regarding value of credentials earned at for-profit colleges and also assist in clarifying prior research findings (Bailey, 2011; Lamer, 2007; Seibold, 2007)

Nursing Educators and Employers

Increasing the number of registered nurses with baccalaureate degrees is an important strategy for the future of our health care system. Online education and for-profit colleges have been proposed as possible solutions (IOM, 2010). This study is the first scholarly study of employer's attitudes and readiness to employ individuals completing their BSN degrees through these options.

Registered Nurses Considering RN-to-BSN Degree Options

This study will also be valuable to help inform registered nurses who may be weighing their options for continued education to understand the attitudes of employers toward online and for-profit degrees. Individuals who pursue higher education make a significant financial investment and have the expectation that their decision will be rewarded with increased employment opportunities and compensation (Becker, 1964; Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). At this time there is no empirical evidence to help guide these decisions.

<center>**Theoretical Perspective**</center>

The theoretical perspective for this study is human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961), which posits that an investment made in education is an investment in human capital since an individual cannot be separated from his or her acquired knowledge and skills. Increases in knowledge and skill result in improvement in the productive ability of individuals (Becker, 1993). Studies have also demonstrated that income and earning potential increases in tandem with investments in educational attainment. Individuals with higher levels of educational attainment earn more than those with less (Becker, 1993). For example, high school and college graduates earn more than non-graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Human capital theory holds that differences in income are a result of different levels of investment in education. Individuals pursue higher levels of education to improve their earning potential and to demonstrate their competence to employers (Becker, 1993). As investment in education exceeds a certain point, it shows a decreasing amount of benefit in return. The cost of additional education must be weighed with the benefit that will result from it. When the costs exceed the benefits, the investment in education should be deferred (Becker, 1993). Before embarking on a new educational path, individuals must

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consider if their investment in attaining additional education will result in increased income or employment opportunities (Blaug, 1976).

Following human capital theory, registered nurses who are considering pursuing their baccalaureate degree must evaluate the returns from education. Graf (2006) applied human capital theory to the decision for an associate degree nurse to earn a baccalaureate degree and found that in many cases the cost of additional education exceeded the level of increased earnings. A key factor was the stage of career in which the nurse received the baccalaureate degree and the time available to accrue additional earnings.

If a registered nurse decides that the investment in additional education is worthwhile, he or she must choose from several degree options. These potential options include traditional colleges, for-profit colleges, classroom-based instruction and online degrees. Factors such as cost, convenience, and flexibility are weighed as individuals make these important decisions. It is also important for registered nurses to consider the perceptions of potential employers regarding their choice of a degree option. The perceived quality of education as well as the level of education has the potential to effect the return (Acemoglu & Autor, 2009). Pursuing a BSN degree requires a significant financial investment. This study will provide insight into the attitudes of employers to help better inform these decisions.

Delimitations

The following limitations are accepted in this study:

1. The study was limited to only those health care recruiters who were active members of the National Association for Health Care Recruitment (NAHCR) in February 2013 which was the time the survey was conducted.

2. The study's data were limited to health care recruiters who volunteered to participate in the study by completing an online survey. The nonprobability sample and low response rate could limit the generalizability of the findings.

3. Data collection used an online survey and did not provide the opportunity to ask follow-up or clarifying comments of respondents with the exception of comment sections provided at various points in the survey.

Assumptions

In this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Individuals who respond to the survey will be representative of the total population of National Association for Health Care Recruitment (NAHCR) active membership.

2. The provided responses accurately reflect their opinions and attitudes.

Definitions of Terms

To ensure the consistent interpretation of terms used in this dissertation, the following definitions were compiled by the researcher and applied in this study:

<u>RN-to-BSN</u> - A degree completion program for registered nurses who completed an Associate Degree in Nursing or a Diploma as his or her initial degree. These programs allow nurses to complete their baccalaureate degree with one to three years of additional education (Ellenbecker, 2010).

<u>For-Profit College (FPC)</u> - A private college that is structured as a for-profit corporation and is owned by shareholders and investors. Examples of for-profit colleges are the University of Phoenix, Capella University, Kaplan University, Walden University and Grand Canyon University (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007).

Traditional College (TC) - Traditional colleges are not-for-profit private or public four year

colleges that maintain a brick-and-mortar campus (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007).

Classroom Instruction - Instruction delivered with the instructor and student present at the

same location at the same time. This includes traditional and web-facilitated courses in which

between 0 and 29% of the content is provided using online technologies (Allen & Seaman,

2013).

Online Instruction – Instruction delivered using Internet technologies without the instructor

and student present at the same place at the same time. Online courses are those in which at

least 80% of the instruction is facilitated using the Internet (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Higher education is in a state of transformation as a result of the rapid adoption of online learning and an upsurge in for-profit college enrollment (Rubin, 2013). For-profit colleges have driven innovation and are leading the adoption of new technologies. These developments are a disruptive force in the established higher education system causing a shift in the practices of traditional colleges and forcing the development of new models to reduce costs and increase access to higher education (Christensen, Horn & Caldera, 2011). This chapter examines the literature pertaining to the growth of online learning and increased enrollment at for-profit colleges. The relevant research regarding employer attitudes toward job applicants with college degrees from these sources is also discussed in detail. Because the specific focus of this study is RN-to-BSN degrees earned online or from for-profit colleges, the review also includes an overview of the challenges in the nursing workforce related to the shortage of baccalaureate degree registered nurses. The literature review will establish the conceptual foundation and frame the research questions for the present study.

Online Learning

Online learning has become an integral part of mainstream higher education in recent years. While overall college enrollment rates have leveled, the number of students taking at least one course online has increased. In Fall 2011, 32% of college students took at least one online course compared to slightly less than 10% in 2003 (Allen & Seaman, 2013). In a survey of college presidents by Pew Research Center, the majority of respondents indicated that most students enrolled at their schools would be taking at least some online courses

(Taylor, Parker, Lenhart & Patten, 2011). This increase is the result of the greater number of online courses available. Between 2002 and 2012, the number of colleges offering complete online degree programs increased nearly 30% (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Approximately one in five postsecondary institutions reported offering at least one online degree program (Parsad, Lewis & Tice, 2008). Traditional colleges have embraced online learning as an integral part of their long-term strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Benefits of Online Learning

Increased access. Online instruction affords academic institutions the ability to reach a much larger audience than traditional classroom instruction and provides flexibility in meeting student demand (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Research from the National Center for Educational Statistics indicates that the major reasons for expanding online learning are responding to student requirements for flexibility in course schedules, expanding access to college for student populations who otherwise could not attend college, enhancing the availability of courses, and attempting to increase enrollment (Parsad, Lewis & Tice, 2008). Online learning is a viable option for working adult students who need to balance family and career obligations. Online learning also attracts learners who may have barriers from their geographic location or that have a disability that otherwise limits their access to higher education (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Online learning also attracts a larger proportion of individuals from certain demographic groups. For example, individuals who earn online degrees are more likely to be from a household where neither parent held a college degree (Cooper, 2008).

Reduced costs. The digital environment of online education also has economic advantages in terms of reduced costs of maintaining the infrastructure of physical classrooms

and printing instructional materials (Lei & Gupta, 2010). A study by Bowen, Chingos, Lack and Nygren (2012) compared the student learning outcomes between a blended learning course that included one hour of face-to-face instruction and a traditional version of the course that required three to four hours of face-to-face instruction each week. The study concluded that students in both courses achieved the same learning outcomes. The study also included cost estimates and projected the potential for significant savings in instructor compensation by using blended learning methods of instruction. Bartley and Golek (2004) support the cost effectiveness of online learning as well and developed a cost matrix to assist in evaluating the potential return on investment for converting courses from face-to-face to online.

Pedagogical advantages. The online learning environment provides the benefit of more frequent access to learning materials and increased learning time (Barcelona, 2009). Denui and Dodge (2006) noted a positive relationship between the frequency of student access to learning materials and student performance in online courses. Asynchronous online discussion promotes reflective learning as it affords learners additional time to contemplate and revise their comments (Brownson, 2005). Online discussion can enable a more personal discourse to occur between the instructors and students than typically achieved during limited interactions in a traditional face-to-face, classroom setting (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Introverted students who are inhibited in the traditional classroom setting are less deterred and therefore more inclined to actively participate in the online setting (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainpel & Fox, 2002).

Issues Regarding Online Learning

Learning outcomes. One of the key issues regarding online learning is concern about the extent of student achievement and learning. Numerous studies have supported that learning outcomes for online learning are comparable to outcomes for face-to-face instruction. Russell (1999) compiled more than 350 studies that compared outcomes from the various methods of distance learning to face-to-face learning and found that no significant difference existed based on the method of instruction. A meta-analysis by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development reviewed several factors across prior research studies and concluded that overall students in online learning performed slightly better than students in solely traditional, classroom instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Another meta-analysis was conducted by Shachar and Neumann (2010) and included an analysis of 125 experimental and quasi-experimental studies. This study found that in the majority of the cases students enrolled in distance education courses outperformed their counterparts in face-to-face courses.

Incidental learning. Comparisons of face-to-face and online instruction typically compare formal outcomes of learning. Not all learning in a college setting occurs in the classroom or because of planned instruction. Informal or incidental learning can occur unconsciously as a consequence of other activities such as interpersonal interactions in social groups, observation, trial and error, or accomplishment of tasks (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). For example, a student may develop teamwork skills as an outcome of group work activities in the classroom (Crawford & Machemer, 2008). Konetes (2011) compared incidental learning in both on-campus and online settings and found that on-campus students experienced higher degrees of incidental learning in three times as many areas as online

students. Face-to-face instruction presents rich opportunities for direct observation and interaction that promotes incidental learning.

Student attrition and retention. Concerns regarding student retention in online education has affected the acceptance of online education as a viable alternative to traditional, classroom instruction (Diaz, 2002). Several researchers have compared student attrition rates and found that students enrolled in online courses were more likely to drop out than traditional classroom students (Patterson & McFadden, 2009). Frydenberg (2007) compared student withdraws in online and onground courses and found that while online courses had a higher percentage of withdraw, most withdraws occurred during the first week of the course. There was not a significant difference in withdraw rates after the initial weeks of the course. The study concluded that differences in instruction were not major factors in the decision to withdraw from the course. Aragon and Johnson (2008) found that the demands of personal time commitments, external to the course requirements, were a primary motive for dropping out of or failing online courses. To the contrary, Tyler-Smith (2006) suggests that early attrition is related to cognitive overload and proposes that instructional methods to reduce cognitive overload can improve student retention and enhance learning. Willging and Johnson (2004) explored factors that influenced students' decision to drop out of an online course. They found that decisions were often complex, but included technology issues and limited human interaction. Success in the online learning environment requires a high level of learner autonomy as well as student resourcefulness, initiative and persistence (Yen & Liu, 2009).

Academic integrity. Another frequent concern regarding online education is the potential misuse of technology for academic dishonesty (Harper, 2006). A common

perception is that cheating and plagiarism are more pervasive in online courses than face-to-face courses (Heberling, 2002). However, the issue of academic integrity is not isolated to online education. Watson and Sottile (2010) found that overall students self-reported a higher level of academic dishonesty in face-to-face courses. Heberling (2002) points out that the digital environment of the online course can help to better detect academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is a common concern and the Internet has provided students with greater access to information and the ability to cut and paste information from online sources (Scanlon & Neumann, 2002). Software applications can be used to analyze student papers and to compare the content to previously submitted student work as well as print and online publications. The use of this technology is facilitated by electronic submission of student papers in online courses. Reverse Internet searches using quoted text from students' work also can be used to help detect academic dishonesty (Heberling, 2002). Another concern is the risk for cheating on web-based tests. Young (2013) describes how students use Internet resources such as Google Docs to share answers during an online examination. Concerns regarding the potential for online cheating has prompted the development of new technologies to monitor student activity during testing and to verify student identity (Young, 2013). Examples of these technologies include the use of fingerprint identification and 360 degree cameras to assist in the remote proctoring of examinations completed online (Bedford, Gregg & Clinton, 2011).

Academic rigor. Another common perception is that online coursework is less rigorous; however several research studies validate standards in online learning. Ridley and Husband (1998) compared student performance in two versions of a college course taught by the same instructor: one version was a classroom course and another version was online.

They found a significant difference between the courses, concluding that the online course was more rigorous. However, the authors hypothesized that differences in the student populations may explain some of the variance. Snell and Mekies (1999) also compared student performance in an online and face-to-face version of a course and determined that the online course was more rigorous based on student achievement and attrition. Wyatt (2005) surveyed college students and asked them to compare classroom and online coursework. They found that most students thought that online coursework provided a quality learning experience and was more academically demanding than traditional courses.

       Degree mill image. One of the major challenges facing online learning is public perception of distance education as inferior because of the negative image that has been cultivated by unscrupulous degree mills (Piña, 2010). It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a legitimate degree earned online and a degree awarded from a degree mill (Stewart & Spille,1988). A degree mill typically requires little or no coursework to obtain a degree and lacks accreditation from an organization recognized by other institutions of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Distinguishing legitimate degrees from bogus degrees has been made even more confusing by the existence of accreditation mills. Accreditation mills are organizations that provide accreditation to colleges with substandard academic quality (Peckham, 2008).

<center>**For-Profit Colleges**</center>

For-profit colleges have been part of the American education system since the mid seventeenth century. Historically, for-profit schools have provided non-degree vocational or occupational training (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). However, in the past two decades for-profit colleges have entered into the realm of providing college degrees in areas that typically

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are served by traditional colleges and universities (Bennett, Lucchesi & Vedder, 2011). For-profit colleges have experienced phenomenal growth and success by introducing a market-driven, business model to higher education. The number of students enrolled in for-profit education increased from 366,000 in 2000 to 1.5 million in 2009 (Baum & Payea, 2011). For-profit colleges now educate approximately 15% of students currently enrolled in higher education (Wilson, 2010). For-profit colleges offer a diverse range of programs from certificates to bachelor degrees to doctorates (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013). The rapid growth has been largely spurred by online learning technology (Christensen, Horn & Caldera, 2011).

Benefits of For-Profit Colleges

   Increasing access to higher education. The for-profit sector has been successful in attracting student populations that have not been well served by traditional colleges (Breneman, Pusser & Turner, 2006). According to Belin (2013), 65% of students attending for-profit colleges are above the age of 25, significantly higher than the enrollment at traditional colleges. For-profit colleges also serve a larger proportion of women, African Americans, Hispanics and low income wage earners (Bennett, Lucchesi & Vedder, 2010; Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013).

   Agility. For-profit colleges have also demonstrated agility in quickly adapting their curricula and programs to meet market needs and as a result they stimulate innovation in higher education (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013). For-profit colleges are able to quickly shift resources. For example, by using part time adjunct faculty they can flex staffing up or down as needed. Because they lease rather than own facilities, they can more easily relocate resources as needed (Bennett, Lucchesi & Vedder, 2011). While curriculum changes at a

traditional college often require multiple levels of involvement and authority through committee and governance structures, changes at most for-profit colleges can be made more quickly (Wilson, 2010).

Cost effectiveness. The business model of for-profit colleges has enabled them to operate at relatively low costs (Klor de Alva, 2010). Focusing on their primary product, providing education, they typically do not devote resources to research. For-profits are required to have this lean cost structure because the majority of their revenue is derived from tuition and they do not receive the public appropriations that colleges in the nonprofit sector receive (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013). They do not maintain large campuses, preferring to lease facilities, rather than own them. For-profits also use standardized curricula and textbooks, with decisions made by program coordinators, not by the individual faculty members (Bennett, Lucchesi & Vedder, 2011).

Innovators. For-profit colleges have a strong focus on understanding and meeting the needs of the market. As a result, they have been successful in meeting preferences for education at convenient locations and at times that accommodate the working adult student (Bennett, Lucchesi & Vedder, 2011). For-profit colleges have demonstrated their ability to adopt new technologies rapidly and to drive innovation in higher education. For example, large for-profit colleges have made investments in sophisticated learning platforms that enhance the learner's experience and performance (Klor de Alva, 2010).

Issues Regarding For-Profit Education

Profit motive. One of the major philosophical issues with for-profit colleges is that they exist to create a profit (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013). For many in higher education this seems to be contrary to the mission of academic institutions (Lechuga, 2006). There is

concern that the profit motive results in decisions that sacrifice the quality of education (Stratford, 2012), while unscrupulous business practices by some for-profit colleges have sullied the image of the industry (Petraeus, 2011).

