EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NURSING PROGRAM

STUDENTS WITH GRANT FUNDING INVESTMENT IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Brian Richard Michel

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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APPROVED BY:

Holly Eimer, EdD, Committee Chair

Breck Perry, PhD, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program at a rural community college in Western New York. This rural institution is a member institution of the State University of New York system. The research was guided by the underlying central research question, "What are the perceptions of lived learning experiences made possible through grant funding investment of nursing program students at a rural community college?" Three different data collection methods were used in interviews, a focus group, and documents. The perception of grant investment efficacy was defined through perceptions of experiential learning of program students as having resulted from grant funding investment. Guided by the work of van Manen, a hermeneutical phenomenology design framed the study, while Astin's student involvement theory was utilized as a theoretical framework for the research and subsequent findings.

Keywords: grant funding, nursing, higher education, student perceptions, program administration

Copyright Page

Dedication

This work is dedicated to God, our Father, who blesses those seeking to enlighten the world around them and my family, who, through this collective effort, know anything is possible as long as you pray, show up, try hard, and never stop believing in yourself.

I would like to thank my wife for her unwavering support, understanding, and encouragement. Over the years, we have somehow always managed to maintain a focus on the importance of this academic pursuit even while enduring as much as we have together.

I thank my parents, mother in law, and siblings for the constant encouragement and support through so many ways. Your examples all taught me about the value of dedication and perseverance in the pursuit of education.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my children Taylor, Freddy, and Emily who bore witness to the countless hours and tireless work that goes into a doctoral degree. I pray my example may inspire each of you to know your dreams are worth chasing.

Glory be to God in the highest.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Eimer, my dissertation chair who I learned so much from as she guided me along the way throughout my research and matched my pace with her steadfast support.

I am grateful to Dr. Perry, my committee member and methodologist. His sharp eye and unrelenting attention to detail enabled this work to present under the highest of quality possible.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to all who participated in this study. Your generosity in providing invaluable insight is sincerely appreciated.

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List of Abbreviations

Central Research Question (CRQ)

Internal Review Board (IRB)

Liberty University (LU)

Major Theme (MT)

Request For Proposal (RFP)

Rural Community College (RCC)

State University of New York (SUNY)

Sub-Question (SQ)

Western New York (WNY)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Grant funding efficacy in higher education provides one of the most important means of student success outcome support and is one of the least understood contributing factors to student success (Tight, 2020). Institutions of higher education miss out on opportunities to support student needs and improve student success outcomes due to a lack of comprehensive understanding of grants and their perceived usefulness in application (Lederer et al., 2020). Such interdependence is particularly challenging for students in health sciences programs given the high institutional cost of maintaining currency in a healthcare-focused curriculum, making institutions vulnerable to ineffective grant funding deployment (Porat-Dahlerbruch et al., 2022). Chapter one of this manuscript outlines the framework for the research study through the background, problem statement, and the identification of a gap in the literature. Made clear in a review of the literature was the lack of adequate qualitative research to examine and understand the perceptions of lived learning experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in community colleges. Additionally, the purpose of the study, significance, relevant definitions, central research question, and three research sub-questions are designed to offer insight into understanding how grants can be better utilized, leading to a stronger understanding of perceptions of lived learning experiences by nursing program students.

Background

The background examining the historical, social, and theoretical implications is investigated as it relates to how the problem evolved. Socially, how the problem has evolved in relation to students, faculty, institutions of higher education, and the community is described. Lastly, through the study, the research will be explored using the theoretical context of the topic

guiding the investigation.

Historical Context

While the United States has taken great strides in making higher education available to all, this was not always the case. During the 18th century, less than one in 1000 American colonists had participated in any form of higher education (Lucas, 2006). For the remainder of the century, availability of postsecondary education would continue to be sparse with only nine collegiate institutions existing prior to the end of the American Revolution in 1776 (Bastedo et al., 2023). These early institutions endured modest underclassmen enrollment rates with some as small as 36 students at Yale University in 1710 and 123 at Harvard University during the same year (Lucas, 2006). As an acknowledgment of the consistently high cost associated with rendering a substantial postsecondary education, nearly all these institutions were either publicly funded by the government or privately sponsored by a religious organization to support sustainment (Rudolph, 2021).

In recognizing the value of higher education, the federal government began making restricted investments directed at easing institutional deficits, launching new academic programs, supporting innovative research, and promoting student success outcomes through the inception of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (McCrambly & Colyvas, 2022). Following the success of the Higher Education Act in supporting institutions of higher education, the need to support students directly was championed through the launch of the Pell Grant program in 1972, and still continues at the time of this writing (Cantora et al., 2020). In large part through the Pell Grant program, students were able to benefit for the first time from direct funded subsidies in their own higher educational pursuits.

In following this growing trend of institutional and student-centric investment, grant making, in its current form, represents a hybrid blend between intended purpose and application between students and institutions (Cunningham, 2020). A unifying theme is evident between institutions and students as grant recipient awards are overwhelmingly directed at supporting student success outcomes (Gandara & Sosanya, 2020). A limitation with this rapid growth in student success outcome grant making is a limited understanding of the perceived benefits as realized by students resulting from grant investment (Nizar, 2020). As a result of the disconnect between intended grant investment outcomes and student experiences, student needs present as vulnerable to being overlooked by their institution potentially missing the mark on remedying real-life problems due to a lack of a comprehensive understanding of the actual effect.

