Part of faculty’s role is to support and encourage students to publish scholarly work that was either created during their doctoral studies or as the result of their culminating project. In an effort to facilitate a quicker launch to a postdoctoral career, an increasing number of doctoral nursing programs have added the publishable manuscript dissertation approach as an option to the traditional dissertation or have made publication of the Doctor of Nursing Practice project paper a requirement. Certainly, such stipulations can accelerate the sharing of cutting edge information and help to position graduates for their career as a scholar. However, with these stipulations also come responsibilities.

One of the first faculty responsibilities is to help students to determine the type of manuscript to be submitted. Manuscripts generated from doctoral final products range from concept papers, integrative or systematic literature reviews, and reports of instrument development, to results of research or quality improvement projects. Nursing education journals benefit from receiving manuscripts that reflect the current syntheses of research, cutting edge research that advances nursing education research and inquiry, or evidence-informed changes to teaching and learning practices.

Another faculty responsibility is recognizing that additional work may be required before the final product is ready to be submitted to a journal and clearly conveying that message to students. Course and final product requirements differ from publication requirements. Consequently, faculty need to prepare students for the changes required to transform a paper produced for academic credit to a publishable manuscript so that the experience is neither daunting nor deflating. The following observations are provided as guidance to commonly submitted doctoral student manuscripts.

Concept Analyses

Perhaps the most difficult type of research to publish is a conceptual analysis. Performing a conceptual analysis is pervasive in nursing doctoral education, and it provides students with an understanding of a particular concept before attempting to understand, measure, and evaluate interventions. However, few conceptual analyses are published relative to the number that are written and submitted. Why? Despite the importance of a conceptual analysis to the individual researcher, the primary reason conceptual analyses are not published is that they do not advance the science of nursing education in a substantive fashion. Thus, an analysis for a specific, individualized purpose or singular research study is generally not usable beyond the scope of the original intent of the analysis. Early and frequent discussions between faculty and student can help make this academic and scientific exercise more meaningful.

Integrative and Systematic Reviews and State of the Science

As the science of nursing education builds, comprehensive literature reviews are necessary to assess the state of the science in a particular area of inquiry and to provide essential direction for future research. Of critical importance is determining the type of review to be conducted. Faculty can assist students to avoid a critical pitfall; that is, performing a literature review for the specific purpose of an exercise in a course with a narrow focus, which thus limits the ability to assess the state of the science or provide expert recommendations for future research.

The Journal of Nursing Education previously outlined explicit guidelines regarding types of reviews. In her editorial, Morin (2012) presented a methodical approach to critiquing evidence via integrative or systematic reviews. The most frequent omissions that journal peer reviewers encounter when evaluating integrative or systematic reviews fall into the following two major areas: (a) detail required for addressing all four areas of flow explicated in the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (i.e., identification, screening, eligibility, included; PRISMA, n.d.) and (b) a hearty, conceptual discussion that is used to direct future research in the area of review. In other words, doctoral students master the technical process, but they would benefit from more guidance in conceptualizing the results in a manner that liberates them from the simple breakdown of articles and findings, to something that provides some theoretical implication that would be usable in future inquiry. Students wishing to publish this type of manuscript should obtain faculty help so that students’ evolution in thinking, complexity, and final study aim are conveyed succinctly and clearly.
Data-Based Reports

Finally, are data-based reports. Ironside and Spurlock (2014) highlighted the following nursing education research areas that are in need of further development: rigorous tool development, outcomes, and multisite studies. This is not to say that preliminary work, such as pilot or single-site studies, will not be considered for publication, but making the case for what value the manuscript will contribute as introductory knowledge to a phenomenon is crucial. A well-tested tool on a phenomenon, based on a conceptual analysis and comprehensive reliability and validity measures that can be used by other researchers, continues to be a need in nursing education research (Tanner, 2011). Similarly, a single-site study of a new methodological approach or a new line of inquiry often spurs collaboration and ideas about advancing a particular area of research. An excellent example of the application of new methodology is the 2014 Christine A. Tanner Scholarly Writing Award winning article by McNelis, Ironside, Zvonar, and Ebright (2014), using the critical decision method.

Shifting the Grounds

Transforming the process necessitates substantive work on the part of faculty, including communication among faculty regarding course papers. First, clear support for the manuscript option must be demonstrated by creating stronger collaborations among course faculty, the student, and the student’s committee when initial papers are being generated. For example, coordinated communication among course faculty teaching integrative review techniques, the student, and the student’s committee is a critical first step to setting the stage for the intent, focus, and utility of the review. This coordination also includes selection of a target journal and writing to the content and stylistic considerations of that journal.

Second, continued review and evaluation by the student’s committee is needed to advance the paper to its next iteration. Due diligence, with expectations and time lines established between both faculty and student, will facilitate the student’s work in a collegial manner, modeling best practices in mentorship (Nick et al., 2012). This relationship is crucial to creating a pathway for a student’s scholarly career and demonstrates how mentorship relationships are needed throughout one’s lifetime.

The move toward requiring the generation of student manuscripts prior to graduation has a significant impact on faculty time and effort. Many academic productivity models assign the bulk of faculty effort to the dissertation or project phase of a student’s academic program. However, more front-loading of responsibility by committee members promotes optimal functioning in the manuscript approach. Open discourse about faculty workloads will facilitate a common understanding and expectation of support over the entirety of a doctoral student’s academic program.

Summary

Nursing education doctoral students can and do make substantial contributions to advancing nursing education research. However, in order for graduates to have an impact, they need careful and ongoing mentorship. Often, this time commitment conflicts with faculty’s own scholarship agenda. Yet, if faculty are to contribute to student development, investment of time is critical. Transitioning doctoral students’ academic work to publishable manuscripts is key to the developing and testing of innovative approaches in nursing education.

References


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