Aggressive recruitment strategies. Media reports of aggressive marketing and recruitment strategies have tarnished the image of for-profit colleges (Whellen, 2007). For-profit colleges have also been criticized for spending more per student on marketing than on instruction (Stratford, 2012). For example, in 2009 the University of Phoenix reportedly spent 33% of its total budget on marketing activities (Bennett, Lucchesi & Vedder, 2011).

Student loan default rates. Students at for-profit colleges tend to take out more student loans and are more likely to default on them (Deming, Goldin & Katz, 2013). Critics point to this as an indication that for-profit schools provide students with a substandard education and that graduates cannot find adequate employment to repay their loans. For-profit colleges maintain that this reflects the demographics of their student population, a higher proportion of whom are economically disadvantaged (Bennett, Lucchesi & Vedder, 2011).

Challenges Facing For-Profit Colleges

After several years of steady growth, enrollment at for-profit colleges declined in 2011. Some attribute this falloff to a change in aggressive recruitment practices and increased public criticism due to student loan defaults (Korn, 2011). Others have cited increased competition from traditional colleges offering online degree options (Ross, 2012). Declining enrollment has resulted in for-profit colleges choosing to close campuses, lay off staff and to institute tuition freezes to attract students (Lewin, 2011).

Employer Perceptions of Online and For-Profit College Degrees

Working adults are motivated to pursue further education at an online or for-profit college in hopes that a college degree will result in increased employment and advancement opportunities. The extent to which continued education translates into increased career opportunities is often dependent on the opinion of hiring gatekeepers, such as recruiters, regarding the value and credibility of credentials (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). Recruiters and hiring managers are key decision-makers regarding employee selection decisions and therefore it is important to understand their attitudes and opinions regarding online and for-profit degree options. Despite the growth of these new alternatives to traditional higher education, employers tend to have a negative perception of degrees earned in non-conventional methods (Carnevale, 2007). In particular, employers often have concerns about the quality, consistency and credibility of online and for-profit degrees (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). While the concerns of hiring decision-makers may not be supported by research regarding the effectiveness of online education, this negative perception of online and for-profit education is still likely to influence decisions made during the hiring process (Peat & Helland, 2004). A job applicant with a degree from an online or for-profit college is at a disadvantage if his or her degree is considered to be inferior to a traditional college education. This bias has potential impact beyond the individual job applicant. One of the barriers to widespread adoption of online learning is the lack of acceptance of online education by potential employers (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

The acceptance of online and for-profit degrees by hiring gatekeepers may be increasing to some extent, provided that the degree is from an accredited institution. As traditional colleges continue to expand online courses and degree offerings, it has become

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more difficult for employers to distinguish degrees earned online from those earned in traditional, classroom instruction (Dolezalek, 2003). Another signal of increased acceptance is that a growing number of large corporations have agreements with the major for-profit online colleges to provide their employees with discounted tuition rates (Klor de Alva, 2010).

Prior Research on Employer Perceptions of Online and For-Profit Education

Several research studies have investigated employer attitudes toward degrees earned either online or from for-profit colleges. Overall, these studies have found that employers maintain a strong preference for traditional college degrees earned through classroom instruction. One of the earliest of such studies was conducted by Chaney (2001) who conducted a qualitative study of human resource professionals from eight pharmaceutical companies to determine employers' perceptions of applicants with online degrees or coursework. Participants expressed a degree of uncertainty regarding online courses and online degrees. Responses indicated that human resources professionals typically recruit from a list of reputable traditional schools. The majority of participants indicated that they would however review resumes from candidates with online degrees and make hiring decisions that also considered the applicant's experience and other qualifications. Skepticism regarding online degrees originated from a negative association of online degrees to mail-order diplomas from degree mills. Participants also suggested they might be more receptive to advanced degrees earned online in cases in which the candidate earned their undergraduate degree from a traditional college.

Adams and Defleur (2005) conducted a survey of hiring committee chairpersons to determine the acceptability of online coursework when pursuing teaching positions in higher education. The study asked respondents to choose from three hypothetical applicants who

earned their doctorate through traditional classroom study, wholly online study, or a combination of classroom and online studies. Respondents indicated a clear preference for the applicant who earned his or her degree through entirely traditional classroom study. When asked to select between an applicant with a degree earned through traditional classroom education or one with a degree earned through online education, 98% of respondents opted for the traditional degree applicant. After being provided a choice between an applicant with a doctorate earned entirely through traditional instruction or an applicant with a degree through a combination of online and classroom instruction, 89% of respondents selected the applicant with the doctorate earned entirely through traditional instruction. Respondents were asked to indicate their main reason for their decisions and 85% of the respondents noted concerns about doctoral degrees earned online. A qualitative analysis of comments revealed that concerns about experience were a dominant theme. Respondent comments reflected that importance was given to the direct experience of participating in labs, clinics, research, and supervised teaching experiences. Other concerns were expressed regarding the lack of interaction and the perceived quality and rigor of a doctoral degree obtained online.

In a subsequent study, Adams and Defleur (2006) investigated the opinions of 269 human resources professionals toward online degrees. Similar to the initial study, participants in the study were asked to make choices between applicants who earned their college degree through either traditional classroom instruction, online instruction or a combination of classroom and online instruction. In this study, 96% of respondents selected a candidate with a traditional degree over a candidate with an online degree. In the second scenario, 75% of participants chose the applicant with a traditional degree over the applicant with a degree

earned through an equal combination of traditional and online instruction. A qualitative analysis of participant comments indicated that accreditation was the dominant concern. Interaction was the second most frequently mentioned category. Participants voiced concerns that online instruction could not replicate the interpersonal experience of the classroom. Quality and reputation was the third most common theme, suggesting that online coursework might be perceived more positively if completed at a traditional college.

Continuing this line of research, a study by Adams, Defleur, and Heald (2007) queried 159 health care administrators regarding the acceptability of degrees earned online or through a combination of online and classroom instruction. The results of this study were consistent with the prior research and found that employers preferred traditional colleges over degrees earned entirely or partly online. When asked to choose between an applicant with a traditional degree and an applicant with an online degree in a hiring scenario, 95% of the respondents selected the traditional degree applicant. In a second scenario, a job applicant with a traditional degree was selected by 71% of respondents over a candidate with a degree completed through a combination of classroom and online instruction. In this study, further analysis was conducted to determine if experience with online courses was associated with candidate selections. The results indicated that there was not a significant relationship between these factors. Content analysis of participant comments identified that a major concern with online education was the absence of classroom interaction and experience.

Several other studies have further extended the research regarding employer perceptions of online degrees. Danzinger (2007) surveyed 138 human resource professionals in Northeastern Wisconsin regarding their perceptions of online degrees in comparison to traditional college degrees. The majority of participants (73%) rated online degrees as less

credible than traditional degrees and 83% rated online degrees as less prestigious. Participants were presented with a hiring scenario and asked to respond to one of three options: prefer a job applicant with a traditional degree; prefer a job applicant with an online degree; or the method a degree was earned would not be a significant factor in a hiring decision. The responses indicated a preference for the job applicant with the traditional degree (62%) while 38% indicated that the method that the degree was earned would not be an important factor. Qualitative feedback revealed that important variables that favored traditional degrees were classroom interaction, face-to-face communication and experiential learning opportunities. Danzinger (2007) concluded that participants in the study did not regard online education or online degrees to be equivalent to traditional education and that human resources managers in the study demonstrated a hiring preference for job applicants with traditional degrees.

Seibold (2007) reported on the findings from six interviews with human resources professionals regarding their perceptions of online education. Participants in the study, while recognizing the benefits of online education, did not feel that online education was equivalent to traditional education. Overall, participants believed that a hybrid of both online and face-to-face coursework as being the ideal educational model. Participants perceived a difference in the quality of online education based on the for-profit and not-for-profit status of the college citing concerns about academic rigor at for-profit colleges. For-profit colleges were compared to a fast-food version of higher education because of the compressed time schedule for courses.

Good and Peca (2007) described the results of a survey completed by 31 tenure and tenure-track education faculty at five state universities in New Mexico. All respondents

worked at a college that was providing some online coursework as part of its curriculum. Respondents were asked to indicate if they would recommend hiring a full-time faculty member who completed a doctorate degree entirely online. The responses were that 65% would not, 16% would and 19% indicated that would depend on circumstances. Respondents were also asked to provide a rationale for their response. The dominant concerns regarding hiring a fellow faculty member with a doctorate earned entirely online were interpersonal skills, negative personal experiences with online instruction and general concerns about the rigor and quality of online instruction.

Huss (2007) analyzed the results of a survey completed by 75 middle school principals regarding potential job applicants who completed pre-service teacher preparation programs entirely or almost entirely online. The responses indicated that 52% of the principals would be "Very Concerned" about the credentials of a teacher candidate with a college degree earned entirely or almost entirely online and that 95% did not believe that an online degree was as credible as a traditional college degree. An analysis of comments revealed that the lack of social interaction was the most frequently cited concern regarding online education.

A study by Lamer (2007) examined the acceptance of MBA degrees from online and for-profit colleges by applying diffusion of innovations theory. Lamer surveyed 210 human resources professionals and found a high degree of acceptance for online learning, concluding that a MBA earned online would be considered to be equivalent to a MBA earned from the same college through classroom instruction. Lamer found less acceptance of MBA degrees from for-profit colleges. In this study, participants perceived for-profit colleges to be less reputable than traditional colleges.

Thompson (2009) reports on a survey of 87 members of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). Respondents in this study overwhelming preferred job applicants with a degree earned in a traditional setting over a degree earned online. When asked to make a choice between a traditional degree job applicant and an online degree applicant, the traditional degree job applicant was selected by 78% of respondents. While there appeared to be a negative bias toward online degree job applicants, most employers in this study indicated that they would not immediately exclude an applicant based solely on the applicant holding an online degree.

Richardson, McLeod and Dikkers (2011) examined the attitudes of 105 human resources directors regarding online credentials earned by K-12 school principals and principal candidates. Overall, respondents thought that online college courses were less rigorous and were inferior in quality compared to traditional college courses. Respondents felt that face-to-face coursework did a better job of preparing job candidates for leadership roles in schools. The researcher also asked for perceptions regarding the preferred format for teaching a number of preparatory courses. All courses, with the exception of technology leadership, were reported to be easier to teach face-to-face than online. Qualitative data from respondents revealed concerns about the lack of human interaction, mentoring, sharing of practical experiences as well as quality and academic honesty with online coursework. Differences in responses were noted by the location of respondents with respondents in rural locations having a more negative perception of online education.

Jeancola (2011) researched the perceptions of certified public accountants regarding the acceptability on online college degrees for entry level accountants. Participants responded by indicating the level of recommendation that they would give to a candidate for an

accounting position with a degree completed in a traditional setting, a degree completed entirely online and a degree completed partially online. In each situation, the applicant had earned an accounting degree from an accredited institution. Findings indicated that participants preferred a candidate with a traditional degree over a candidate with a degree earned entirely or partially online. Jeancola (2011) also found that individuals with personal experience with online courses rated the effectiveness of online instruction to teach accounting courses higher.

Using a grounded theory methodology, Bailey (2011) examined the factors that influence perceptions of MBA degrees earned online and from for-profit colleges through 20 interviews with hiring managers. The study found that important factors in evaluating an MBA degree were accreditation, classroom interaction, and academic standards. Bailey (2011) concluded that in general, hiring managers did not perceive a significant difference in whether a degree was obtained online or in a traditional setting or if the school was for-profit or not-for-profit. Bailey (2011) also suggested that it was not an important factor to hiring managers if a school only existed online.

Udegbe (2012) studied the attitudes of 215 students who were enrolled in a human resources management course at a university in Nigeria. The majority of participants perceived that college coursework in a traditional classroom method was more rigorous than online coursework. The research also found a less favorable view of the skills and abilities of graduates of online degrees in comparison to graduates of traditional degree programs. Based on the responses of these prospective human resource managers, Udegbe (2012) concluded that graduates holding online degrees may experience discrimination in the job search process.

Nursing Baccalaureate Degrees

The United States is facing a critical shortage of registered nurses to provide direct patient care as well as a shortage of nursing faculty to educate the next generation of nurses. A shortage of registered nurses ranging from 340,000 to 1 million by 2020 is predicted and this shortfall will be evident in a multitude of health care settings (HRSA, 2008). Compounding this crisis, colleges and universities are faced with a shortage of nursing faculty and have been forced to turn away qualified applicants seeking admission to nursing degree programs (Ellenbecker, 2010).

Registered Nurse Educational Pathways

The field of nursing is faced with the issue of differing levels of educational preparation to meet the demands of an increasingly complex health care system and an aging population. While most health care professions have a clearly defined standard for pre-licensure education, registered nurses can have one of three different levels of educational preparation. These options include a two-year associate degree, a three-year diploma, and a four-year bachelor degree pathway. Associate Degree of Nursing programs are two year programs usually completed at a community college. Three year diploma programs are typically completed in a hospital setting and use a combination of classroom and practical experience. Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees are four year degrees offered in a college or university setting (Scheckel, 2009). Graduates from all three options are required to complete the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) to become a licensed registered nurse (Ellenbecker, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education recognizes two agencies that provide specialty accreditation for BSN degree programs: the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and the Accreditation

Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), formerly the National League for Nursing

Accrediting Commission (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

The Demand for Nurses With Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) Degrees

The desire for registered nurses to complete a baccalaureate level degree is not an

emerging need. The American Nurses Association (ANA) has endorsed the BSN as the

minimum education standard since 1965 and it continues to be a topic of debate (ANA,

1965). Baccalaureate nursing education is also encouraged by several other organizations

including the National Advisory Council on Nurse Education (1996), the American

Association of Colleges of Nursing (2000), and the American Organization of Nurse

Executives (2005).

Although a baccalaureate degree is not yet universally mandatory for registered

nurses, it is becoming the standard in many settings. A survey conducted by ACCN found

that 30% of employers are requiring entry level registered nurses to hold a BSN, while 76.6%

of employers indicate a strong preference for BSN degrees in the hiring process (ACCN,

2011). In a similar survey conducted by the Association of Nurse Executives, 51% of nurse

leaders indicated that their organizations gave preference to job applicants with BSN degrees

in hiring decisions (Caramanica & Thompson, 2012). The U.S. Military, U.S. Veterans

Administration and U.S. Public Health Service require a bachelor's degree for registered

nurse positions (Reilly, Fargen & Walker-Daniels, 2011). Goode et al. (2001) reported on a

survey of chief nursing officers and found a strong desire among nurse executives to increase

the proportion of BSN degree nurses in their organizations. Many hospitals are also pursuing

recognition through the Magnet Recognition Program ®, developed by American Nurses

Credentialing Center (ANCC). Effective January, 2013 Magnet applicants will require that 100% of nurse mangers have either a BSN or a graduate degree in nursing (ANCC,2012).

One of the reasons for this demand is that higher levels of education among registered nurses have been associated with higher quality care and patient outcomes. Several studies have found an association between the number of baccalaureate-prepared RNs and patient outcomes. Aiken, Clarke, Cheung, Sloane, & Silber (2003) conducted the seminal research on this topic and determined that a 10% increase in the ratio of registered nurses with a baccalaureate degrees was associated with a 5% decrease in the probability of surgical patients dying within 30 days of admission as well as the rate of failure to rescue. Subsequent research has provided further evidence to support relationship of registered nurse educational attainment and patient outcomes (Estabrooks, Midodzi, Cummings, Ricker & Giovanetti, 2005; Friese, Lake, Aiken, Silber & Sochalski, 2008).

Registered nurses with baccalaureate degrees have also been found to have greater levels of job satisfaction and retention. Rambur, McIntosh, Palumbo, and Reinier (2005) found that registered nurses with a BSN were more satisfied with their opportunities for autonomy and job growth than registered nurses with associate degrees. Nursing administrators also perceive a difference in practice with BSN degree nurses, including critical thinking, leadership skills, communication, patient education and outcomes focus (Goode et al., 2001).

While there is considerable evidence to support the benefits of registered nurses completing their baccalaureate degree, there is still a shortage in the current workforce. Currently, only 50% of registered nurses hold a BSN degree or higher (HRSA, 2010).

Several organizations, including the Tri-Council for Nursing (2010) and the Institute of Medicine (2010), have advocated for increasing this statistic.

BSN Degree Completion Programs

Degree completion programs are designed to support academic mobility for registered nurses. Nurses with an associate degree or diploma are able to earn a bachelor degree with 1 to 2 years of additional study, depending on prerequisite coursework (Ellenbecker, 2010). RN-to-BSN degree enrollment increased by 15.8% from 2010 to 2011 and reflected the ninth year of enrollment increases (AACN, 2012a). According to the AACN (2012a), there are currently 646 RN to BSN programs in the United States, which include more than 400 that are offered at least partially online.