Social Context

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a continuous decline in the volume of active nursing healthcare professionals in the United States was brought to a point as healthcare systems were pushed to their limits in providing for the institutionalized sick (Tuohy et al., 2021). Higher education institutions with health sciences programs sought to provide a source of graduating healthcare professionals available for immediate hire (Healy et al., 2022). The need for employable nurses was acutely felt in community colleges across the United States who traditionally sponsor nursing, allied, and physical health programs. With an increasing need to produce viable candidates for hire, these traditionally underfunded community colleges were hard-pressed to find ways to promote high student retention and graduation rates. In turn, many community colleges faced challenges in affording maintenance of the currency of healthcare program curriculums by way of instructional technology, equipment, and supplies used in the providing crucial experiential learning opportunities (Saudelli & Niemczyk, 2022).

In finding ways to maximize limited resources, grant funding presents an opportunity to invest substantially in healthcare curriculum programmatic needs without stressing already dwindling institutional resources (Nakra, 2021). While nursing program host institutions use grant funding to invest in what they recognize as the greatest needs of the program and student, there is a void in the understanding of nursing program student experiences used in the decision-making process in nursing practice (Rodrigues et al., 2021). A measurable shortcoming of insufficient experiential learning can be observed in nursing program students having the perception they lack adequate hands-on educational experience to exercise proficiency in basic lifesaving skills (Postlewaite & Frankland, 2021). Potential contributing factors to this may present as a lack of institutional investment in a sufficient amount of instructional equipment and supplies to facilitate hands-on instruction for all students during lectures and labs. From a societal standpoint, graduating students into the field who lack genuine proficiency in medical practice, places patients at risk as they are now vulnerable to having their ailment worsened by poor technique from an inexperienced, newly graduated, attending nurse. A disconnect between program grant investment and perceived learning experiences presents a reality not easily overlooked without having societal implications, further emphasizing the need for this research.

Theoretical Context

As grant funding is utilized to facilitate experiential learning in higher education, there exists a void between application and understood efficacy from the students who are intended to benefit (Haake & Silander, 2021). A disconnect in understanding by funding administrators can potentially lead to missed opportunities to maximize the usefulness of grant funding investments intended to aid students (Chattopadhyay, 2022). Using student involvement theory, as developed by Astin (1984), provides an opportunity to contribute to the existing body of literature and offer

valuable insight to decision makers who are responsible to invest limited financial resources into healthcare-based curriculums. Student involvement theory focuses on the extent a student's experience is directly influenced either by how much, or how little effort they invest into a scenario. Postlewaite and Frankland (2021) offered a concerning outlook on the existence of a growing disconnect between healthcare curriculum learning outcomes and the student perceptions suggesting classroom instruction failed to deliver prescribed skillset competency program benchmarks. While students are often able to pass classroom-based skill competency examinations for course passage, they often lack the sort of in-depth experience and knowledge of a skillset necessary to effectively practice in the field following graduation (Roberts et al., 2009).

As a validation of the efficacy student involvement theory provides in understanding student learning experiences, Cheng (2022) asserted student lived experiences were substantially influenced by the extent students exerted themselves in achieving prescribed outcomes. Student involvement theory offers a ready method to examine the perceptions of student lived experiences (Astin, 1984). In student involvement theory, Astin (1984) identified core inputs, environment, and outcomes as core elements for observation. Using these elements aligns the theory as a framework suitable for exploring the perceptions of nursing program students pertaining to grant funding efficacy in higher education using continual data collection, analysis, and active documentation (Xhomara et al., 2023). Measuring perceptions of lived experiences by nursing program students presents an opportunity to gain insight into the intangible programmatic outcomes such as student persistence, beliefs, and development of personal confidence in practical skillset attainment. Healthcare programs possess curriculums which place a heavy emphasis on classroom experiential learning crucial to developing a skillset mastery in

practical medicine (McNiesh, 2011). Students rely on their programs and instructors to convey this experiential learning in a substantial and personally meaningful way. Using Astin's (1984) student involvement theory as a theoretical framework offers valuable insight to the challenges decision makers faced with investing finite financial resources into healthcare-based curriculums with prescribed student skill competency outcomes. By adding to the depth of understanding of student perceived lived experiences, refinements to future funding decisions may be made to administer to the perceived programmatic shortcomings as identified from the data attained firsthand from nursing program students through this study.

Problem Statement

The problem is grant funding investment efficacy in higher education remains one of the most critically important means of student success outcome support, yet it is one of the least understood contributing factors (Balzer, 2020; Chattopadhyay, 2022; Edmund, 2020; Tight, 2020). Lacking a comprehensive understanding of grants and their perceived usefulness in application, institutions of higher education often overlook opportunities to administer directly to student needs and thereby affect program-wide retention and graduation rates (Lederer et al., 2020). With the high cost associated with maintaining the currency of healthcare-focused curriculums, nursing program students within the health sciences are some of the most vulnerable population subsets to ineffective grant funding deployment (Surur et al., 2020). The utilization of grant investment can be demonstrated across a broad spectrum in academia, given the variety of applications toward where funding is applied. Grants can be seen as a means to acquire new instructional equipment and supplies, employ additional program personnel, provide wrap around services (Lundy & Curran, 2020), and support student welfare (Ortagus et al., 2020). Even as grants are used to remedy a number of issues directly associated to student non-

completion rates (Beasy et al., 2021), little is understood about the perceived experiential usefulness of such investments by those who are most closely associated with them: program students, faculty, and administration.

