



Structured Peer Mentoring and Nursing Student Retention

Terri Peerenboom, MA. MSN, APRN, PMHNP-BC

Sam Houston State University (SHSU), School of Nursing, The Woodlands, TX

Purpose

Evaluate the impact of a structured, curriculum-integrated peer mentoring program on BSN student retention and on-time graduation over five semesters.

Compares the required Recitation & Wellness (R&W) course against the prior voluntary peer-led model to determine whether universal curriculum integration improves outcomes.

The Problem: Nursing Student Attrition

- Projected RN workforce shortage of ~64,000 by 2030 (AACN, 2024)
- National graduation rates ~70%, reflecting ~30% attrition (NCSBN, 2023)
- Academic strain and clinical stressors consistently linked to program withdrawal (Veesart, 2022)

Sustainability

- Institutional Integration:** Credit-bearing, curriculum-embedded across all five semesters
- Funded Mentor Positions:** Competitively hired student workers with dedicated grant funding each semester
- Self-Renewing Pipeline:** Advancing students naturally become mentor candidates each semester
- Faculty Oversight:** Instructor-informed model ensures consistency as cohorts change
- Evidence-Based:** 10 semesters of retention data support ongoing institutional investment

Literature Snapshot

Academic Integration

- Underperformance predicts early attrition
- Structured interventions improve persistence

Social Integration

- Peer belonging predicts retention
- Mentorship enhances institutional commitment

Psychological Factors

- Stress contributes to withdrawal decisions
- Self-efficacy supports academic persistence

Astin, 1984; Igbo, 2019; Jeffreys, 2001; Mumba, 2022

Theoretical Framework

Jeffreys Nursing Undergraduate Retention and Success (NURS) Conceptual Model

Retention = academic performance + psychological & environmental factors

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Persistence = degree of academic and social engagement students invest in their education.

Implications for SHSU SON

Current State

Recitation & Wellness cohorts active in Sophomore 2 and Junior 1 levels

Future State

Preliminary trends suggest improved retention in R&W cohorts. Potential enhancement of coping capacity and academic resilience.

Research Question

Does structured peer mentoring in a required Recitation & Wellness course improve semester-to-semester progression and on-time BSN completion over five semesters, compared to voluntary or no mentoring?

100%

Retention rate achieved in 3 of 5 R&W cohorts
Fall 2020, Fall 2021, Fall 2022

38%

Graduation rate gap — Spring 2021
74% vs. 36% on-time completion

Limitations

Voluntary Model

- Self-selected students
- Informal study sessions
- Variable session sizes
- Limited faculty involvement
- No college credit

Recitation & Wellness Course

- Required
- Formal curriculum course
- Standardized enrollment
- Instructor-informed oversight
- 2-credit hour course

Note: Non-randomized cohorts limit causal inference; other factors may influence outcomes.

Overall Retention Outcomes

Entering Nursing Cohort	Completed Success and Wellness Program — Yes			Completed Success and Wellness Program — No			P-Value
	Headcount	# Retained	Retention Rate	Headcount	# Retained	Retention Rate	
Fall 2020	14	14	100%	74	64	86%	0.07
Spring 2021	43	42	98%	55	35	64%	0.00
Fall 2021	37	37	100%	50	39	78%	0.00
Spring 2022	57	53	93%	34	21	62%	0.00
Fall 2022	67	67	100%	18	15	83%	0.00

Overall Perfect Graduation Rates

Entering Nursing Cohort	Completed Success and Wellness Program — Yes			Completed Success and Wellness Program — No			P-Value
	Headcount	Graduated Within 5 Terms	Perfect Graduation Rate	Headcount	Graduated Within 5 Terms	Perfect Graduation Rate	
Fall 2020	14	11	79%	74	48	65%	0.16
Spring 2021	43	32	74%	55	20	36%	0.00

In Action



Mentors & Mentees

Implementation

Structure: 2-credit course, all five semesters

Enrollment: Required of all students - universal access

Leadership: Mentor-Led and Instructor-Informed

Continuity: Entry to graduation - full BSN journey

References

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2023). New data show enrollment declines in schools of nursing. aacnnursing.org
- Igbo, I. N. & Sule, E. N. (2019). Peer mentoring as a successful retention strategy. *Innovation Center*, 40(3), 192-193.
- Jeffreys, M. R. (2001). Evaluating enrichment program study groups. *Nurse Educator*, 26(3), 142-149.
- Mumba, M. N., et al. (2022). Development and implementation of a novel peer mentoring program. *IJNES*, 20(1), 1-9.
- National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2022). National nursing workforce study. ncsbn.org



Structured Peer Mentoring and Nursing Student Retention

Terri Peerenboom, MA, MSN, APRN, PMHNP-BC

Biography

Terri Peerenboom is a Clinical Assistant Professor and Academic Success Coach at Sam Houston State University School of Nursing in Huntsville, Texas. A registered nurse since 1992 and a nurse educator since 1996, she has spent her career doing work she genuinely loves because nursing offers so many ways to help people.

Terri holds a Master of Arts in Counseling and a Master of Science in Nursing, and she is a board-certified Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner. This combination gives her a uniquely holistic perspective through which she approaches student success. That blend of clinical knowledge and counseling insight is what led her to her current role as Course Coordinator for the Recitation & Wellness course, a peer-led program designed to support nursing students through one of the most demanding academic journeys they will face.

She does this work because she wants to be part of nurses' futures and because she remembers firsthand how challenging nursing school can be. As Academic Success Coach, she works alongside students not just to help them pass, but to help them find their footing and keep going. Her capstone project grows directly out of that commitment, examining how structured peer mentoring in the Recitation & Wellness course impacts student retention and on-time graduation across the five-semester program.

Outside of the university, Terri enjoys life with her husband of 30 years and their daughter. Whether they're on the golf course or planning their next trip, those moments remind her of something she tries to pass along to her students. Rest, connection, and joy are not extras. They're part of the whole picture.

Contact Information



Terri Peerenboom, MA, MSN, APRN, PMHNP-BC
Clinical Assistant Professor, Academic Success Coach
Sam Houston State University
terripeerenboom@shsu.edu