Barriers and Disincentives to Earning a BSN Degree

Registered nurses often face many barriers to increasing their level of education. One of the primary barriers for registered nurses is time constraints related to balancing work and family responsibilities (Delaney & Piscopo, 2004; Megginson, 2008). Cost is another significant barrier. In many employment settings there is little or no differentiation in pay for registered nurses based on educational level (Graf, 2006). The investment in earning a BSN degree may assist in competing for advancements, but there is usually not an immediate financial incentive for a diploma or associate degree nurse to earn his or her BSN (McGrath, 2008). Organizational culture and management practices may also act as a disincentive. Organizations that reward informal learning and experience may discourage registered nurses from pursuing formal education (Orsolini-Hain, 2012). Weinberg, Cooney-Miner, Perloff and Bourgoin (2011) conducted interviews of 23 nursing managers about hiring criteria for registered nurse job applicants and reported that nurse managers did not attribute much

significance to BSN education in the hiring process, but rather focused on individual qualities such as personality and attitude.

Closing the Gap with Distance Education

Distance education has been proposed as a viable solution for increasing the accessibility of baccalaureate level nursing education for registered nurses in the current literature. Allan and Aldebron (2008), in their analysis of the nursing shortage, identified distance education as a strategy to deal with the shortage of nursing faculty. Talbert (2009) describes the many benefits of online education and its potential to encourage more nurses to advance their education. Kozlowski (2002) and Pank (2007) both encourage registered nurses to consider the advantages of earning a nursing baccalaureate degree online and provide practical suggestions in selecting a program. Holly (2009) points out that online learning also helps to address the need for increased informatics content by utilizing emerging technologies and increasing competence for working in complex workplaces. Rich and Nugent (2010) discussed the potential of educational technologies such as video conferencing and online learning to improve access to nursing education programs. The Institute of Medicine has also pointed to online degrees and for-profit colleges as credible strategies (IOM, 2011).

<center>**Summary and Conclusion**</center>

The convergence of Internet technologies and a business paradigm in higher education has catalyzed the growth of online education. Traditional colleges, facing fiscal crisis due to the rapidly rising cost of higher education, now compete with for-profit colleges in new markets. Within academia, online education has faced scrutiny regarding its quality, rigor and effectiveness. However, empirical studies have demonstrated that online learning

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can deliver outcomes that are at least comparable to traditional face-to-face instruction. For-profit colleges are also responding to public criticism and adjusting their practices to renew their images and respectability in the public realm. Despite the mounting evidence in support of online learning's capacity to achieve learning outcomes, employers appear to remain skeptical. While employers see some benefits to online learning, it is often regarded as impersonal and inferior to traditional residential education. The convenience and flexibility offered by for-profit colleges are often perceived as short-cuts to earning a college degree. The nursing profession is facing a critical shortage of baccalaureate degree registered nurses. Online education and for-profit colleges are proposed solutions to address this critical workforce shortage. But, it is imperative to understand the attitudes of potential employers toward job applicants completing these educational options. If employers do not regard these options as valuable, then there is little incentive for registered nurses to make the financial and personal commitment to pursuing a BSN through these options or for organizations to invest resources to deliver them.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study compared the attitudes of health care recruiters to RN-to-BSN degrees

based on the instructional delivery method and the for-profit/nonprofit status of the college.

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to conduct the study. First, the overall

research design is discussed. The population and sample for the study is described in the next

section. Following that, the survey instrument and survey design process is detailed. This

chapter concludes with an overview of the data collection procedure and plan for data

analysis.

Research Design

This research design was a descriptive study using a cross-sectional survey

methodology. Descriptive research describes a situation or condition as it currently exists and

does not involve the manipulation of variables. A cross-sectional study measures a

phenomenon at a single point in time (Creswell, 2003). The researcher determined a

descriptive, cross-sectional survey study to be the most appropriate method for this

attitudinal study because of the limited research regarding employer attitudes regarding

online and for-profit RN-to-BSN degrees. The goal of this study was to describe the current

state of health care recruiter attitudes toward RN-to-BSN degrees earned online or from for-

profit colleges.

The independent variable in each of the four research questions was the type of RN-

to-BSN degree. The degree options included four combinations based on instructional

delivery method (classroom or online) and for-profit/nonprofit status of the college as

described in Figure 1. The independent variables were at the nominal level of measurement.

TYPE OF COLLEGE

	Traditional College (TC)	For-Profit College (FPC)
Classroom Instruction	TC+CLASSROOM	FPC+CLASSROOM
Online Instruction	TC+ONLINE	FPC+ONLINE

Figure 1. Independent variable matrix.

There were four dependent variables. They included the health care recruiter rating

of: 1. advantage in hiring process; 2. credibility; 3. concerns about credentials; and 4.

likelihood to recommend hiring. The four dependent variables were measured on a four-point

Likert-type scale as described in Table 1.

Table 1

Dependent Variables in This Study

Dependent Variable	Likert-type Rating Scale			
Advantage in Hiring Process	No Advantage	Very Little Advantage	Some Advantage	Significant Advantage
Credibility	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High
Concerns about Credentials	No Concern	Little Concern	Moderate Concern	Significant Concern
Likelihood to Recommend	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very Likely

Rationale for Survey Methodology

A self-administered online survey was used to collect the data. This methodology was the most appropriate method for this study for several reasons including the relatively low cost and the ability to collect data efficiently (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001). It would be difficult to obtain information from a large, national sample of health care recruiters using another data collection method. An additional advantage of this self-administered survey method was that it encouraged participants to be candid in their responses. This method was also preferred over face-to-face interviews for several reasons. First, it prevented the researcher from inhibiting or influencing the responses of participation, which is a potential risk if using an interview method for data collection. The ability to conduct the research in a limited time frame was also a consideration. Due to cost, time, and other resource limitations it would not have been possible to conduct a similar face-to-face interview survey among a sample of this size. The survey methodology was also appropriate based on the review of literature for this type of study.

Population and Sample

The population for the study was health care recruiters who were involved in registered nurse recruitment. Health care recruiters are employed in a diverse number of employment settings such as hospitals, nursing homes and outpatient centers. According to the American Hospital Association (2013), there are approximately 5,700 hospitals in the United States. There is also an estimated 16,000 skilled nursing facilities, over 230,000 physician practices, about 10,000 home health agencies and approximately 5,200 ambulatory surgery centers. Some of these organizations are independently operated and others are part of integrated health care delivery systems. The size and complexity of this population

presented a logistical barrier to probability sampling. A central database of all health care

recruiters is not available. Therefore, active members of the National Association for Health

Care Recruitment (NAHCR) were defined as the subpopulation for this study. NAHCR was

founded in 1975 as the National Association for Nurse Recruiters. Currently, NAHCR is the

leading professional association for health care recruiters. NAHCR members are employed in

hospitals, long-term care, home care, rehabilitation facilities, veteran's administration and the

military. The researcher is an active member of NAHCR and gained access to NAHCR

membership list after making a request to the NAHCR Board of Directors. This study used a

nonprobability sample. An invitation email was sent to all active NAHCR members, a total

of 791 individuals. The sample included those NAHCR members who volunteered to

participate in the study by responding to the survey. Self-selected sampling is a non-

probability sampling technique and is commonly used in communication and educational

research (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001).

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the individual health care recruiter. Previous

research regarding employer attitudes toward online and for-profit degrees has focused on

hiring gatekeepers (Adams & Defleur, 2005; 2006; Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007). Health

care recruiters are gatekeepers to the hiring process and often make recommendations

regarding the screening and selection of job applicants. Therefore, it is important to

understand the role of individual attitudes and perspectives among health care recruiters.

Data Collection Instrument

The researcher developed the survey instrument (Appendix D) used in this study after

a review of the current literature on the topic of employer attitudes toward degrees earned

online or from for-profit colleges. The online survey instrument included a total of 22

questions and was developed and hosted on Qualtrics, a web-based survey application.

To establish face validity, a small panel of health care recruiters who were not active

members of NAHCR but involved in nurse recruitment reviewed the survey instrument. The

researcher used feedback from the panel to improve the wording of questions and the overall

format of the survey. This process confirmed that the questions were clear and

understandable. To further validate the survey instrument, it was also reviewed by the

coordinator of the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Applied Research Laboratory (ARL).

The ARL is a statistical consulting center that offers expertise in instrument design, data

organization and statistical analysis to researchers at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

The final survey instrument (Appendix D) included seven sections and a total of 22

questions. Following is a description for each section:

Section One of the survey was the initial page of the survey. It provided an informed

consent describing the purpose of the research, identified the researcher, and indicated that

participation was voluntary and anonymous and that the survey was approved by the

Institutional Review Board at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Participants were required

to respond affirmatively to a question regarding their willingness to participate in the survey

prior to continuing.

Section Two of the survey provided respondents with an overview of the survey and

operational definitions for several terms used in the survey including RN-to-BSN, For-Profit

College, Traditional College, Classroom Instruction and Online Instruction.

Section Three of the survey asked five close-ended (yes or no) questions. This

section was positioned at the beginning of the survey because it could be completed quickly

and did not require extensive consideration to complete. The first question in this section asked if the respondent was involved in nurse recruitment and was a screening question. Responses from individuals not involved in nurse recruitment were excluded from the dataset since the intent of the study is to investigate the perceptions of hiring gatekeepers in nurse recruitment. The next four questions asked about experience with online education, online degrees, for-profit college education and for-profit college degrees. These four questions were collected as additional demographic factors for further analysis.

Section Four of the survey asked participants two specific questions related to nurse recruitment. The first question asked participants about the frequency of difficulty in recruiting registered nurses (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always) and the second question asked participants their opinion regarding the importance of registered nurse job applicants holding a bachelor degree (Not Important At All, Somewhat Important, Important, Extremely Important). A space for additional comments was included after each question.

Section Five of the survey included four questions that addressed the primary research questions for the study. The first research question was addressed by a question that asked:

"If experience and other qualifications were equal, how much of an advantage in the hiring process would a registered nurse job applicant with the following degrees have in comparison to a job applicant with an Associate Degree in Nursing from a community college?"

The question listed the four degree options as independent variables (TRADITIONAL COLLEGE(TC)+CLASSROOM, TRADITIONAL COLLEGE(TC)+ONLINE, FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE(FPC)+CLASSROOM, FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE(FPC+ONLINE). A four-point Likert-type scale was used to rate the degree of advantage (No Advantage, Very Little Advantage, Some Advantage, Significant Advantage).

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The second research question was addressed by a survey item that asked:

"How would you rate the credibility of the following nursing degrees?"

The question listed the four degree options as independent variables. A four point Likert-type scale was used to rate the level of credibility (Very Low, Low, Moderate, High).

To collect data related to the third research question, the next question asked: *"How much concern would you have about the credentials of a registered nurse job applicant with each of the following degrees?"*

The question listed the four degree options as independent variables. A four-point Likert-type scale was used to rate the level of concern (No Concern, Little Concern, Moderate Concern, Significant Concern).

A final survey question in this section measured the fourth research question:

"How likely would you be to recommend hiring a registered nurse job applicant with the following degrees?"

The question listed the four degree options as independent variables. A four-point Likert-type scale was used to rate the likelihood of recommending the candidate for hire (Very Unlikely, Unlikely, Likely, Very Likely).

A space for additional comments was included after each question in this section.

Section Six used three questions to gather information regarding the tuition assistance provided by the respondent's employer. The question asked if the employer reimbursed staff for completing an RN-to-BSN degree. Subsequent questions asked if the same level of assistance was provided for RN-to-BSN degrees from online degrees and for-profit colleges. A space for additional comments was included after each question.

Section Seven was the final section of the survey and consisted of eight demographic questions including gender, age group, highest level of education, years of health care recruitment experience, professional certifications, and characteristics of their employment setting. Responses to these questions were used to help identify and report characteristics of the sample.

Data Collection and Procedures

This study was conducted through an online survey hosted on Qualtrics. The survey invitation (Appendix B) was emailed on February 5, 2013 to all 791 active members of NAHCR by a NAHCR staff member. The survey invitation informed participants of the purpose of the study, anonymity of responses, and provided instructions to participate. The invitation included a hyperlink to access the online survey. A reminder email (Appendix C) was sent on February 19, 2013 and the survey was closed on March 5, 2013. Both initial email and the reminder email included the contact name, address, and email address of the researcher. After submitting the survey, participants were automatically re-directed to a confirmation page and could complete a form to request a copy of the survey results.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of the survey included the response rate, demographics of the sample, and descriptive statistics for all independent and dependent variables. Based on the sample size, level of measurement for the variables and testing of data for parametric statistics assumptions, such as normal distribution, the researcher determined that non-parametric statistics would be the appropriate statistical analysis for hypothesis testing. Therefore, frequency distributions, percentages, and medians were used to describe the findings. Hypotheses for the four primary research questions used the Freidman test to determine the significance of the difference between the medians for each of the degree options. The p

value for accepting a hypothesis was set at $p \leq .05$. Follow up pairwise comparisons were completed with the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. The Mann Whitney U test was used to compare differences between groups based on demographic factors. The comments received from participants were categorized and described using frequency analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Approval from Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to beginning this study (Appendix A). Based on the population of the study, anonymity of respondents and nature of the research this study was eligible for expedited review. As discussed in the preceding sections, the email invitation to participate outlined the essentials of informed consent for respondents by emphasizing that participation was voluntary. Additionally, the survey instrument included an informed consent statement that required participants to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. The informed consent statement advised participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time by closing the browser window on their computer. Participants were informed about purpose of the study, provided the contact information for the researcher and also provided an opportunity to request a copy of the study's results. Email addresses of respondents were not collected or tracked by the researcher, ensuring that all respondents remained anonymous.

Limitations

The major limitation for this study was the reliance on a nonprobability sample. Although nonprobability sampling is common, it does present the risk for response bias. Response bias could occur if the attitudes and opinions of those who respond differ from the attitudes and opinions from those who do not respond to the survey. This may limit the generalizability of the study to the entire population.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter is the analysis of results from a survey of health care recruiters regarding their perception of four different RN-to-BSN degree options. The purpose of this study was to determine if health care recruiters perceive a significant difference between the four RN-to-BSN degree options described in Chapter 3 (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, and FPC+ONLINE). The chapter begins with a description of the survey response rate and characteristics of the sample. Descriptive information regarding the employment setting, tuition assistance policies and perspectives on nurse recruitment are also presented. Four primary research questions are presented with associated hypothesis along with the results of non-parametric statistical analysis. The four research questions focused on the relative advantage of the various RN-to-BSN degree options in the hiring process, the perceived credibility of RN-to-BSN degree options, the level of concerns about the credentials of candidates holding various types of RN-to-BSN degree options and the likelihood to hire a candidate based on the type of RN-to-BSN held.

Data Collection and Response Rate

An email requesting participation was sent to 791 active members of the National Association of Health Care Recruiters. Included in the email was a direct link to the survey instrument located on the Qualtrics online survey site. The initial email resulted in 86 responses. A second email request was sent two weeks after the first and resulted in an additional 45 responses for a total of 131 responses. A total of 15 respondents completed less than 50% of the survey questions and those reports were excluded from all subsequent analyses, leaving 116 responses for further analysis. Receiving 116 usable responses from

791 invitations resulted in a 14.6 % return rate. IBM ® SPSS ® Statistics 20 was utilized for data analysis.

Sample Characteristics

There were 116 participants in the study; not all participants answered every question in the study but all data were used in the data analysis. All 116 participants indicated that they were a health care recruiter involved in the screening and interviewing of registered nurse job applicants. A summary of responses to demographic questions appears in Table 2.

Table 2

Gender, Age and Educational Attainment of Survey Sample

Variable	n	Percentage
Gender		
Male	6	5%
Female	109	95%
Age Group		
20-30 years	6	5%
31 – 40 years	17	15%
41 – 50 years	32	29%
51 – 60 years	45	40%
60+ years	12	11%
Educational Attainment		
Diploma	4	4%
Associate	9	8%
Bachelor	51	45%
Graduate	49	43%

The sample was predominantly female, 95% (n=109) compared to just 5% male (n= 6). This is comparable to the membership demographics of the National Association of Health Care Recruiters. Members of the sample were predominantly older with 29% (n = 32) being 41 to 50 years and 40% (n = 45) in the range of 51 to 60 years. Eighty-eight percent of the sample had completed at least a bachelor's degree, including 43% (n = 49) who held a graduate degree. Nearly half of the sample, 48% (n = 56) indicated that they had taken an

online course for college credit and 52% (n = 60) indicated that they had not. A total of 16%

(n = 19) indicated that they held a college degree that was completed entirely online and 84%

(n = 97) did not hold a college degree that was completed entirely online. Fewer members of

the sample had direct experience with for-profit education. A total of 116 participants

responded to the question regarding experience with for-profit education, 15% (n = 17) of

participants indicated that they had attended a for-profit college and 85% (n = 98) indicated

that they had not. A total of 15% (n = 17) also indicated that they held a college degree from

a for-profit college and 84% (n = 98) indicated that they did not hold a degree from a for-

profit college. Table 3 summarizes the recruitment experience and credentials of the sample.