With the grant fundable needs surrounding student retention rates becoming increasingly numerous and complex, granters and grantees are faced with fundamental questions. Questions surrounding grant funding efficacy in higher education come as a symptom of the imbalance between funding availability, utilization, and assessment, where one cannot exist in a meaningful capacity without the other two being equally present (Rosinger et al., 2022). Investigating such questions surrounding grant funding efficacy in higher education may bring the author and audience closer to recognizing the generosity of God present in their daily lives. As stated in Job 1:21, "And said, naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." As shepherds of God's will, it is incumbent upon educators to carefully guide the utilization of earthly resources to ensure their just use and continued sustainment of those who depend on them.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program at a rural community college (RCC) in Western New York (WNY). The research is guided by the underlying central research question: "What are the perceptions of lived learning experiences made possible through grant funding investment of nursing program students at an RCC?" Guided by the work of van Manen (2023), a hermeneutical phenomenology study serves as the means of research design, while Astin's (1984) student

involvement theory will be utilized as a theoretical framework for the research and subsequent findings.

Significance of the Study

Multiple stakeholders may benefit from the outcome of this research including nursing program students, faculty, administration, and community members. In managing grant funding awards, administration and faculty may gain valuable insight into what goes into meaningful grant programming. As beneficiaries of grant funding investments, students and community stakeholders may benefit from being given an opportunity to voice their opinions on their learning experiences resulting from grant funding both inside and outside of the classroom. Exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, an already growing shortage of nursing staff across the country was worsened as healthcare systems were pushed to their breaking point administering to the health and wellness needs of the masses (Tuohy et al., 2021). In remedying this problem, community colleges were seen as a means to provide a pool of viable nursing candidates for deployment into the field (Miguel Dos Santos, 2020). Crucial to the reliability of healthcare workers was nursing programs' maintenance of high retention and graduation rates among nursing program students. As a component of student retention and graduation rates, effective grant funding investment offered a way for institutions to afford enhanced supportive services, educational supplies, simulation equipment, experiential learning opportunities, and instructional personnel, all in the name of promoting student success (Davis et al., 2022).

Notably lacking in this mobilization and refocusing of supplemental funding resources is an understanding of student perceptions of the usefulness and practicality of the lived experiences in the classroom (Samuriwo et al., 2020). While there have been conventional efforts made to assess and evaluate the efficacy of grant funding investment, few studies have attempted

outright, to elicit feedback directly from nursing program students seeking to understand how they experience, perceive, and realize the benefit of such work (Mahboobeh Khabaz et al., 2022). Such information would offer a greater understanding of beliefs, perceptions, experiences, and ideologies collectively contributing to the phenomenon of lived experiences of nursing students in a community college. The insight gained may be invaluable to administration at institutions of higher education seeking to maximize the benefit grant funding investment has on student experiences leading to successful outcomes.

Theoretical

Theoretical themes developed as a result of this study may aid researchers in understanding the practical application of student involvement theory in the research methods and techniques utilized in the study (Astin, 1984). Additionally, this study may potentially reveal valuable theoretical insights into the student learning experience enhancing the researchers' comprehension of how this theory can be practically implicated otherwise. Such realizations may aid in the development of practical and relevant recommendations for future research.

Empirical

This study seeks to narrow the gap in the literature through the findings of a qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study that explores the connection between individual perceptions and lived experiences of nursing program students (Astin, 1984). The study may potentially add to the body of knowledge and contribute to the development and interpretation of future studies aiming to gain a greater insight into nursing program student's lived experiences. Lastly, the study may help to clarify findings brought about from previous work that neglected to adequately address the research topic through quantitative means.

Practical

From a practical standpoint, there is a growing urgency for educational grant funding for this research to be conducted, given its real-world implications on the deployment of grant funding, student graduate practical skill set mastery (Catton, 2020), and the perceived lived experiences of nursing program students. As a result of this research, higher education leadership may be able to better make informed decisions when endeavoring to use grant funding to administer to student needs holistically (Gross et al., 2023). Grant-funded classroom learning experiences, coupled with improved student support services, may improve student success rates and lead to improved student perceptions of lived experiences of the nursing program in relation to grant funding investments.

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Research Questions

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A central research question and three sub-questions serve as the basis for this hermeneutical phenomenological qualitative research.

Central Research Question

What are the lived learning experiences made possible through grant funding investment of nursing program students at an RCC?

Sub-Question One

How are the learning experiences of grant funding perceived by students?

Sub-Question Two

What are the perceived student success outcomes from grant-funded instruction?

Sub-Question Three

What opportunities and resources do nursing students perceive as being a result of grant funding investment in their program?

Definitions

1. *Award* - Financial assistance providing support to accomplish a recognized purpose. Awards are given in the grant-making process in the form of funding, or property in lieu of funding. The term does not include technical assistance, where services would be provided in place of funding (Mengyao et al., 2020).

2. *Budget* - A defined financial plan for a project or program used as a basis for operation under a funding award (Fulweiler et al., 2021).