Table 3

Recruitment Experience and Credentials of Survey Sample

Variable	N	Percentage
Years of Recruitment Experience		
1-5 years	17	15%
6-10 years	28	24%
11-15 years	31	27%
16-20 years	21	10%
20+ years	27	24
Credentials		
Registered Nurse	55	47%
Certified Health Care Recruiter	51	44%
Professional in Human Resources	24	21%
Senior Professional in Human Resources	3	3%

The sample include a well-proportioned distribution of recruitment experience; 15%

(n = 17) had between 1 and 5 years of experience, 24% (28) had between 6 and 10 years of

experience, 27% (n = 31) had between 11 and 15 years of experience, 10% (n = 12) had 16-

20 years, and 23% (n = 27) had more than 20 years of experience. Several members of the

sample held one or more credentials, including 47% (n = 55) of the respondents who were

registered nurses as well as a health care recruiter. In all, the sample represented a diverse

and representative group of health care recruiters. Information regarding the employment

setting of the sample appears in Table 4.

Table 4

Employment Setting of Survey Sample Participants

Variable	n	Percentage
Organization Type		
Individual Hospital	49	43%
Multiple Hospital/Healthcare System	53	46%
Long Term Care	4	4%
Home Health	2	2%
Rehab	1	1%
Other	6	5%
Organization Status		
Not-for-profit, Non-governmental	91	78%
For-Profit	13	11%
Governmental, Non-Military	6	5%
Veterans Administration or Military	6	5%
Total Employees		
0-499	6	5%
500-999	10	9%
1,000-1,999	24	2%
2,000 – 5,000	35	30%
More than 5,000	41	35%

The majority of the respondents were recruiters in a hospital setting including 42% (n

= 49) who recruited for an individual hospital and 45.3% (n = 53) who recruited for a

multiple hospital / healthcare system. Most respondents indicated that they worked for a not-

for-profit, non-governmental organization, 78% (n = 91). The majority of the sample worked

for a larger employer with 35% (n = 41) indicating the number of employees was greater than

5,000 and 30% (n = 35) indicated that the number of employees was between 2,000 and

5,000.

Nurse Recruitment Questions

Participants were asked how often it was difficult for their employer to recruit registered nurses. The majority of participants indicated that it was "Sometimes" difficult. A summary of the responses appears in Table 5.

Table 5

Frequency of Difficulty in Recruiting Registered Nurses

Response	n	Percentage
Never	5	4.3%
Sometimes	86	74.1%
Often	19	16.4%
Always	6	5.2%

Participants were able to provide additional comments in response to this question. Almost 60% of the comments made reference to difficulties in recruiting nurses in specialized areas such as a critical care, surgical, emergency department or obstetrics. The availability of new graduate nurses was found in 21% of the comments. The shortage of experienced nurses was noted in 19% of the comments. It appears that the current recruitment needs among respondents is for experienced nurses in highly specialized roles. A shortage of BSN degree nurses was only mentioned by 2 respondents (4%). The verbatim comments are included in Appendix E.

Participants were also asked their opinion on the importance of a registered nurse holding a Bachelor's degree and 64.6% rated it as either "Important" or "Extremely Important". A summary of the responses appear in Table 6.

Table 6

Importance of Registered Nurse Holding BSN Degree

Response	n	Percentage
Not Important at All	9	7.7%
Somewhat Important	32	27.6%
Important	49	42.2%
Extremely Important	26	22.4%

Participants were able to provide additional comments after responding to this

question. A facility preference for hiring a BSN degree or requiring completion of a BSN

with a specified time period after hire was mentioned in 65% of the comments. A direct

reference to Magnet Nursing Excellence Program was noted in 16% of the comments. A

BSN requirement for only specific roles was remarked on in 19% of the comments.

Approximately 10% of the comments included a reference to the IOM target for 2020,

facility support for BSN degree completion or the perceived benefits of a BSN degree

requirement. Verbatim comments are included in Appendix E. Based on these responses, it

appears that there is a preference for BSN degree nurses among health care recruiters.

Tuition Benefit Policies

Participants were asked the extent to which their employer provided reimbursement

for individuals pursing a RN-to-BSN degree completion program. The majority of

respondents indicated that their employers paid for some of the costs. Responses are

summarized in Table 7.

Table 7

Tuition Assistance for RN-to-BSN Degree Completion

Question	Responses	n	Percentage
Does your organization reimburse employees for the cost of completing a RN-to-BSN degree?	Yes, all of the costs	5	4.3%
	Yes, some of the costs	86	74.1%
	No	19	16.4%
If yes, are RN-to-BSN degrees completed entirely online eligible for reimbursement?	Yes	96	85.7%
	No	4	3.6%
	Not Applicable	12	10.7%
If yes, are RN-to-BSN degrees completed at for-profit colleges eligible for reimbursement?	Yes	98	87.5%
	No	2	1.8%
	Not Applicable	12	10.7%

A total of 112 participants responded to follow up questions regarding the eligibility of coursework completed online or at for-profit colleges. From this data it appears that employers support the completion of RN-to-BSN from for-profit colleges and online instruction to a similar extent to which they support RN-to-BSN degrees from traditional colleges and classroom instruction.

Research Question 1

RQ#1: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived advantage of an RN-to-BSN degree in the hiring process across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? The first research question was addressed by a survey question that asked participants to rate the advantage in the hiring process for a job applicant holding each of the four RN-to-BSN degree options in comparison to a job applicant holding an Associate degree in nursing from a community college. The independent variable was the type of RN-to-BSN degree and included the four combinations

of TC+CLASRROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM and FPC+ONLINE. The

dependent measure was the participant's rating of the advantage in the hiring process of four

different RN-to-BSN degree options on a four-point Likert-type scale of 1 (No Advantage)

to 4 (Significant Advantage). The distribution of ratings appears in Table 8.

Table 8

*Frequency Distribution for Health Care Recruiter Rating of Perceived Advantage of RN-to
BSN Degree in the Hiring Process Across Four Degree Options*

	No Advantage	Little Advantage	Some Advantage	Significant Advantage
TC+CLASSROOM	13.9%	7.8%	40.9%	37.4%
TC+ONLINE	17.9%	24.3%	36.6%	21.7%
FPC+CLASSROOM	18.3%	15.7%	47.8%	18.3%
FPC+ONLINE	21.9%	36.0%	31.6%	10.5%

Degrees earned from TC+CLASSROOM were rated as providing a significant advantage a

frequency of 37.4% compared to 21.7% for TC+ONLINE, 18.5% for FPC+CLASSROOM

and 10.5% FPC+ONLINE.

Hypothesis 1.1

*H1.1: There will be a significant difference in the perceived advantage of RN-to-BSN
degree options across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE,
FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE).* The first hypothesis is based upon several prior

research studies that found that employers have preference for traditional college degrees

earned through classroom instruction (Adams & Defleur, 2005; 2006; Adams, Defleur &

Heald, 2007). It was expected that employers would rate the relative advantage of a RN-to-

BSN degree from a traditional college and classroom instruction significantly higher than the

other degree options. To test the hypothesis, a Friedman test was conducted to evaluate

differences in the medians among the perceived advantage of TC+CLASSROOM (*Mdn* =

3.00), for TC+ONLINE (*Mdn*= 3.00), FPC+CLASSROOM (*Mdn* = 3.00) and

FPC+ONLINE (*Mdn* = 2.00). The test was significant $\chi^2(3, N = 114) = 101.545$, $p < .01$.

Follow-up pairwise comparisons were conducted using a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and

the results are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9

Pairwise Comparison of Advantage in the Hiring Process by Degree Type Using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests

Pair	Variable 1	*Mdn*	Variable 2	*Mdn*	z	p
1	TC+ CLASSROOM	3.0	TC+ONLINE	3.0	-5.417	<.001*
2	TC+ CLASSROOM	3.0	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	-5.246	<.001*
3	TC+ CLASSROOM	3.0	FPC+ONLINE	2.0	-6.741	<.001*
4	TC+ ONLINE	3.0	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	-6.559	.510
5	TC+ ONLINE	3.0	FPC+ONLINE	2.0	-4.548	<.001*
6	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	FPC+ONLINE	2.0	-5.500	<.001*

The median perceived advantage for traditional college/classroom instruction was greater

than the median perceived advantage for TC+CLASSROOM, $p < .001$, FPC+CLASSROOM,

$p < .001$, and FPC+ONLINE, $p < .001$. It is worth noting that the median for three of the

degree options was 3.0, while the median for the combination of FPC+ONLINE was 2.0.

Hypothesis 1.2

H1.2: There will be no significant difference between the perceived advantage ratings

of recruiters who have completed an online course for college credit and those who have not.

The rationale for this hypothesis is based on a prior research by Adams, Defleur, and Heald

(2007) who found that prior participation in online learning did not have an effect on

opinions regarding online degrees. Jeancola (2011) had a contradictory finding, concluding

that prior enrollment in online courses did have a positive impact. The results of a Mann-

Whitney *U* test revealed no significant difference in the rating of advantage in the hiring

process for recruiters who had completed an online course for college credit and those who

had not for TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, or FPC+ONLINE. The

hypothesis was accepted. A summary of results appears in Table 10.

Table 10

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Advantage in Hiring Process Rating Based on Recruiter Completion of Online Course for College Credit Variable

	Completed Online Courses	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	56	54.73	3065	1469	-1.094	.274
	No	59	61.10	3605			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	56	55.96	3134	1538	-.665	.506
	No	59	59.93	3536			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	56	57.21	3204	1608	-.263	.792
	No	59	58.75	3466			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	56	56.75	3121	1581	-.247	.805
	No	59	58.20	3434			

Hypothesis 1.3

*H1.3: There will be a significant difference between the perceived advantage ratings of recruiters who completed a college degree entirely online and who did not.*Because of the

increase of online learning many individuals may have completed an online course for

college credit as part of a degree from a traditional college that also included classroom

instruction. This hypothesis was examined to determine if recruiters who hold a degree that

was earned entirely online had a different perception. Prior research by Jeancola (2011)

found that experience with online coursework made a difference in the perception of online

learning, while research by Adams, Defleur and Heald (2007) concluded that it did not.

Because earning a college degree entirely online is a less common experience than taking a

single college course online, it was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference.

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The results of the Mann Whitney *U* test revealed that there was not a significant difference

based on this factor, therefore the hypothesis is rejected. The results are summarized in

Table 11.

Table 11

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Advantage in Hiring Process Rating Based on
Recruiter Completion of College Degree Entirely Online

	Completed Online Degree	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	19	46.11	876	686	-1.818	.069
	No	96	60.35	5794			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	19	55.16	1048	858	-.424	.672
	No	96	58.56	5622			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	19	51.45	977.5	787.5	-1.008	.312
	No	96	59.30	5692.5			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	19	55.26	1060	860	-.339	.735
	No	95	57.95	5505			

Hypothesis 1.4

H1.4: There will be no significant difference between the perceived advantage ratings

of recruiters who have previously attended a for-profit college and those who have not. This

hypothesis predicted that no significant difference would be found between individuals who

previously attended a for-profit college and those who had not. No prior studies have

examined this demographic variable however Adams, Defleur, and Heald (2007) found that

prior enrollment in online coursework did not impact perceptions of online learning. Based

on this research a null hypothesis was established. The results of a Mann-Whitney *U* test

revealed no significant difference in the rating of advantage in the hiring process for those

that had previously attended a for-profit college and those that had not for

TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, or FPC+ONLINE. However, it

important to note that the *p* value for TC+CLASSROOM was only marginally above the

significance threshold of $p <. 05$. A summary of results appears in Table 12.

Table 12

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Advantage in Hiring Process Rating Based on Recruiter Prior Enrollment at a For-Profit College Variable

	Attended For Profit College	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	23	46.54	1070.5	794.5	-1.90	.057
	No	91	60.27	5484.5			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	23	52.04	1197	921	-.922	.356
	No	91	58.88	5358			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	23	56.98	1310.5	1034.5	-.090	.928
	No	91	57.63	5244.5			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	23	60.28	60.28	959.5	-.564	.573
	No	90	56.16	56.16			

Hypothesis 1.5

H1.5: There will be no significant difference between the perceived advantage ratings of recruiters who are registered nurses and those who are not. Many health care recruiters have prior experience as a registered nurse. No previous research has examined if prior experience in the nursing profession might impact attitudes during the hiring process toward nursing degrees earned wholly online or from a for-profit college. In the absence of existing research, a null hypothesis was assumed. The results of a Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed no significant difference in the rating of advantage in the hiring process between health care recruiters that were registered nurses and those who were not for TC+CLASSROOM. However, a significant difference was found for TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, or FPC+ONLINE. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected for these three degree options. From these results it appears that health care recruiters, who are also registered nurses, have a more positive view of alternatives to traditional, residential college instruction. This may be

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due in part to the established presence of distance education in the nursing profession. The

results are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Advantage in Hiring Process Rating Based on Recruiter Status as a Registered Nurse Variable

	Registered Nurse	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	61.34	3312.5	1466.5	-1.081	.280
	No	61	55.04	3357.5			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	54	66.21	3575.5	1203.5	-2.589	.010*
	No	61	50.73	3094.5			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	66.56	3594.5	1184.5	-2.771	.006*
	No	61	50.42	3075.5			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	54	66.23	3510	1154	-2.754	.006*
	No	61	49.92	3045			

Qualitative Data

The survey instrument provided an open space for additional comments following the

rating scale. The importance of the RN-to-BSN to come from a school that is accredited was

mentioned in 5 of 13 comments (38%). An equal number of comments indicated that either a

BSN degree was not necessary for bedside nursing or that other factors such as experience,

skills, and certifications were important. In contrast, a total of three comments (23%)

indicated that the organization currently had or would be soon implementing a specific hiring

preference for BSN degree nurses. Finally, three comments (23%) indicated that the source

of the BSN degree did not matter. The verbatim survey comments are transcribed in

Appendix E.

Research Question 2

RQ#2: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived credibility of an RN-to-BSN degree across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? The second research question was addressed by a survey question which asked participants to rate their perception of the credibility of the four RN-to-BSN degree options. The independent variable was the type of RN-to-BSN degree option. The dependent measure was the participant's rating of the credibility of four different RN-to-BSN degree options on a four-point Likert-type scale of 1 (Very Low) to 4 (High). The frequency distribution of ratings appears in Table 14.

TABLE 14

Frequency Distribution for Health Care Recruiter Rating of Credibility of RN-to-BSN Degree in the Hiring Process Across Four Degree Options

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High
TC+CLASSROOM	0%	0%	14%	86%
TC+ONLINE	0%	0%	54.5%	37.5%
FPC+CLASSROOM	.9%	4.4%	45.1%	49.6%
FPC+ONLINE	8%	22.1%	46%	23.9%

Degrees earned from a TC+CLASSROOM were rated as high with a frequency of 86% compared to 37.5% for TC+ONLINE, 49.6% FPC+CLASSROOM and 23.9% FPC+ONLINE.

Hypothesis 2.1

H2.1: There will be a significant difference in the perceived credibility of RN-to-BSN degree options across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE). This hypothesis was based on the literature regarding employer perceptions of online education and the negative bias toward for-profit academic

institutions. Degrees earned online are typically not perceived to be as a credible as degrees earned through traditional, residential college study (Carnevale, 2007; Danzinger, 2007). A Friedman test was conducted to evaluate differences in the medians among the perceived advantage of traditional college/classroom instruction (*Mdn* = 4.00),   for traditional college/online instruction (*Mdn* = 3.00), for-profit college/classroom instruction (*Mdn* = 3.00) and for-profit college/online instruction (*Mdn*= 3.00). The test was significant χ^2(3, *N* = 111) = 139.079, *p* < .01. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. Follow-up pairwise comparisons were conducted using a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and the results are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15

Pairwise Comparison of Credibility by Degree Type Using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests

Pair	Variable 1	*Mdn*	Variable 2	*Mdn*	z	p
1	TC+CLASSROOM	4.0	TC+ONLINE	3.0	-7.008	<.001*
2	TC+CLASSROOM	4.0	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	-6.131	<.001*
3	TC+CLASSROOM	4.0	FPC+ONLINE	3.0	-7.627	<.001*
4	TC+ONLINE	3.0	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	-1.983	.047*
5	TC+ONLINE	3.0	FPC+ONLINE	3.0	-4.977	<.001*
6	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	FPC+ONLINE	3.0	-6.618	<.001*

The median credibility rating for TC+CLASSROOM was greater than the median credibility rating for TC+ONLINE, *p* < .001, FPC+CLASSROOM, *p* < .001, and FPC+ONLINE, *p* < .001.