3. *Grantor* - An individual or organization, from where a grant funding award is paid out of (Blumenstyk, 2015).

4. *Grantee* - An individual or organization, to whom a grant funding award is paid to (Altbach et al., 2019).

5. *In-Kind Contribution* - A non-monetary contribution made to a project possessing a recognized quantifiable value in the total budgeted amount of a project (Mcgee, 2020).

6. *Project Cost* - The total allowable cost to be incurred under a project including all involuntary cost sharing and voluntary committed cost sharing (Boldureanu et al., 2020).

7. *Project Period* - The time duration specified in the award documentation during when grant funding sponsorship begins and ends (Browning, 2022).

8. *Student Investment Theory* - Student involvement theory refers to the extent to which a student's experience is directly influenced either by how much, or how little effort they put into a scenario (Astin, 1984).

9. *Subaward* - An award provided by a pass-through entity to a sub-recipient in order to carry out a specified portion of programmatic activity included in the project (Britton et al., 2020).

10. *Termination* - A specified point at when a project ends either completely or partially (Li, 2020).

11. *Utilization Rate* - A measure of expenditure of a set amount of funds calculated as a percentage and traditionally used as a benchmark for progress in a project (Gitman et al., 2015).

Summary

Grant funding investment in higher education provides a means of support for student success outcome attainment and yet is one of the least understood contributing factors. Examining the perceived lived experiences of nursing program students in the classroom offers an opportunity to gain insight into student perceptions of learning outcomes acquired as a result of grant funding investment in the program. To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, a qualitative hermeneutical phenomenology must be conducted to explore the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program. Chapter one provides an overview of the research topic and context surrounding the study. The chapter then describes the background of the study featuring a broad historical overview of the development of the problem, its social implications, and the theoretical framework. The chapter concludes with explanations of the problem statement, purpose of the study, its significance, the central research question, sub-questions, and definitions related to the research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the lived experience perceptions with grant funding investment of nursing program students in a community college. Chapter two offers a review of the research on the topic through an extensive examination in the theoretical framework, related literature, and summary sections. Astin's (1984) student involvement theory will both be utilized as a theoretical framework for evaluation and discussed in the first section, followed by a review of recent literature on grant funding in higher education, funding system organization, grant program development, and the presence of funding utilization in student life. Lastly, the literature surrounding grant funding purpose diversity, student success outcomes, healthcare curricula, experimental learning, perceptions, and program efficacy assessment and evaluation are presented.

Theoretical Framework

Alexander Astin (1984) developed student involvement theory as a multifaceted research framework. Student involvement, unlike other theoretical frameworks at the time, was based on data derived primarily from students as they were active within the field of study. Data collection will focus on inputs, environment, and outcomes as sources of raw data. As a widely applicable framework, student involvement theory has several defining characteristics that distinguish it from other theories. Student involvement in research focuses on desired outcomes in relation to how students change over time (Cheng, 2022). In terms of active analysis, researchers identify qualitative trends based on raw data compiled to document observational themes, with data collection from sampling and analysis occurring simultaneously (Thomas et al., 2021). Lastly,

the type of inductive procedure ultimately corresponds with the theory being utilized as a systematic procedure (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The evolution of student development theory provides a means to conduct an in-depth and substantial investigation into the elements of efficacy of grant utilization in higher education given its foundation in data-based analysis of complex processes (Greer et al., 2023). As part of the creation of student involvement theory, Astin (1984) sought to explain the relationship between institutionally desired student outcomes and actual changes in the student population over time. Astin identified three core elements as the basis for observation in his theory: inputs, environment, and outcomes. These three elements enable student development theory to be aligned as a framework used in the investigation of grant funding efficacy in higher education through continual data collection, analysis, and active documentation (Xhomara et al., 2023).

Beyond the elements, Astin (1984) identified five basic assumptions pertaining to involvement. First, Astin maintained involvement refers to the measured investment of psychological and physical energy. Second, the amount of energy devoted by a student in relation to an object is not uniform. Third, involvement embodies both quantitative and qualitative characteristics. Fourth, the amount of learning and personal development gained by each student is proportionate to the quality and quantity of involvement. Lastly, the efficacy of any educational policy correlates directly with the extent of student involvement. Using these assumptions, experiential data as provided by impacted students, faculty, and staff can be analyzed and used to generate documented findings used in the drawing of conclusions by the researcher (Necmettin et al., 2021).

This researcher has gained valuable insight and perspective into the topic by examining it through the lens of student involvement theory. With grant work embodying a systematic

process, Astin's (1984) student involvement theory as a research framework, provides a means by where all facets of the grant process lifecycle from conceptualization to assessment and evaluation can be examined in a substantial way as they pertain to perceived student lived experiences with grant funding (Cunningham, 2020). Using the student involvement theory framework, the perceived successes and shortcomings of grant funding utilization by nursing program students in a community college may become more readily apparent. As a researcher whose perspective and subsequent work are founded in student involvement theory, this author has gained valuable insight into the research topic benefiting the research and its continuation into the future. Using involvement theory, the interview questions and focus group questions were structured to ascertain insight into the perceived experiences and associated involvement of nursing program students as they pertain to grant funding investments in the classroom.

Related Literature

Grant funding efficacy in higher education remains one of the most critically important means of student success outcome support and is yet one of the least understood factors contributing to student success outcomes (Garriott, 2020). The importance of understanding student perceptions of lived experiences in the classroom made possible through grant investment remains paramount as there is the potential for a disconnect between intended institutional outcomes and actual experiences as lived out by the students (Spencer & Temple, 2021). The impact of grant investment can be demonstrated across a broad spectrum, given the variety of applications where funding is applied. Grants are looked at as a means to sustain institutional bottom lines, support student welfare, promote new research, and develop new academic programming, potentially contributing to student success outcomes (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). Overall, student success outcomes have become a broad target for institutions to invest

grant funding against to bolster individual program graduation rates (Evans et al., 2020) and graduating student skills competencies (Rapanta et al., 2021).

As a whole, institutions of higher education are distinct from typical grant recipient entities, given their traditional nonprofit status as an educational organization. Institution portfolios reflect this universal funding eligibility by containing a blend of public and private restricted funds, thus exponentially increasing the amount of funding they have at their disposal to achieve specified outcomes (Masri & Sabzalieva, 2020). However substantial the sum total value of these program grant investments may be, a noted deficiency can be found in the lack of uniform assessment and evaluation of grant funding impact throughout higher education in answering the fundamental questions of what are grants being used for and how do we know if they worked (Slavin, 2020)? More importantly, student perceptions of lived experiences with grant funding can vary substantially from one student to the next (Spencer & Temple, 2021). It is for precisely this reason that exploring the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment is an important endeavor since a general consensus has not been determined in the scholarly literature.

Purpose of Grant Funding

According to McCrambly and Colyva (2022), the process of grant making itself acts as an agent for change. Grant funding in higher education serves as a means for public and private funds to be invested in education as the result of a competitive request for proposal process. As a result of the Higher Education Act of 1965 on institutions, grants were made available to offset deficits, sustain programs, hire personnel, facilitate investigative research, and launch new programs (McCrambly & Colyvas, 2022). Shortly after the initiation of the Higher Education Act of 1965, the need to invest in students directly was recognized, and so, in 1972, the Pell

Grant program was launched, providing students with a subsidy to participate in higher education (Cantora et al., 2020). In current practice, Weber-Main et al. (2020) noted an increasingly common trend of blending institutional and student-direct investment to afford student support services. In such a capacity, grants are also used for institutions of higher education to offer student support services including counseling, internship placement, housing, and child daycare.

Funding System Organization

Following needs identification, grant seeking presents an inherently complex process (Koen, 2020) where institutions and individuals are challenged to match a known need with an available funding source (McAlpine, 2020). The search for funding can be enhanced and streamlined through the utilization of grant funding databases and other digital funding organization platforms. Depending on the funding source, requests for proposals (RFP) present unique opportunities to administer to various needs directed at supporting student success outcomes. Private foundations are particularly effective in this capacity as they are capable of providing highly targeted funding directed toward niche needs (Sommers et al., 2020), as compared to the more generalized project funds designed to benefit the greater good, as is traditionally the case in state level (Syverson et al., 2020) and federal grant funding awards (Zabel et al., 2022).

Grant funding, throughout its various phases, primarily exists in the absence of structure, scrutiny, and explanation, necessitating research for a comprehensive understanding (McAlpine, 2020). Contributing to the complexity of understanding perceptions of lived experiences with grant funding in higher education is the fact investment can be procured from multiple levels of government, including the federal (Pierce, 2022), state (Uhing, 2022), and local. Additionally,

funding investment is also commonly made from private non-profit foundations whose application and utilization parameters often differ significantly from those in public funding (Enstad, 2020). In taking the multiple levels of grant funding investment in higher education into account, it becomes critically important to not only grasp the concept of funding system organization, but then to actively apply it in the evaluation of application against the recipient's intended deliverables (Haake & Silander, 2021). Such utilization of findings can lead to significant improvements of future continued program delivery as well as ensure the realization of operational efficiency.

Institutional Funding Utilization

Grant funding in higher education is used to remedy a number of needs ranging from the institution down to the level of individual student success. Administering to the needs of one often has benefits for all, given the interdependence between institutions of higher education, the student body, and stakeholders. On an institutional level, grants are used for a variety of applications, including offsetting lost revenue, hiring personnel, capital improvements, academic program expansion, and research facilitation. As explained by Black and Taylor (2021), under the auspices of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are now state and federal grant funds being utilized in mass as a means of sustainment for otherwise insolvent institutions of higher education. To this effect, Pan (2021) wrote how grant funding has served as a lifeline between the government and higher education sustaining institutions in the face of adversity. Subsequently, through this support, institutions of higher education are enabled to serve those who depend on them more readily, both on and off campus. In this sense, grant funding utilization serves as an example of higher education's role and influence in policymaking and financial undertaking in the name of student success and the common good. Given the abstract

nature of institution-level grant funding utilization, quantification of funding impact success is limited primarily to compliance-based programmatic and financial audits in providing routine filings.