Hypothesis 2.2

H2.2: There will be no significant difference between the credibility ratings of recruiters who have completed an online course for college credit and those who have not. The rationale for this hypothesis was based on a prior research by Adams, Defleur, and Heald (2007). The experience of taking an online college course for credit could have either a

positive or negative effect on a respondent's perception. A positive experience that was rigorous might result in perceiving online learning as credible. A negative experience or one that was not designed to elicit active participation and involvement could result in the perception that online degrees are less credible. The results of a Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference in the rating of credibility for those that had completed an online course for college credit and those who had not for TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, or FPC+ONLINE. This is consistent with the finding of Adams, Defleur and Heald (2007) but in contrast to the findings of Jeancola (2011). A summary of results appears in Table 16.

Table 16

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Credibility Rating Based on Recruiter Completion of Online Course for College Credit Variable

	Completed Online Courses	N	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	U	z	p
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	56	56.34	3155	1559	-.612	.540
	No	58	58.62	3400			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	55	61.16	3364	1311	-1.685	.092
	No	57	52	2964			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	55	59.19	3255	1474.5	-.781	.435
	No	58	54.19	3185			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	56	60.58	3392	1395.5	-1.229	.219
	No	57	53.48	3048.5			

Hypothesis 2.3

H2.3: There will be a significant difference between the credibility ratings of recruiters who completed a college degree entirely online and those that have not. It was anticipated that individuals who completed a college degree entirely online would have a more favorable view regarding the credibility of college degrees earned online and from for-profit colleges because of their own personal experiences. Previous research studies

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have reached contradictory conclusions regarding the impact of prior enrollment in an online

course (Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007; Jeancola, 2011). The results of a Mann-Whitney *U*

test, summarized in Table 17, revealed no significant difference for TC+CLASSROOM,

TC+ONLINE and FPC+CLASSROOM. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected for these

degree options. However, there was a significant difference for FPC+ONLINE. Individuals

who completed a college degree entirely online had a significantly more favorable perception

regarding the credibility of RN-to-BSN degrees earned through FPC+ONLINE.

Table 17

*Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Credibility Rating Based on Recruiter Earning a
College Degree Entirely Online Variable*

	Completed Online Courses	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	19	50.50	959.5	769.5	-1.681	.093
	No	95	58.90	5595.5			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	19	67.11	1275	682	-1.763	.078
	No	93	54.33	5053			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	18	61.72	1111	770	-.752	.452
	No	95	56.11	5330			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	19	74.26	1411	565	-2.688	.007*
	No	94	53.51	5030			

Hypothesis 2.4

H2.4: There will be no significant difference between the credibility ratings of

recruiters who have previously attended a for-profit college and those that have not.

A null hypothesis was assumed because no prior studies have examined this variable and also

based on the research of Adams, Defleur, and Heald (2007) who found that prior enrollment

in online learning did not affect perceptions of online college degrees. The results of a

Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed no significant difference in the rating of credibility for those

that had previously attended a for-profit college and those that had not for TC+ONLINE.

However, significant differences did exist in the rating of credibility for TC+CLASSROOM, FPC+CLASSROOM, and FPC+ONLINE. The hypothesis is rejected for these three degree options. Based on these findings, it appears that individuals who previously attended a for-profit college have a more favorable attitude toward RN-to-BSN degrees earned online or from for-profit colleges. These individuals also rated TC+CLASSROOM significantly lower respondents who had previously attended a for-profit college. A summary of the results appears in Table 18.

Table 18

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Credibility Rating Based on Recruiter Prior Enrollment at a For Profit College Variable

	Attended For Profit College	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	23	47.8	1099.5	823.5	-2.498	.013*
	No	90	59.35	5341.5			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	22	63.43	1395.5	815.5	-1.363	.173
	No	89	54.16	4820.5			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	22	68.14	1499	734	-2.113	.035*
	No	90	53.66	4829			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	23	77.04	1772	551	-3.628	.001*
	No	89	51.19	4556			

Hypothesis 2.5

H2.5: There will be no significant difference between the credibility ratings of individuals who are registered nurses and those who are not. In the absence of existing research, a null hypothesis was assumed. The results of a Mann-Whitney *U* test, summarized in Table 19, revealed no significant difference in the credibility rating between health care recruiters who were registered nurses and those who were not for TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, or FPC+ONLINE. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 19

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Credibility Rating Based on Recruiter Status as a Registered Nurse Variable

	Registered Nurse	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	U	z	p
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	53.89	2910	1425	-1.839	.066
	No	60	60.75	3645			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	54	54.57	2947	1462	-.683	.494
	No	58	58.92	3381			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	55.78	3012	1527	-.428	.669
	No	59	58.12	3429			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	54	57.22	3090	1581	.-074	.941
	No	59	56.80	3351			

Qualitative Data

The survey instrument provided an open space for additional comments following the rating scale. The importance of the accreditation of the school was the dominant theme and was mentioned in 3 of 11 comments (27%). This was the only repeated comment in this section. Additional individual comments indicated both support and concern about online education. All open comments regarding credibility are recorded in Appendix E.

Research Question 3

RQ#3: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' concerns about credentials of an RN-to-BSN degree across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? The third research question was addressed by a survey question that asked participants to rate the level of concerns about credentials for job applicants holding each of the four RN-to-BSN degree options. The independent variable was the RN-to-BSN degree option and included the four combinations of TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, and FPC+ONLINE. The dependent measure was the participant's rating of concerns about credentials on a four-point

Likert-type scale of 1 (No Concern) to 4 (Significant Concern). The frequency distribution

of ratings appears in Table 20.

TABLE 20

Frequency Distribution for Health Care Recruiter Rating of Concerns About Credentials Across Four Degree Options

	No Concern	Little Concern	Moderate Concern	Significant Concern
TC+CLASSROOM	71.7%	25.6%	1.8%	0%
TC+ONLINE	38.4%	43.8%	15.2%	2.7%
FPC+CLASSROOM	44.2%	43.4%	11.5%	0.9%
FPC+ONLINE	25.4%	36.8%	22.8%	14.9%

For "Significant Concern", degrees earned from FPC+ONLINE were rated with a frequency

of 14.9%, FPC+CLASSROOM 0.9%, TC+ONLINE 2.7%, and significant concern about

graduates from TC+CLASSROOM was 0%.

Hypothesis 3.1

H3.1: There will be a significant difference in the concerns about credentials of RN-to-BSN degree options across the four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? This hypothesis was based on prior research

regarding the level of concerns about school administrators who earn credentials online

(Huss, 2007). It was also predicted based on findings in the literature regarding a negative

perception of academic integrity and rigor toward online degrees (Columbaro & Monaghan,

2009). A Friedman test was conducted to evaluate differences in the medians among the

concerns about credentials of registered nurse job applicants from TC+CLASSROOM (*Mdn*

= 1.00), TC+ONLINE (*Mdn* = 2.00), FPC+CLASSROOM (*Mdn* = 2.00) and FPC+ONLINE

(*Mdn* = 2.00). The test was significant $\chi^2(3, N = 112) = 128.107$, $p < .01$. Follow-up

pairwise comparisons were conducted using a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and the results are

summarized in Table 21. A significant difference was found for each of the comparisons

with the exception of TC+ONLINE compared to FPC+CLASSROOM.

Table 21

Pairwise Comparison of Concerns About Credentials by Degree Type Using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests

Pair	Variable 1	*Mdn*	Variable 2	*Mdn*	*z*	*p*
1	TC+CLASSROOM	1.0	TC+ONLINE	2.0	-6.360	<.001*
2	TC+CLASSROOM	1.0	FPC+CLASSROOM	2.0	-5.445	<.001*
3	TC+CLASSROOM	1.0	FPC+ONLINE	2.0	-7.039	<.001*
4	TC+ONLINE	2.0	FPC+CLASSROOM	2.0	-1.549	.121
5	TC+ONLINE	2.0	FPC+ONLINE	2.0	-5.212	<.001*
6	FPC+CLASSROOM	2.0	FPC+ONLINE	2.0	-6.364	<.001*

Hypothesis 3.2

H3.2: There will be no significant difference between the concerns about credentials

ratings of recruiters who have completed an online course for college credit and those who

have not. As described in the preceding sections, the rationale for this hypothesis is based on

research that did not find an association between prior experience with online coursework

and perceptions of degrees earned online (Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007). The results of a

Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed no significant difference in the rating of concerns about

credentials for those that had completed an online course for college credit and those that had

not for TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, or FPC+ONLINE.

Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. A summary of results appears in Table 22.

Table 22

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Concerns About Credentials Rating Based on Recruiter
Completion of Online Course for College Credit Variable

	Completed Online Courses	N	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	56	56.44	3160.5	1564	-.231	.817
	No	57	57.55	3280.5			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	55	56.38	3101	1561	-.041	.967
	No	57	56.61	3227			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	56	55.01	3080.5	1484	-.703	.482
	No	57	58.96	3360.50			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	56	56.38	3157	1561	-.373	.709
	No	58	58.89	3398			

Hypothesis 3.3

H3.3: There will be a significant difference between the concerns about credentials ratings of recruiters who completed a college degree entirely online and those who have not. This hypothesis assumed that individuals who completed a college degree online would have fewer concerns about the credentials of a job applicant who also earned his or her college degree online. Logic dictates that a person who earned his or her college degree online would be familiar with the academic standards of online coursework and would be less likely to have concerns about rigor, integrity or learning outcomes in the online learning environment. A Mann-Whitney *U* test was conducted to test this hypothesis, and it revealed no significant difference in the rating of concerns about credentials for TC+CLASSROOM or FPC+CLASSROOM. There was a significant difference for TC+ONLINE and FPC+ONLINE. Respondents who completed a college degree entirely online had a lower level of concern regarding job applicants with RN-to-BSN degrees earned through TC+ONLINE and FPC+ONLINE. The results are summarized in Table 23.

Table 23

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Concerns About Credentials Rating Based on Recruiter Earning a College Degree Entirely Online Variable

	Completed Online Courses	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	19	56.45	1072.5	882.5	-.103	.918
	No	94	57.11	5368.5			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	18	41.00	738	567	-2.389	.017*
	No	94	59.47	5590			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	19	49.61	942.50	752.5	-1.184	.237
	No	94	58.49	5498.5			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	19	38.24	726.50	536.5	-2.904	.004*
	No	95	61.35	5828.5			

Hypothesis 3.4

H3.4: There will be no significant difference between the concerns about credentials ratings of recruiters who have previously attended a for-profit college and those who have not. Because no prior studies have examined this variable and based on the research regarding the effect of prior enrollment in online coursework (Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007) , this hypothesis predicted that no significant difference would be found. The results of a Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed no significant difference in the rating of concerns about credentials for those that had previously attended a for-profit college and those that had not for TC+CLASSROOM and TC+ONLINE. However, a significant difference was found for FPC+CLASSROOM and FPC+ONLINE. Recruiters who had been previously enrolled in a for-profit college expressed a lower level of concern regarding the credentials of job applicants that completed their degree at both FPC+CLASSROOM and FPC+ONLINE. A summary of results appears in Table 24.

Table 24

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Concerns About Credentials Rating Based on Recruiter Prior Enrollment at a For- Profit College Variable

	Attended For Profit College	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	23	58.41	1343.5	979.5	-.408	.684
	No	89	56.01	4984.50			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	22	46.52	1023.5	770.5	-1.666	.096
	No	89	58.34	5192.5			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	23	41.74	960	684	-2.683	.007*
	No	89	60.31	5368			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	23	37.57	864	588	-3.324	.001*
	No	90	61.97	5577			

Hypothesis 3.5

H3.5 There will be no significant difference between the concerns about credentials ratings of recruiters who are registered nurses and those who are not. In the absence of existing research, a null hypothesis was assumed. A Mann-Whitney *U* test was conducted to test the hypothesis and it revealed a significant difference in the rating of concerns about credentials between health care recruiters that were registered nurses and those who were not for TC+CLASSROOM. Registered nurse respondents indicated a higher level of concern about credentials for the job applicants from TC+CLASSROOM leading to a significant difference. However, a significant difference was not found for TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, or FPC+ONLINE. The finding of a higher level of concern regarding RN-to-BSN graduates from TC+CLASSROOM among registered nurse respondents conflicts with the overall finding that this degree option had the lowest level of concern. This may reflect a preference among health care recruiters who are also registered nurses for more experienced nurses. The results are summarized in Table 25.

Table 25

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Concerns About Credentials Rating Based on Recruiter Status as a Registered Nurse Variable

	Registered Nurse	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	64.20	3467	1204	-2.856	.004*
	No	59	50.41	2974			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	53	57.36	3040	1518	-.287	.774
	No	59	55.73	3288			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	61.03	3295	1375.5	-1.372	.170
	No	59	53.31	3145			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	55	55.47	3051	1511	-.660	.509
	No	59	59.39	3504			

Qualitative Data

The survey instrument provided an open space for additional comments following the rating scale. The dominant theme was related to the practical experience as a component of the BSN degree education and it was mentioned in 4 of 8 comments (50%). Concerns were that online programs provide less opportunity for direct patient care experience. One respondent also indicated that for registered nurses with patient care experience, the source of a BSN was less important. The second most common theme with two mentions (25%) was related to accreditation. Respondent comments regarding concerns about credentials are included in Appendix E.

Research Question 4

RQ#4: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' likelihood to hire a registered nurse job applicant across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? The fourth research question was addressed by a survey question that asked participants to rate the likelihood of hiring job applicants holding each of the four RN-to-BSN degree options. The independent variable was the RN-to-BSN

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degree option. The dependent measure was the participant's rating of likelihood to hire on a four-point Likert-type scale of 1 (Very Unlikely) to 4 (Very Likely). The distribution of ratings appears in Table 26.

TABLE 26

Frequency Distribution for Health Care Recruiter Rating of Likelihood to Hire Across Four Degree Options

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very Likely
TC+CLASSROOM	.9%	0%	25.2%	73.9%
TC+ONLINE	.9%	8.3%	42.2%	48.6%
FPC+CLASSROOM	.9%	4.6%	49.5%	45%
FPC+ONLINE	5.5%	23.6%	40%	30.9%

Degrees earned from a TC+CLASSROOM were rated as Very Likely a frequency of 73.9% compared to 48.6% for TC+ONLINE, 45% for FPC+CLASSROOM and 30.9% FPC+ONLINE.

Hypothesis 4.1

H4.1: There will be a significant difference in the likelihood to hire a registered nurse job applicant across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE). This hypothesis is based upon prior research that found that employers demonstrate a preference to hire job applicants with degrees earned from classroom instruction rather than online instruction (Adams & Defleur, 2005; 2006; Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007; Jeancola, 2011). A Friedman test was conducted to evaluate differences in the medians among the likelihood to hire between TC+CLASSROOM (*Mdn* = 4.00), for TC+ONLINE (*Mdn*= 3.00), FPC+CLASSROOM (*Mdn* = 3.00) and FPC+ONLINE (*Mdn* = 3.00). The test was significant $\chi^2(3, N = 108) = 104.506, p < .01$.

Follow-up pairwise comparisons were conducted using a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and

the results are summarized in Table 27.

Table 27

Pairwise Comparison of Likelihood to Recommend Hiring by Degree Type Using Wilcoxon
Signed Ranks Tests

Pair	Variable 1	*Mdn*	Variable 2	*Mdn*	*z*	*p*
1	TC+CLASSROOM	4.0	TC+ONLINE	3.0	-5.161	<.001*
2	TC+CLASSROOM	4.0	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	-5.425	<.001*
3	TC+CLASSROOM	4.0	FPC+ONLINE	3.0	-6.494	<.001*
4	TC+ONLINE	3.0	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	-0.000	1.0
5	TC+ONLINE	3.0	FPC+ONLINE	3.0	-5.289	<.001*
6	FPC+CLASSROOM	3.0	FPC+ONLINE	3.0	-5.849	<.001*

A significant difference was found for each of the comparisons with the exception of

TC+ONLINE compared to FPC+CLASSROOM.

Hypothesis 4.2

 H4.2 There will be no significant difference between the likelihood to hire ratings of

recruiters who have completed an online course for college credit and those who have not.

The rationale for this hypothesis is based on a prior research by Adams, Defleur & Heald

(2007) which asserts that prior enrollment in online courses does not affect the hiring

decision-makers perception of college degrees earned online. A Mann-Whitney *U* test was

used to test the hypothesis. The results, summarized in Table 28, revealed no significant

difference in the likelihood to recommend hiring for those that had completed an online

course for college credit and those that had not for all four degree options.

Table 28

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Likelihood to Hire Rating Based on Recruiter Completion of Online Course for College Credit Variable

	Completed Online Courses	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	58.01	3132.5	1430.5	-.840	.401
	No	57	54.10	3083.5			
TC + CLASSROOM	Yes	54	55.10	2975.5	1479.5	-.037	.970
	No	55	54.90	3019.5			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	53	58.98	3126	1273	-1.441	.149
	No	56	51.23	2869			
FPC + ONLINE	Yes	54	54.57	2947	1462	-.316	.752
	No	56	56.39	3158			

Hypothesis 4.3

H4.3 There will be a significant difference between the likelihood to hire ratings of recruiters who completed a college degree entirely online and those who have not.

Consistent with similar hypotheses used in this study, it was anticipated that individuals that completed a college degree entirely online would be significantly more likely to recommend hiring a job applicant who also earned his or her college degree entirely online. It was further reasoned that a respondent who earned his or her college degree entirely online would also be more likely to recommend a job applicant who completed his or her degree at a for-profit college, since many online degrees are completed at for-profit colleges. A Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to test the hypothesis, and it did not result in a significant difference in likelihood to recommend hiring based on completing a college degree entirely online for any of the RN-to-BSN degree options. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. A summary of the results appears in Table 29.

Table 29

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Likelihood to Hire Rating Based on Recruiter Completion of College Degree Entirely Online Variable

	Completed Online Degree	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	19	52.37	995	805	-.709	.478
	No	92	56.75	5221			
TC +ONLINE	Yes	19	56.39	1071	828.5	-.235	.814
	No	90	54.71	4923			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	19	58.89	1119	781	-.666	.505
	No	90	54.18	4876			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	19	60.24	1144.5	774.5	-.753	.451
	No	91	54.57	4960.5			

Hypothesis 4.4

H4.4 There will be no significant difference between the likelihood to hire ratings of recruiters who have previously attended a for-profit college and those who have not. Since no prior studies have examined this variable and based on the research regarding the effect of prior enrollment in online coursework, this hypothesis predicted that no significant difference would be found. The results of a Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed no significant difference in the rating of likelihood to hire for those that had previously attended a for-profit college and those that had not for TC+CLASSROOM and TC+ONLINE. However, a significant difference was found for FPC+CLASSROOM and FPC+ONLINE. Based on these results, it appears that individuals who previously attended a for profit college are more likely to recommend hiring a job applicant with a degree from FPC+CLASSROOM and FPC+ONLINE. The results are summarized in Table 30.

Table 30

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Likelihood to Hire Rating Based on Recruiter Prior Enrollment at a For-Profit College Variable

	Attended For Profit College	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	*U*	*z*	*p*
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	23	58.41	1343.5	979.5	-.408	.684
	No	89	56.01	4984.50			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	22	46.52	1023.5	770.5	-1.666	.096
	No	89	58.34	5192.5			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	23	41.74	960	684	-2.683	.007*
	No	89	60.31	5368			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	23	37.57	864	588	-3.324	.001*
	No	90	61.97	5577			

Hypothesis 4.5

H4.5 There will be no significant difference between the likelihood to hire ratings of recruiters who are registered nurses and those who are not. As previously stated, there is no existing research regarding the attitudes of health care recruiters with nursing credentials regarding RN-to-BSN degree options. A null hypothesis was therefore assumed. To test the hypothesis a Mann-Whitney *U* test was used and it revealed a significant difference in the likelihood to recommend hiring between health care recruiters that were registered nurses and those that were not for TC+CLASSROOM. Registered nurse respondents indicated a higher rating of likelihood to hire for the job applicants with a RN-to-BSN degree from TC+CLASSROOM. However, a significant difference was not found for TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, or FPC+ONLINE options. A summary of results appears in Table 31. This finding conflicts with registered nurse ratings for perceived advantage in the hiring process and concerns about credentials. Health care recruiters might also have hiring preferences and patterns influenced by their own background and training.   Because of the

limited research in this area, this inconsistency should be explored in subsequent studies on

this topic.

Table 31

Results of Mann Whitney U Test Comparing Likelihood to Hire Rating Based on Recruiter Status as a Registered Nurse Variable

	Registered Nurse	n	Rank Average	Sum of Ranks	U	z	p
TC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	64.20	3467	1204	-2.856	.004*
	No	59	50.41	2974			
TC+ONLINE	Yes	53	57.36	3040	1518	-.287	.774
	No	59	55.73	3288			
FPC+CLASSROOM	Yes	54	61.03	3295	1375.5	-1.372	.170
	No	59	53.31	3145			
FPC+ONLINE	Yes	55	55.47	3051	1511	-.660	.509
	No	59	59.39	3504			

Qualitative Data

The survey instrument provided an open space for additional comments following the

rating scale. The prevailing theme found in this section was that factors other than the source

of the RN-to-BSN degree weigh heavily in determining the likelihood to hire. Of a total of

15 comments, 9 comments (60%) in some way mentioned the importance of experience,

clinical skills, customer service, teamwork, performance in the interview and overall

organizational fit in making a hiring decision. The verbatim survey comments regarding

likelihood to recommend are included in Appendix E.

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Summary

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The findings of this study indicate that a significant difference was found in the

perceptions of health care recruiters regarding the four RN-to-BSN degree options. In

particular, RN-to-BSN degrees from traditional colleges and classroom instruction were

viewed more favorably. The credibility of RN-to-BSN degrees from a combination of

traditional college and classroom instruction were regarded with a higher degree of credibility and likelihood to hire. RN-to-BSN degrees earned from for-profit colleges and online instruction were viewed the least favorably. An analysis of open comments found that the accreditation of a RN-to-BSN program is a common theme in evaluating a degree and additional factors such as experience and organizational fit are often considered in the hiring process. Chapter 5 will provide a detailed discussion of the results as they relate to the current literature and identify potential opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive research study was to investigate and compare the attitudes of health care recruiters toward RN-to-BSN degrees based on the method of instructional delivery and the for-profit/nonprofit status of the college. This chapter is a presentation of a discussion of the significant findings reported in Chapter 4. It is also a discussion of the implications of the findings and provides recommendations for further research.

Summary

Overview of the Problem

The rapid growth of online learning and increased enrollment at for-profit colleges are two significant trends that are changing the landscape of higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Christensen, Horn & Caldera, 2011; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). Online education and for-profit colleges offer attractive alternatives to working adults who wish to continue their education in order to improve their prospects in the job market and to advance into positions of higher responsibility (Cercone, 2008).

Despite the increasing number of individuals earning their college degree entirely online or at a for-profit college, it is unclear if employer acceptance of these alternatives to traditional college degrees obtained through classroom study is also growing. As online and for-profit education continues its expansion, the health care industry is facing a critical shortage of baccalaureate degree registered nurses (HRSA, 2008). Online education and for-

profit colleges have been identified as potential methods to achieve the goal of 80% of registered nurses with bachelor degrees by 2020 (IOM, 2010).

There is a need for additional research regarding the attitudes of hiring gatekeepers toward college degrees earned online or from for-profit colleges (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009). Several prior research studies have found that employers demonstrate a preference for job applicants with degrees earned through classroom instruction over job applicants with college degrees earned online (Adams & Defleur, 2005; 2006; Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007) while, in a more a recent study Bailey (2011) concluded that the method of how a college degree is earned is not significant to employers.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to compare the perceptions of health care recruiters regarding the RN to Baccalaureate degrees based on the method of instructional delivery (classroom, online) and the type of college (traditional, for-profit) to determine if significant differences exist. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ#1: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived advantage of an RN-to BSN degree in the hiring process across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM,FPC+ONLINE)?

RQ#2: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived credibility of an RN-to-BSN degree across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)?

RQ#3: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived concerns about credentials across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)?

RQ#4: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' likelihood to recommend hiring a job

applicant based on type of RN-to-BSN degree across four degree options

(TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)?

Methodology

As described in Chapter 3, this descriptive study used a cross-sectional survey

methodology. The nonprobability sample was recruited from the active members of The

National Association for Health Care Recruitment (NAHCR). NAHCR sent the survey

invitation email to active members on behalf of the researcher. At the end of the survey

period, 132 surveys were started and 116 surveys were complete and usable for analysis.

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Discussion of Findings

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of health care recruiters

toward RN-to-BSN degrees based on instructional delivery method and college for-

profit/nonprofit status. A summary of the major findings for each research question and a

discussion of its relevance to the current literature follow.

Research Question 1

RQ#1: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived advantage of an RN-

to-BSN degree in the hiring process across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM,

TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? This study found that indeed, there

was a significant difference in the perceived advantage of RN-to-BSN degree options across

four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM,

FPC+ONLINE). From the results it appears that individuals who complete a college degree

online from a for-profit college gain the least advantage. Often a working adult chooses to

pursue a college degree through non-traditional methods with the goal of advancing in his or

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her career. Previous researchers have examined credibility and the likelihood to hire a job applicant, but have not compared the advantage in the job search process (Adams & Defleur, 2005; 2006; Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007). From the perspective of human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) it is important to compare both the investment and the benefit received from pursing a college degree. For-profit and online college degrees often charge the equivalent and in some cases higher tuition than public, nonprofit universities (Baum & Payea, 2011). McGarth (2008) found that one of the barriers to associate degree nurses enrolling in a RN-to-BSN program is that they do not anticipate a benefit in regard to pay or advancement opportunities. The findings of this study suggest a similar barrier exists based on the type of RN-to-BSN degree program. A job applicant who earns a degree online from a for-profit college might expect limitations on the acceptance of his or her degree which may inhibit the return on education. This may limit the role of online education and for-profit colleges in addressing the shortage of baccalaureate degree nurses.

The findings in this study also revealed a difference between health care recruiters who were registered nurses and health care recruiters who were not. Recruiters who were also registered nurses rated the advantage in the hiring process for alternatives to traditional, residential education significantly higher than respondents who were not registered nurses. There are a few possible explanations for this difference. Distance education has an established presence in nursing education (Holly, 2009; Talbert, 2009). It is possible that prior exposure to distance learning in the profession is a factor. It may also be a result of insights gained from working in the nursing role and recognition of the benefits of continued education. Health care recruiters who are also registered nurses may also be more aware of

the call to increase the number of baccalaureates through involvement in professional nursing organizations.

Research Question 2

RQ#2: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' perceived credibility of an RN-to-BSN degree across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? This study revealed that yes, there was a significant difference in the perceived credibility of RN-to-BSN degree options across four degree options. Similar to the findings of Adams and Defleur (2006), the narrative comments from respondents reinforced the importance of accreditation in evaluating a college degree. Online degrees from for-profit colleges received the lowest rating for credibility. This is consistent with the conclusions of Danzinger (2007) as well as Chaney (2001) who found the image of degree mills as being a barrier to acceptance of non-traditional college degrees. Chaney also found that recruiters typically chose to work from a list of reputable colleges. An online degree from a highly reputable school is more likely to be readily accepted than an online degree from a less known or less reputable school. Some for-profit colleges have been the subject of civil lawsuits and government investigations because of their marketing and recruitment practices. Publicity regarding these events may influence the perceptions of their credibility.

Respondents who had prior enrollment at a for-profit college rated credibility higher for college degrees earned online and from for-profit colleges. This demographic was not examined in prior research. It is however, consistent with Jeancola (2011) who found that prior enrollment in online education has a positive effect on attitudes toward online degrees. As stated in Carnevale (2005), employers who lack direct experience with online education

or for-profit colleges have a higher level of concern about the unknown. It is logical to assume that individuals who chose to enroll as a student at for-profit college would be more accepting of credentials earned in this setting. Online learning is also widely adopted by for-profit colleges, therefore it is likely that many individuals who attended a for-profit college also have prior exposure to online learning.

Research Question 3

RQ#3: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' concerns about credentials of an RN-to-BSN degree across the four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? This study revealed a significant difference in the level of concern about credentials of RN-to-BSN degree options across four degree options. The greatest level of concern was from job applicants with degrees from for-profit colleges and earned through online instruction. The lowest level of concern was for job applicants with degrees awarded from traditional, classroom study. In a study regarding online pre-service teacher preparation programs, Huss (2007) found that middle school principals had significant concerns about job applicants who earned their credentials online. The finding in this study confirms that hiring gatekeepers have a higher level of concern about credentials earned entirely online. Also, similar to Huss (2007) a key factor underlying this concern is the lack of interpersonal experience. Comments in this section emphasized the importance of direct patient experience. Nursing education programs have evolved from an apprenticeship training model used in diploma programs (Scheckel, 2009). It is evident that direct experience remains an important consideration. The level of concern among health care recruiters regarding the lack of direct experience as part of online RN-to-BSN may be unwarranted. To earn CCNE accreditation, all baccalaureate nursing programs must require

students to complete clinical training experiences.   These experiences are designed to progress the student to a baccalaureate level of proficiency (AACN, 2012b).   ACEN standards also require appropriate clinical experiences that are evidence-based and reflective of current nursing practice (Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing, 2013).

The findings with this research question also revealed that individuals who previously attended a for-profit college have a significantly different perspective than those who have not. Individuals who completed a college degree completely online expressed a lower level of concern than those who had not completed a college degree online. Respondents who had prior enrollment at a for-profit college also had less concerns about credentials regarding job applicants with degrees from a for-profit college.

Research Question 4

RQ#4: Is there a difference in health care recruiters' likelihood to recommend hiring a job applicant based on type of RN-to-BSN degree across four degree options (TC+CLASSROOM, TC+ONLINE, FPC+CLASSROOM, FPC+ONLINE)? This study showed a significant difference in the likelihood to recommend hiring a registered nurse across the four degree options. Consistent with the findings of Adams, Defleur and Heald (2007) this study found that health care employers demonstrated a preference for job applicants with degrees earned through classroom instruction at a traditional college. This finding also supports the view of Lamer (2007) who concluded that employers in the health care sector demonstrate a strong preference for face-to-face learning in the classroom. The findings of this study are in contrast to Bailey (2011) who determined that the instructional delivery method and the for-profit/nonprofit status of a college was not a significant factor in an employer's evaluation of an applicant's credentials.

While there was a clear preference for the traditional, classroom RN-to-BSN graduate, the narrative comments reflect that a hiring decision is a complex process and is not based solely on the type of degree. Several previous studies concluded that individuals with non-traditional degrees are not immediately excluded from consideration, but they may be at a disadvantage (Chaney, 2001; Thompson, 2009). The narrative comments support that in at least some instances, an RN-to-BSN degree earned online from a for-profit college may still be advantageous. While employers may prefer a traditional college degree, there is clear evidence that a baccalaureate degree is a desired qualification for registered nurses. As Thompson (2009) noted, having an online degree may be better than not having a degree at all. This would be particularly true if the job applicant is seeking employment at any of the growing number of organizations that are requiring a BSN for employment or advancement into leadership positions.

Implications

The results of this study have implications beyond the specific findings for each research question and are not limited to the nursing profession. This study provides valuable insight regarding the acceptability of degrees earned through online learning and for-profit colleges. The rapid growth of online learning and the rise in for-profit college enrollment represent significant trends in higher education. The following implications are proposed:

Online and For-Profit Credentials: Education to a Lesser Degree

Previous research studies have found that employers demonstrate a preference for job applicants who hold college degrees earned through classroom instruction at a traditional, brick and mortar college (Adams & Defleur, 2005; 2006; Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007; Danzinger, 2007; Jeancola, 2011) while a more recent study (Bailey, 2011) concluded that

method of instruction and for profit/nonprofit status of the college was not a significant factor. This research study found that significant differences still exist in the perceptions of hiring decision-makers based on the method on instruction and for-profit/nonprofit status of the college granting the degree. It appears that while the number of students holding degrees earned online or from for-profit colleges is increasing, employers continue to favor traditional college degrees. Employers still have concerns about the effectiveness of online education and are skeptical of for-profit college degrees. Online and for-profit education is unlikely to gain the same degree of credibility as traditional classroom education as long as these concerns persist. Distance education professionals must continue to validate the legitimacy of online learning. For-profit colleges must also continue to improve their image and reputation among employers.