Student Support Funding

A hallmark of ongoing modernization of student support services can be had in the cultivation of inclusive environments designed to cater to the diverse needs of the student body. A noted trend in the utilization of higher education grant funding, as described by Huirjts and Kolster (2021), has been the use of grants to meet individualized student needs through comprehensive support services, commonly known as wrap around support services. As institutions become increasingly focused on providing wrap around services, these supports have come to include case-based management within the student population. Grant deployment is following suit by funding academically oriented items including tutoring, success coaching, course material, and personal technology. Simultaneously, grants are being used to offer students services in mental health counseling, career coaching, child daycare, food sustenance, and housing assistance. Through a blended approach, institutions have provided students with wrap around services to holistically meet their needs while eliminating barriers to entry that may otherwise prevent full participation in higher education (Hallonsten, 2022). Proof of success in wrap around services is largely reflected in stabilized student retention rates, leading to degree completion as institutions endeavor to empower students to persevere to graduation.

Students look to their respective institutions of higher education to remedy a number of issues as well as provide services structured to be preventative in nature. Some of the most common wrap around student support services offered by institutions of higher education to their student body include childcare, success coaching, food scarcity abatement, housing

assistance, career and transition services, as well as the offering of school supplies at a significantly reduced cost (Hallonsten, 2022). These need-specific services administer to broader, more overarching personal needs through mental health wellness, personal financial viability, and academic empowerment.

Academic Advisement

Academic guidance and counseling represent a fundamental pillar of student support networks (Mishra, 2020). Faced with declining institutional revenues, higher education academic advisors are under increasing pressure to contribute more broadly to the student journey, starting at recruitment and ending in graduation. Academic advisors play a significant role in attracting and retaining students while often fulfilling a parental role as well. Prospective students commonly visit college unclear of the benefits of secondary education, how to choose an appropriate degree program, and how to navigate the admissions process (Pichon, 2019). In administering to this disconnect, academic advisement and counseling facilitate success outcome attainment by helping students navigate their educational journey, providing guidance on course selection, degree completion planning, and alignment with career pathways.

Throughout the course of a student's academic career, routine check-ins by advisement personnel occur to facilitate this critically important relationship. Advisement personnel can provide the insight and perspective needed by students who seek to make informed decisions that align with their personal interests and long-term goals (Elliott, 2020). A common misconception in higher education about this level of wrap around services is the belief such interventions are ineffective and are therefore, expendable. Systematic undervaluing is evidenced by advisement personnel being amongst the first category of staff eliminated during

times of financial hardship and implementation of institutional austerity measures (White, 2020). The reality is, however, rather than representing a cost base, advisement services can act as an institutional lifeline directly contributing to student retention and completion rates.

To remedy the cost associated with implementing academic advisement services, institutions can rely on grant funding to support the development and implementation of programming specifically directed at student advisement. Reckhow and Haddad (2018) examined how the use of external funds can contribute to achieving institutional goals and objectives in academic advisement and intervention as student success mechanisms. The efficacy of such purpose-driven work offers tangible benefits to the students in their perceptions of higher education and their personal experience throughout their academic career. Institutions who invest in robust academic advisement programming are more likely to produce student graduates who are readily prepared to contribute to their field of employment (McIntosh et al., 2021).

Career and Transition Services

Career and transition services represent a value-added proposition for students, designed to support internship placement, post-graduation employment assistance, and student transfer facilitation between institutions (Okolie et al., 2020). Career and transition service personnel play a role in preparing students for successful transition into the workforce and include resume writing, conducting a lead search, interview preparation, and dress for success closet-free clothing attire availability (Bradley et al., 2021). Additionally, these same personnel are often tasked with acting as a conduit, linking institutional academic programs in the facilitation of incoming student transfer degree continuation. Such relationships between institutions are particularly important when it comes to two-year community colleges, technical colleges, and

their four-year counterparts as a significant portion of junior college student graduates pursue a four year degree (Wickersham, 2020).

As part of the educational experience, degree programs are structured to include field placement requirements to graduate. Internships, residencies, and apprenticeships all offer experiential learning opportunities eligible for credit in a degree program. Internships are developed as a result of partnerships with industry where temporary positions are structured to offer students-controlled exposure to a breadth of experiences and duties students, as graduates, could later expect to encounter in the workforce (Thelenwood et al., 2020). Hora (2020) noted students who experience internships are more likely to complete their degree program and attain related employment following graduation as compared to students who did not participate in such enrichment activities regardless of their requirement status in their respective degree program.

Typical in healthcare-related degree programs, residencies place students in what is structured as a long-term temporary position embedding them in the field within their area of educational focus (Frye, 2020). Through this concentrated exposure, students can attain significant exposure to experiential learning pertinent to their degree. Skills and competencies in these residency placements are assessed and evaluated by program faculty and supervising medical staff who are partnered with the student's sponsoring institution of higher education (Jingyi et al., 2023). Successful completion of the residency necessitates students develop mastery of basic skill set competencies unique to their field of study and subsequent intended practice.

While apprenticeships can take on a variety of forms depending on the type of industry and partnership structure, apprenticeships in higher education embody the epitome of active

collaboration between industry, higher education, governmental departments of labor, and also organized labor (Voeller, 2022). Under the supervision of career and transition services departments, apprenticeship program students can participate in experiential learning, offering monetary compensation as they work through the placement. As students progress through mastery of predetermined levels of skillsets, they can earn progressive titling ranging from novice, to journeyman, to master. In gaining these titles, students become eligible for degree credit, or credit for prior learning. As part of higher education-sponsored apprenticeship programs, apprentices actively maintain their status as students by continuing their classroom degree program outside of working hours (Evans & Cloutier, 2023).