Because of this disparity, individuals holding degrees earned online or at for-profit colleges may face limits to the return on investment in education. Potential job seekers need to be concerned that their credentials may not be regarded to the same degree as a traditional, residential degree. Applying human capital theory, potential job seekers need to consider their investment carefully and recognize these challenges. Becker (1963) cautions that investments in human capital are often made more impulsively than investments in other forms of capital. It is critical to evaluate both the accreditation and the reputation of a degree program before making a financial and personal commitment.

Online Degrees from Traditional Colleges Favored Over For-Profit Online Degrees

The results of this study found that not all online college degrees are equivalent in the minds of employers. Online degrees from traditional colleges were regarded in a more positive light than online degrees from for-profit colleges. Prior research studies have

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compared traditional, residential college degrees to online degrees from virtual colleges and found the former to be strongly favored (Jeancola, 2011). But, students seeking an online degree are not limited to the choice of a for-profit college. The number of traditional colleges offering degree programs entirely online continues to increase (Allen & Seaman, 2013). This study supports the conclusions of Seibold (2007) who found that the for-profit or nonprofit status of the college impacts the opinion of hiring gatekeepers as well as Adams and Defleur (2006) who proposed that online degrees may be accepted more readily if they were earned at a traditional college.

Because of geographic and time constraints, online education may be the only option for many working adults seeking to advance their education. Evaluating online college degree options using human capital theory provides an opportunity to consider both the investment required and the value received from each option. An online degree from a public, nonprofit university is on average less expensive than an online degree from a for-profit college. Based on the results of this study, the value of the online degree from the public, non-profit university is greater because it is regarded more positively by hiring decision- makers. As the number of traditional colleges offering online degrees continues to increase, for-profit colleges may find increased competition for students from nonprofit institutions. After several years of rapid growth, enrollment at for-profit colleges began a sharp decline in 2011 and during this same time period several traditional, non-profit colleges launched new initiatives and increased online enrollment (Ross, 2012).

For Employers, There is a Significant Difference

Numerous research studies have supported that online education can provide learning outcomes that are at least comparable, and in some cases superior, to face-to-face instruction.

The conclusion of "no significant difference" does not seem to be accepted in the workplace as readily as it may be in education. The convenience of online study and the accelerated format of for-profit college coursework appeals to many adult students, but it appears to diminish the experiential aspects of college education that employers value. This study and several others have found that employers are concerned with the lack of direct experiences associated with face-to-face instruction (Adams & Defleur, 2005; Adams, Defleur & Heald, 2007; Danzinger, 2007; Seibold, 2007). A far-reaching implication of this finding is that research comparing the outcomes of online and face-to-face instruction may not be measuring the competencies that are most important to employers. The value that employers ascribe to experience may be because experience provides incidental learning outcomes that have not been significantly compared in the current research comparing online and face-to-face instruction.

Prior Enrollment in Online and For-Profit Education Increases Acceptance

This study contributes to the understanding of factors that affect employer acceptance of college degrees earned through non-traditional methods. Previous research has reached conflicting views on the impact of prior experience with online learning on the acceptance of online degrees. Adams, Defleur and Heald (2007) found that there was not a relationship, while Jeancola (2011) found that experience with online learning had a positive impact on perceptions. This study found that completing an online course for college credit was not a significant factor but individuals that completed a college degree completely online did have a more favorable perception regarding the credibility of degrees earned from for-profit colleges/online instruction and also less concerns about the credentials of job applicants with college degrees from both traditional college/online instruction and for profit college/online

instruction. According to Allen and Seaman (2013) most college students will take at least one college course online or partially online. Exposure to online learning is becoming common place. However, the experience of completing an entire college degree online appears to be a more critical factor affecting recruiter perceptions. Human resources professionals who have completed a college degree online are more likely to be receptive to hiring individuals with similar education backgrounds.

The results of this study also further extend the knowledge base regarding non-traditional college degrees by finding that individuals who were previously enrolled at a for-profit college have a more favorable view of for-profit degrees earned through classroom and online instruction. This conclusion is vividly demonstrated in a national television commercial that was produced by the University of Phoenix in 2013 and dubbed "Lucky Socks". The commercial depicts a University of Phoenix graduate walking to an employment interview wearing a pair of bright red socks to symbolize the University of Phoenix brand. The graduate encounters a receptive hiring decision-maker who is also wearing a pair of the brightly colored socks. The commercial promotes the benefits of the University of Phoenix alumni network to its graduates. The findings of this study endorse the notion that hiring decision-makers who hold credentials from online education and for-profit colleges will be more receptive to job applicants holding credentials earned in the same manner.

Employers May Be Sending Mixed Messages

This study also found that most employers who provide tuition assistance for the completion of RN-to-BSN degrees offer the same level of benefits for RN-to-BSN degrees completed entirely online and from for-profit colleges. This is consistent with the findings of Jeancola (2011). In addition to paying for tuition through online education and for-profit

college, some companies are endorsing these programs. A growing number of employers are establishing partnerships with for-profit colleges and encouraging employees to pursue further education in these settings (Carnevale, 2007; Parry, 2010).

While there is acceptance of online degrees and for-profit colleges in regards to tuition assistance policies, it does not appear to be aligned with hiring preferences. This may inhibit individuals from taking full advantage of these resources and discourage completion of additional education. Employers seeking to increase education attainment in their workforce should ensure these policies and practices are consistent. Failing to do so could result in a wasteful investment in human capital to develop workforce capability and create disappointment for employees who earn credentials that are not regarded by the same employer as equivalent to traditional college education. Individuals earning degrees through these partnerships may also face limitations if they pursue employment opportunities in other settings.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study established a new line of inquiry regarding the acceptance among employers of nursing degrees earned online or from for-profit colleges. Subsequent studies should be conducted to build upon this foundation. For example, interviews or focus groups with nurse recruiters would allow a deeper and more in-depth exploration of attitudes toward online degrees and for-profit colleges. In addition, further research could examine perceptions regarding other types of nursing degrees offered online and by for-profit colleges, such as pre-licensure RN degree programs and graduate level nursing degrees. This study did not investigate employer perceptions of blended degree programs that utilized a combination of classroom and online instruction. This model is often used in RN-to-BSN

degree programs and it would be valuable to gain employer insights on this hybrid model. Blended learning RN-to-BSN may offer the benefit and convenience of online learning along with meaningful, face-to-face experiences that develop the desired critical thinking, leadership and communication skills.

Areas of further research should also include studies that identify and expand upon factors that influence the perceptions of other hiring decision-makers toward online and for-profit degree options. The design of this research study should be replicated to compare attitudes toward online and for-profit college degrees in professions outside of nursing. Despite the significant research that supports online education as equivalent to classroom instruction, employers do not appear to value degrees earned online as equal. Further research needs to explore the learning outcomes that are most important to employers and to compare the effectiveness of classroom and online instruction to achieve those desired outcomes. For example, additional research comparing incidental learning outcomes valued in the workplace such as teamwork, communication, and problem solving between face-to-face and online instruction would clarify areas where significant differences do exist between these modalities of instruction. Another important variable that was not addressed in the current study is the role of reputation in the acceptance of colleges degrees earned online or from for-profit colleges. Online degrees from traditional colleges were viewed more positively than online degrees from for-profit colleges. This may be in part to several factors such as existence of a physical campus and the public perception of for-profit colleges being degree mills and/or negatively influenced by media coverage of recruitment practices and government investigations regarding the high student loan default rate. The credentials of faculty may also have a bearing on the perception of for-profit colleges. For-profit colleges

also typically employ a higher percentage of part time faculty and may have less doctorally prepared faculty members. As the number of traditional colleges offering online degrees increases, acceptance of online degrees may also increase when the degree is awarded by a highly reputable college.

Limitations

The findings reported in this study are limited to active members of the National Association for Health Care Recruitment (NAHCR). The low response rate also affects the generalizability of the findings. As indicated in Chapter 3, there are also potential limitations of the study because of the reliance on a nonprobability sample. Despite these limitations, this study still provides valuable insight regarding health care recruiters' attitude toward college degrees earned online or from for-profit colleges

Conclusion

The health care sector is facing a critical shortage of registered nurses that are educated to deliver care in an increasingly complex health care system that is caring for an aging population with chronic health care needs. There is a clarion call for associate degree nurses to advance their level of education. Online education and for-profit colleges are proposed strategies to meet this need. Prior to this study, there was no empirical research regarding employer attitudes toward nursing degrees earned online or from for-profit colleges. This study fills that gap in the research literature.

This descriptive study compared the attitudes of health care recruiters toward RN-to-BSN degrees based on the instructional delivery method and for-profit/nonprofit status of the college using a cross-sectional survey methodology. Building on prior research and the

theoretical framework of human capital theory, this study found that all RN-to-BSN degrees are not perceived to be equivalent.

For a nurse unable to complete a classroom RN-to-BSN degree, this study suggests that pursing an online program at traditional college would be more advantageous than an online degree from a for-profit college. Health care recruiters in this study demonstrated the highest level of concern toward online degrees from for-profit colleges. Regardless of which degree option a nurse chose, it would be critical to ensure that the program was regionally accredited and also accredited by CCNE or ANEC. The standards for accreditation by CCNE or ANEC provide specific guidelines for baccalaureate nurses programs and ensure consistency among accredited programs regardless of the setting or method of instruction. Accreditation, as well as the college reputation, would weigh in the consideration of a job applicant's credentials.

If online education and for-profit colleges are to fulfill their role in addressing the shortage of baccalaureate degree registered nurses as proposed by IOM, it is critical to consider the perceptions of employers revealed by this study. A major conclusion of this study is that job seekers need to carefully evaluate the reputation and perceived quality of a college degree prior to making an enrollment decision. The convenience and flexibility of online and for-profit college degrees may be offset by an employer's perception of the quality and rigor of the academic experience. This study takes an important step in illuminating these tensions, but additional research regarding employer attitudes toward online and for-profit education is warranted.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
www.iup.edu

Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1048

P 724-357-7730
F 724-357-2715
irb-research@iup.edu
www.iup.edu/irb

January 11, 2013

James Kineer
2680 Melloney Lane
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Mr. Kineer:

Your proposed research project, "A Comparison of Health Care Recruiters' Attitudes toward RN-to-BSN Degrees Based on Instructional Delivery Method and College For-Profit/Not-For-Profit Status," (Log No. 12-269) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved as an expedited review for the period of January 10, 2013 to January 10, 2014.

It is also important for you to note that IUP adheres strictly to Federal Policy that requires you to notify the IRB promptly regarding:

1. any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented),
2. any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects, and
3. any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

Should you need to continue your research beyond January 10, 2014 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at (724) 357-7730 or come to Room 113, Stright Hall for further information.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=91683 .

This letter indicates the IRB's approval of your protocol. IRB approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University policies, including, but not limited to, policies regarding program enrollment, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

John A. Mills, Ph.D., ABPP
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Psychology

JAM:jeb

xc: Dr. Mark Piwinsky, Dissertation Advisor
        Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary

Survey Invitation Email

Subject: Survey of Health Recruiter Attitudes toward RN-to-BSN Degree Options

Dear Colleague:

Can you spare a few minutes to share your thoughts toward RN-to-BSN degree options?

Just like you, I am employed in the field of health care human resources and a member of the National Association for Health Care Recruitment (NAHCR). I am also currently a doctoral student in the Communications Media Department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am conducting research regarding health care recruiter attitudes toward RN-to-BSN degree options for my dissertation. I need your input to complete my doctoral degree.

Will you help by participating in an online survey dealing with your role as a health care recruitment professional? The survey includes 22 questions and will take less than 10 minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is voluntary and all individual responses are anonymous.

Your response is extremely valuable to my research. To complete the survey now, please click here.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Best Regards,

James Kinneer, SPHR
Vice President, People and Organizational Development
Indiana Regional Medical Center
835 Hospital Road
Indiana, PA 15701
Email: j.w.kinneer@iup.edu

Appendix C

Reminder Email

Subject: Survey of Health Recruiter Attitudes toward RN-to-BSN Degree Options

Dear Colleague:

About two weeks ago, you received an email from me requesting your participation in a research study about health care recruiters' attitudes toward RN-to-BSN degree options. If you submitted your responses already, thank you for your participation. If you have not yet had a chance to complete the survey, please consider doing so at your earliest convenience. Participation in this study is voluntary and will only require approximately ten minutes of your time. All responses are anonymous.

To complete the survey now, please click here.

Thank you for our assistance with this important project.

James Kinneer, SPHR
Vice President, People and Organizational Development
Indiana Regional Medical Center
835 Hospital Road
Indiana, PA 15701
Email: j.w.kinneer@iup.edu

Data Collection Instrument

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study about health care recruiters attitudes toward RN-to-BSN degree options. This study is being conducted by James Kinneer, a doctoral student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. You are eligible to participate because you are a health care recruiter involved in the screening and interviewing of registered nurse job applicants.

The purpose of this study is to measure the attitudes of healthcare recruiters toward RN-to-BSN degrees earned through varied methods of instruction. The study is intended to be interesting and informative to human resources, nursing and instructional technology professionals. The findings of this study will lead to a better understanding of employer attitudes toward online and for-profit education.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time while responding by closing your browser or skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. Individual responses will be anonymous. Survey results will only be reported in an aggregate form. There are no foreseeable risks from participation in this study. The results of this study will be published in a doctoral dissertation and may ultimately be presented in other formats such as academic journal articles or conference presentations. You may request a copy of the survey results by contacting the researcher.

The researcher for this study is a doctoral candidate at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the Communications Media and Instructional Technology program. He is being supervised in this project by: Dr. Mark Piwinsky, Professor, Communications Media Department, 121 Stouffer Hall, 1175 Maple Street, Indiana, PA 15705, 724-357-2492

CONTACT: James Kinneer, Researcher, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705, j.w.kinneer@iup.edu

This research study has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. You may contact the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board at (724) 357-7730 or by email at irb-research@iup.edu.

Your completion of this survey indicates your consent to participate in this research study. Do you wish to participate in this survey?

O Yes   O No

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. There are 14 survey questions followed by several demographic questions at the end of the survey. Topics include your experiences, opinions and attitudes. All questions are multiple choice and there are several opportunities to also share additional comments to clarify or expand on your responses. Please allow ten minutes to complete the survey.

Following are definitions of some terms that you will find used in the survey.

RN-to-BSN - A degree completion program for registered nurses who completed an Associate Degree in Nursing or a Diploma as their initial nursing degree.

For-Profit College - A private college that is structured as a for-profit corporation and is owned by shareholders and investors. Examples of for-profit colleges are the University of Phoenix, Capella University, Kaplan University, Walden University and Grand Canyon University.

Traditional College - Traditional colleges are nonprofit private or public four year colleges that maintain a brick-and-mortar campus.

Classroom Instruction - Instruction delivered with the instructor and student present at the same location at the same time.

Online Instruction -   Instruction delivered using Internet technologies without the instructor and the student being present at the same place at the same time.

IUP

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the following questions, please choose the option that best describes you.

Are you a health care recruiter involved in the screening and interviewing of registered nurse job applicants?

○ Yes
○ No

Have you ever completed an online course for college credit?

○ Yes
○ No

Do you hold a college degree that was completed entirely through online instruction?

○ Yes
○ No

Have you ever attended a for-profit college (examples include the University of Phoenix, Capella University, Grand Canyon University, Kaplan University, Walden University)?

○ Yes
○ No

Do you hold a degree from a for-profit college (examples include the University of Phoenix, Capella University, Grand Canyon University, Kaplan University, Walden University)?

○ Yes
○ No

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the following questions, please choose one of the options provided.

How often is it difficult for your organization to recruit qualified registered nurse job applicants?

○ Never
○ Sometimes
○ Often
○ Always

Comments:

In your opinion, how important is it that registered nurse job applicants hold a bachelors degree in nursing?

○ Not Important at All
○ Somewhat Important
○ Important
○ Extremely Important

Comments:

INSTRUCTIONS: This section asks for your opinions regarding job applicants holding various types of RN-to-BSN degrees. Please indicate your response by selecting the option which best describes your opinion.

If experience and other qualifications were equal, how much of an advantage in the hiring process would a registered nurse job applicant with the following degrees have in comparison to a job applicant with an Associate Degree in Nursing from a community college?

	No Advantage	Very Little Advantage	Some Advantage	Significant Advantage
RN-to-BSN degree from a **TRADITIONAL COLLEGE**, earned through **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **TRADITIONAL COLLEGE**, earned entirely through **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE**, earned through **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE**, earned entirely through **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○

Comments:

How would you rate the credibility of the following nursing degrees?

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High
RN-to-BSN degree from a **TRADITIONAL COLLEGE**, earned through **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **TRADITIONAL COLLEGE**, earned entirely through **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE**, earned through **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE**, earned entirely through **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○

Comments:

How much concern would you have about the credentials of a registered nurse job applicant with each of the following degrees?