As a central tenant of field placement, experiential learning is an invaluable component of any degree program for students endeavoring to enter a skill intensive career field. Beyond basic skill set mastery, students are positioned to cultivate relationships with professionals as they are mentored throughout the learning process. This network of contacts can play a key role in leading to future placements as well as post-graduation employment attainment (Okolie et al., 2021). Such development outside of the classroom takes a well-resourced career and transition department to ensure success. Given the added cost associated with staffing such departments, institutions of higher education can find these efforts to be cost prohibitive and therefore, need to rely on supplemental funding through grants to offset costs and ensure continuation into the future (Ehrenberg, 2012).

Childcare

Access to affordable high-quality childcare represents a significant challenge for parents endeavoring to pursue a degree in higher education. Affordability, or lack thereof, can influence a parent student's decision to take a reduced course load or potentially balk at enrolling in school

altogether. The scarcity of childcare in higher education represents a legitimate obstacle for parent students as merely 15% of colleges reported offering on-campus childcare for students in 2019 (Ryberg et al., 2021). In recognizing the barrier childcare accessibility represents to parents, higher education, as an industry, has taken on offering childcare services aligning with their student body scheduling needs. Public institutions outperformed the national trend, however with 49% of four-year institutions and 38% of two-year colleges affirming the availability of childcare services on campus in varying capacities (Ryberg et al., 2021).

In functioning as a childcare provider, institutions of higher education operate outside of their traditional area of expertise and are faced with the challenges incumbent upon childcare service conveyance including accreditation, staffing, facilities operations, and affordability (Morais et al., 2021). State and federal regulations must be adhered to attain and maintain the licensure required to operate a childcare facility. Specialized personnel who are uniquely credentialed to oversee a childcare operation must be sought out, hired, and retained on staff (Buchner et al., 2023). From a structural standpoint, the facility must meet square footage requirements and feature age-segregated spaces uniquely furnished to administer to its respective child population segment subset.

To satisfy all of these costly requirements associated with rendering high-quality childcare, institutions must find a way to maintain affordability to ensure childcare remains accessible to their student body (Diego-Medrano & Salazar, 2021). Instead of passing operating expenses directly on to students, innovative financial models have been developed, including utilization of supplemental external funding. Grant funding attainment represents an ideal means to cover a number of childcare programmatic expenses including personnel, center supplies, room equipment, child nutrition, facilities renovation, and subsidy of child enrollment. Through

grant subsidization, institutions can offer childcare at a greatly reduced cost to support existing students and entice prospective students to enroll. The United States Education Department (USDOE) offers a popular, yet competitive, grant to support childcare availability in higher education through its Child Care Access Means Parents In School (CCAMPIS) program. With over $80 million in annual funding, the USDOE made over 301 financial awards in 2023, with individual institutional awards averaging $273,338. At this level, the program is limited to supporting a small fraction of student parents who need childcare support across the country (Lieberman, 2023).

Student perception of self-empowerment comes as students are enabled to enroll in a program and persevere to completion. When student parents have access to affordable and reliable childcare, they can focus more effectively on their academic responsibilities both inside and outside of the classroom (Williams et al., 2022). An enhanced level of focus results in improved retention and graduation rates. Research conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) found student parents who utilize subsidized childcare services have a higher likelihood of persisting and completing their degrees (Busse & Gathmann, 2020). By fostering a supportive atmosphere with subsidized childcare, institutions can increase student retention and contribute to the growing size and academic success of their student-parent population.

In terms of gender-based participation, subsidizing childcare in higher education is particularly essential for promoting equality among genders and increasing diversity among the student population (Busse & Gathmann, 2020). Mothers often face greater challenges in balancing family responsibilities and educational pursuits than their male father counterparts. By offering subsidized childcare, institutions can actively address gender disparities in their student

population while supporting the academic aspirations of mothers in becoming non-traditional student parents. College degree attainment by single parents has been demonstrated to significantly decrease the chances that such parents may need to rely on social welfare support to raise their family.

Housing

The landscape of higher education has evolved significantly in recent years as student body populations have dwindled. Institutions have turned to a progressively more diverse population group to maintain minimal enrollment levels necessary for survival by leveraging unconventional assets such as student housing. In broadening the appeal of higher education to the masses, institutions have had to identify barriers to entry and enact strategies to overcome them. To address the breadth of student needs, housing insecurity has presented as one of the most influential reasons why a prospective student may decide against enrollment, or an existing student may have to drop out of their degree program (Broton, 2019). Such an emerging trend in student demographics highlights the vital role housing plays in accommodating the complex needs and aspirations of nontraditional learners and those from economically diverse backgrounds.

To welcome students from diverse backgrounds, some institutions of higher education acknowledge the value of leveraging housing as a tool capable of creating and fostering an inclusive, supportive, and enriching environment that promotes academic success, personal growth, and social integration (Karlin & Martin, 2020). With nontraditional students encompassing individuals from diverse backgrounds, housing plays a crucial role in providing a context for belonging. The provision of needs-appropriate housing becomes imperative to ensure individuals can readily participate in their educational journey and maximize the benefit of

support systems and accommodations available to them as students. Nontraditional students often require flexible housing options, such as accommodations catering to their unique work schedules and personal responsibilities (Chassman et al., 2020). On-campus housing can be structured to meet these diverse needs by providing family-friendly amenities, quiet study spaces, and close proximity to childcare facilities to enable engagement in both academic and extracurricular activities.