	No Concern	Little Concern	Moderate Concern	Significant Concern
RN-to-BSN degree from a **TRADITIONAL COLLEGE**, earned through **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **TRADITIONAL COLLEGE**, earned entirely through **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE**, earned through **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE**, earned entirely through **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○

Comments:

How likely would you be to recommend hiring a registered nurse job applicant with the following degrees?

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very Likely
RN-to-BSN degree from a **TRADITIONAL COLLEGE**, earned through **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **TRADITIONAL COLLEGE**, earned entirely through **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE**, earned through **CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○
RN-to-BSN degree from a **FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE**, earned entirely through **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**	○	○	○	○

Comments:

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the following questions, please choose the option that best describes your employer's tuition assistance benefits.

Does your organization reimburse employees for the cost of completing a RN-to-BSN degree?

○ Yes, all of the costs
○ Yes, a portion of the costs
○ No

If yes, are RN-to-BSN degrees completed entirely online eligible for reimbursement?

○ Yes
○ No
○ Not Applicable

Comments:

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If yes, are RN-to-BSN degrees completed at for-profit colleges eligible for reimbursement?

○ Yes
○ No
○ Not Applicable

Comments:

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DEMOGRAPHICS

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the following questions, please choose the option that best describes you. All answers are confidential and data will not be associated with your individual responses in any way.

What is your gender?

O Male
O Female

What is your age group?

O 20-30 years
O 31-40 years
O 41-50 years
O 51-60 years
O 60+ years

Which of the following best describes the highest level of education that you have completed?
O Diploma
O Associate Degree
O Bachelor Degree
O Graduate Degree

How many years have you been involved in health care recruitment?

O 1-5 years
O 6-10 years
O 11-15 years
O 16-20 years
O 20+ years

Please indicate which of the following, if any, credentials that you hold (check all that apply).

○ Registered Nurse (RN)
○ Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR)
○ Professional in Human Resources (PHR)
○ Certified Health Care Recruiter (CHCR)

Which of the following best describes the organization for which you primarily recruit job applicants?

○ Individual Hospital
○ Multiple Hospital / Healthcare System
○ Long Term Care
○ Home Health
○ Sub-acute
○ Rehab
○ Other

Which of the following best describes the status of the organization for which you primarily recruit job applicants?

○ Not-for-Profit, Non-Governmental
○ For-Profit
○ Governmental, Non-Military
○ Veterans Administration or Military
○ Other

How many total employees (all positions) are in the organization for which you primarily recruit job applicants?
○ 0-499
○ 500-999
○ 1,000-1,999
○ 2,000-5,000
○ More than 5,000

Participant Comments

Verbatim comments from participants following the question that asked:

"How often is it difficult for your organization to recruit qualified registered nurse job applicants?"

1. Usually have multiple qualified applicates, but finding the right fit to aide in the retention of the nurse. Type of nursing, scheduling, shifts, etc

2. New grads are easy. Greater experience, specialization, and higher degrees makes recruitment more difficult.

3. for specialty areas

4. Especially in Critical Care areas, ED and RN needing a higher level of education such as an MSN for CNS positions.

5. We are in a rural area.

6. difficult to find nurses with very specific expertise, not difficult at all to find new grads or peds nurses with some peds med-surg background

7. For certain highly specialized areas like EP, Cath Lab and OR.

8. depends upon speciality

9. we do not have many applicants with alot of experience

10. Certain specialty areas such as the operating room present challenges for finding qualified candidates

11. Experienced nurses are the ones that are more difficult to recruit, it would not matter if they held an associate's or bachelor's.

12. Shortage of experience nurses and nurses with BSNs

13. Dialysis RN's are hard to find

14. Dependent on specialty area

15. We have Creighton School of Nursing attached to our Hospital so rarely do we have issues filling positions.

16. Depending on the position-critical care areas are more difficult

17. Critical care nurses for our PICU, NICU, and ED as well as for our Surgery/OR can sometimes be more challenging due to those departments usually want candidates with experience in those units. Other acute care nursing positions or outpatient positions ar not difficult to recruit qualified candidates for.

18. It is difficult to find the experienced nurse, most applicants are new grads

19. Only for highly specialized nurses

20. "depends on the position-if for Med/Surg or Surg/Peds-not at all

21. critical care or cath lab experienced- sometimes"

22. For staff level positions the majority of applicants are new graduates. It is more difficult to recruit the experienced nurse

23. We receive a large amount of new graduate applicants but are always looking for more experienced RNs.

24. It's been much easier lately - more nursing school graduates.

25. occasionaly highly specialized mid-levels (e.g. NPs)

26. speciallty positions - OB, ICU, OR ED

27. Experienced nurses

28. We don't usually have full time offerings which greatly affect our ability to attract viable candidates.

29. depends on what specialty skills (ICU, ED, L&D...) we are looking for

30. OR and ED nurses with 3 - 5 years experience

31. Only for specific areas such as Cardiac Cath Lab which is not a college specialization.

32. pool is small

33. Abundance of new grad candidates - a few 2-3 year experienced med-surg RNs - very, very few experienced critical care RNs or other specialty areas (informatics, educators, OR, CVICU, ICU)

34. It is sometimes a challenge to recruit qualified nurses for management level positions and higher, i.e. director of nursing positions.

35. Experienced RN's in the areas of critical care and telemetry can sometimes be difficult to recruit for both day and night shift.

36. experience RNs are more difficult, particularly w/ critical care experience. organization is attempting to obtain magnet status so focus is on BSNs. Graduate nurses are a dime a dozen in our area right now.

37. Our increasing needs for BSN prepared nurses will further complicate our ability to fill our available positions. Additionally, our organization is investigating all the options available to assist our current staff in converting to BSN preparation.

38. It depends on the position, the area, and the amount of experience the manager is expecting.

39. We get plenty of unqualified applicants-- new nurses or without proper experience

40. More difficulty in certain areas (critical care) than others (primary care)

41. We are a physical rehab hospital -- that poses the biggest challenge in finding experienced rehab nurses or CRRNs.

42. Not in recent years, but 6-7 years ago it was still a struggle.

43. area specific OR, L&D & ER

44. Rarely

45. For speciality positions

46. It is often difficult to recruit qualified RN's with more than just a year or two of experience. It is not difficult to recruit new graduates.

47. Critical Care, ER, OR

48. Occasional difficulty in specialty/critical care areas.

Verbatim comments from participants following the question that asked:

"In your opinion, how important is it that registered nurse job applicants hold a bachelors degree in nursing?"

1. It all depends on the role and the facility.

2. Our system is moving towards having a min of 80% of our RN workforce hold a BSN and all new hires are required to sign an agreement stating they will obtain a BSN wihtin 5 years of employment.

3. Due to our Magnet status we must have a certain percentage of BSN RN's.

4. I prefer to look at the whole candidate and not just the degree

5. You need a BSN and a State Registered License to interview.

6. We are a Magnet facility where there are requirements for a high % of BSN staff

7. We are seeking 80% nursing staff with BSN level or higher.

8. Nursing administration is very much supporting the ANCC and IOM initiatve "80 by 20"

9. it is good when organizations support diploma or associate nurses to complete their bachelors

10. Since we are working on Magnet status and a percentage of your RN's need to hold a Bachelor's or higher we are assisting those who want to go back and get their RN - most of them are doing that online and working full time.

11. We are moving to a BSN majority nursing work force

12. Emphasis on management is taught in BSN programs

13. This is a tough question. I hold a diploma in nursing and have attempted many times over the course of my career to return to school. I have always had excellent reviews and never any problem when I was at the bedside. I have been told I am successful as recruiter because I have worked in several different areas and have kept current in nursing. Today as a recruiter for a Magnet facility, we take the stand of BSN preferred, but for Magnet demographics we carefully watch the number of BSNs/MSNs we employ. Since the IOM report states that BSNs have better outcomes we of course encourage all our nurses to return to school and provide tuition reimbursement. As a recruiter seeing the amount of clinical some new grads in BSN progrms receive it is questionable ho the report came out with this recommendation.

14. Our minimum requirement is an ASN Degree to work as a bed side nurse in acute or critical care , but for those nurses who wish to become a Charge Nurse or pursue other opportunities that require a BSN Degree, they would have an advantage and qualify over those who only have the ASN Degree.

15. We now require all new RN hires to sign an agreement to complete their ASN to BSN degree within 5 years of their start date.

16. most of our entry level RN positions require a degree completion (can be ADN) and an active RN license - only Charge or leadership positions require bach degree

17. our medical center is moving towards an all-BSN staff

18. not usually for staff positions, but more often required for management/leadership positions, or something in quality, safety, risk management, etc.

19. Research we have reviewed indicates that patient outcomes are better for hospitals that have 80% BSN prepared nurses at the bedside. We are applying for Magnet and BSN degrees are one of their mandated criteria particularly for nurse managers. I think nures have a braoder view of patient care and healthcare as a whole as well as healthcare as a business after completing the BSN degree. I think that nurses even have a better understanding of how challenging the profession is and what a profession even mean with a higher degree.

20. Our health care system holds Magnet recognition and as a result, our continuing goal is to increase recruitment of BSN nurses.

21. or if they are in school for BSN we will consider, w/out BSN they stand much better chance if they have been working for us as a tech

22. Our organization is committed to quality and excellence; we anticipate the opportunity to better serve our patients through nursing staff who are Bachelors prepared.

23. We are the only profession that does not require a minimum of a bachelors degree. I believe it is a factor in why nursing does not receive the respect it deserves. Most people, although they "trust" nurses, do not have any idea that it is the nurse who moitor the patients 24/7, and that if it were not for their critical thinking skills and education of the nurse caring for them, patients would not have successful outcomes. Nursing continues to have a poor image on TV and in other media, and I believe thi lack of minimum education only adds to it.

24. We are a Magnet organization and the emphasis is on BSN prepared RN's.

25. Sometimes for our higher level positions but not at all for staff nurses.

26. Depends on the position. The VA financially rewards BSN nurses so is easier to recruit.

27. Our institution only hires BSN prepared candidates for Nursing positions.

28. we require it or the RN has to agree to matriculate within a yr of employment

29. They need to know the job.

30. As of January 2013, we require all newly hired ADNs to sign an agreement that they will receive their BSN within 6 years of hire.

31. We are very comfortable with our 2-year degree candidates

Verbatim comments from participants following the question that asked:

"*If experience and other qualifications were equal, how much of an advantage in the hiring process would a registered nurse job applicant with the following degrees have in comparison to a job applicant with an Associate Degree in Nursing from a community college?* "

1. Any program would need to be accredited.

2. The type of college is not as significant as whether or not the nursing program is NLNAC or CCNE certified. If the school isn't certified, we won't hire the nurse.

3. Schools must be accredited by the CCNE or NLNAC to be eligible for employment at the Veterans Administration.

4. We do not differentiate between the different degrees as long as they are accredited and recognized by the BRN.

5. We are only concerned if the college is accredited by the NLNAC or CCNE. So it doesn't matter if it's for-profit or non-profit, if it's accredited by either of those institutions.

6. The Classroom Component along with Clinics is huge. The students who graduate from Penn State, Drexel, Temple University verses the online schools tend to interview stronger.

7. Knowing where schools have students complete clinicals helps

8. We give preference to new graduates with a BSN or higher. Some RN job titles also require a BSN.

9. Currently we hire both BSN and Associate degreed nurses. At some point in near future (within next 12-18 months) we will be requiring Associate degree nurses hired at our organization to complete a BSN at within a designated time frame. Our agency is shifting to a BSN only hiring requirement for RN positions in the next year, but the BSN is already preferred no matter

10. It is not always evident to recruiters/hiring managers what programs are completed online vs. in traditional classroom.

11. For experienced nurses working at the bedside, there is no advantage to having a BSN.

12. An RN is an RN in our system unless it is management position

13. If you are talking bedside nurses, I want someone with classroom experience but for many specialties- ICP, Case Manager, Utilization, Infomatics, it doesn't matter as much.

14. No advantage in consideration for staff RN positions

15. Education is important, but at my organization we focus on mission fit. First and foremost, the candidate must have a desire to work in service to our mission.....skills and abilities can be taught, but caring and compassion come from within.

16. All BSNs are considered equal.

17. In our organization it does not matter how one earns the RN-BSN degree as long as they have a BSN.

18. We only hire BSN prepared nurses, all that matters is that the candidate has their BSN

19. I would need further information on the candidate. Was it a second degree, were they an LPN first then a RN, how long were they an RN

20. Since I have acquired 2 associates degree and now working on my bachelors I can relate to the online degree and know that they are not easier to acquire versus a brick and mortar school, you still have to study, take exams, write essay's etc. I have learned a lot by attending an online program through Penn Foster. They have great study materials and great instructors and I can still work full time.

21. We allow students from the for profit on online programs to complete clinicals at our organization. These students get excellent clinical experiences that are equal to those of the traditional program students.

22. It all depends on the person's ability to learn in an on line environment

23. Although I would look at the whole picture of the applicant including experience, years of service to each place of employment, integrity, references, and so on; education from non-profit, traditional colleges resonates with me as a person working hard to be the best.

Verbatim comments from participants following the question that asked :

"*How would you rate the credibility of the following nursing degrees ? "*

1. We value BSN over ADN because of Magnet status. We don't look at one school as "better" than the next at this point

2. For accredited programs, whether traditional or on-line

3. Provided the school is accredited.

4. As long as it is accredited and is on the BRN list we consider all equal.

5. We always do education verification as part of background check.

6. Our facility encourages our current nursing staff with associate or diplomas in nursing to consider what makes sense for them - on-line; for profit, our on site program through a local university, traditional educational programs.

7. There are some on-line colleges that I question-I recently interviewed a nurse who took an on-line accredited program where you work at your own pace and she completed the degree in less than a year and went on to finish her master's in 7 months. This is concerning. There is another college that I won't even look at grads who went from an LPN to a BSN-all on line. Some of the on-line instruction requires practicing RNs to retake biology, biochem and yet leave out important courses that you would need today such as Nursing Informatics. There should be consistency

8. I really can't rate the credibility of the online programs as well as the for-profit classroom instruction due to the region that our hospital is in. We have one of the largest ASN programs in the nation with Fresno City College and an excellent BSN program in CSU Fresno, plus several other ASN programs with two other community colleges within one hour of us. National University just recently started their BSN program two years ago and Grand Canyon University just entered our market last year, so it's to early to rate their programs.

9**.** There are so many variables. So much depends on the person. You can get a lot or a little from any of these formats.

10. After taking an online college course for an HR certification, I see a lot of extra work with on line courses because they seem to have to make sure you understand the theory.

Verbatim comments from participants following the question that asked :

"*How much concern would you have about the credentials of a registered nurse job applicant with each of the following degrees?* "

1. Most ADN RN's are working as an RN when they do the RN to BSN. So they are already qualified

2. on-line colleges tend to have less clinical / bedside experience

3. My concerns are that some for profit online programs do not have any clinical with human beings. Although I do value simulation labs I think there is tremendous value when learning via hands on direct patient care experience.

4. If the RN has passed the NCLEX and has been practicing, where they complete the BSN is of lesser importance than those who take a completely on-line RN course.

5. hands on direct patient care experience.

6. Once again, accreditation is a factor

7. As long as it is accredited and is on the BRN list we consider all equal.

8. We always do education verification as part of background check.

Verbatim comments from participants following the question that asked :

"How likely would you be to recommend hiring a registered nurse job applicant with the following degrees? "

1. Hire for the willingness to learn and be part of a team. Can orient to the procedures of the facility. Focus on patient and employee satisfaction

2. We look for a fit into the organization along with the BSN

3. I would recommend any of these nurses based on many other factors I see when reviewing their applications. I do not make any recommendations based solely on education from any college.

4. Would hire any from accredited, reputable program. Some are better than others within each category listed above.

5. Once again, a practicing RN who has obtained a BSN in any type of program will be considered

6. depends on hands on experience as well.

7. It would depend on their experiences after they received any of these degrees.

8. Our hiring decisions are not determined by the institution or mode of instruction by which the RN obtained their degree.

9. Couldn't recommend the two online programs due to not having had any applicants or exposure to their graduates.

10. as long as has active RN license for entry level RN positions

11. The issue with all these questions is that each individual to be considered, regardless of educational preparation, will be considered based on interview, assessment tools, as well as education, and a BSN grad from an online for profit institution, may in the end be selected over a traditional grad who cannot answer interview questions with some sense of credibility....So it all depends..........

12. It's all about the right and qualified candidate for the right position.

13. my answer would be N/A

14. The degree would have very little to do with my recommendation compared to clinical skills, work ethic and participation.