As a broad category, those who classify as economically diverse students, particularly those who come from low-income households or face financial constraints, often encounter barriers involving finances when pursuing degrees. Crutchfield et al. (2020) explained for these students, affordable and accessible housing is more than a mere convenience; instead, is a central determinant of their ability to participate in higher education. The provision of housing reduces financial stress, and potentially enables students to refocus their energy on studies and engage in campus life. When assigning the residencies of these students, placement close to campus can reduce other indirect costs associated with pursuing an education in transportation, time, and effort making the prospect of enrollment and continuation significantly more viable (Revington et al., 2020).

Housing structured to meet the needs of nontraditional students and those from economically diverse backgrounds can integrate these populations not only with themselves, but with each other and the greater community (Broton, 2021). With these student population subsets all having faced challenges in overcoming adversity, a support network can strengthen their self-confidence, while mitigating feelings of isolation. Shared experiences and interactions in communal spaces can enrich the development of valuable support networks for students. Beyond the value of cultivating the development of support networks for student population subsets,

communal housing enriches the environment as a host for cross-disciplinary collaboration
(Canabate et al., 2020). Through the student's lived experience of coexistence, community
members gain valuable skillsets for the workforce as they learn to recognize and navigate
differences when working with others to achieve a common goal in achieving individual
academic success.

While housing can function as a substantial asset to attract and retain a diverse student
population, it also brings with it sizable operating costs. Institutions of higher education often
rely on external funding from both the public and private sectors to make the facilitation of
housing possible (Terrile, 2022). In considering the lived experiences of those who participate in
student housing, institutions must look beyond the traditional brick-and-mortar costs of housing
and integrate wrap around services. Students who perceive a sense of safety and inclusion are
significantly more likely to persevere to degree completion. Grant funding directed at student
support services including, but not limited to housing, can contribute significantly to making
these services possible.

Food Pantry

Education serves as a crucial social determinant of individual health and provides various
economic and psychological benefits throughout one's life. The federal government and states
have enacted student aid programs designed to significantly enhance the accessibility of higher
education over the past five decades (Laska et al., 2021). Consequently, the demographic
composition of the higher education student body has undergone significant changes within
higher enrollment of low-income, first-generation, and ethnic minority students than ever before
(Weaver et al., 2020).

With this shift in the socioeconomic status of the student body composition, new challenges have emerged to ensure student needs are supported as they pursue a postsecondary education. Among the shifting needs, food scarcity has presented as one of the common and pressing obstacles faced by students of lesser means (Martinez et al., 2021). Numerous poor health and academic outcomes have been associated with this shortcoming. In these instances, food insecurity has been demonstrated to hinder student achievement and undermine their abilities to access resources intended to reduce health disparities.

Students faced with difficulty satisfying basic survival needs such as food security are particularly susceptible to dropout and degree pursuit abandonment. Contributing factors to basic survival needs, such as food insecurity, go beyond physical health alone and render a reduced individual mental health status. When faced with food scarcity, students are more susceptible to the onset of depression, anxiety, and a loss of personal hope (DeBate et al., 2021). Authors DeBate et al. (2021) concluded there is a correlation in those who self-reported as suffering from poor mental health were demonstrated to perform at reduced academic levels as compared to their peers who self-reported as being mentally healthy.

With the close relationships between food security, mental health, and academic standing, the need for food security intervention represents an opportunity to not only help individual students, but to minimize the chance of withdrawal from school (Raskind et al., 2019). As a practical means of intervention, the establishment of campus food pantries offer an opportunity to administer directly to the need for food security in the student body. From a student experience standpoint, receiving free meals and groceries in a dignified manner instills a sense of hope and a feeling of self-empowerment as they are able to refocus their efforts on academic pursuits instead of meeting basic survival needs (Haskett & Majumder, 2020). With

offering food pantry services, institutions of higher education must find ways to finance this crucial auxiliary support service. Supplemental funding, by way of establishing partnerships and attainment of grant funding awards, presents a unique opportunity to cover costs associated with food pantry operation, including staffing, storage equipment, packaging, delivery systems, and food goods without impacting budgetary lines.

Tutoring

Tutoring services in higher education play an important role in higher education in shaping the academic journey of students. As institutions attempt to offer comprehensive support for diverse learning styles and needs, tutoring services have emerged as an invaluable resource (Dawson et al., 2021). Tutoring provides a means of supplemental instruction that can have a significant impact on student academic outcomes. Academic performance can be an influential factor in a student's decision on whether to persist or drop out of a degree program (Pascoe & Hetrick, 2019); thus, tutoring may help students to persist in higher education.

In rendering instruction outside of a traditional classroom setting, a tutoring center offers the benefit of providing individualized academic interventions. Students can partner with a tutor with whom they can collaborate with on a routine basis through scheduling (Mendoza & Kerl, 2021). Tutors are able to personalize their instructional approach to address specific needs and learning gaps as they become familiar with the student's learning style. Personalized attention from the tutor may enhance the student comprehension and mastery of the subject matter, all while working through the course at their own pace (Walker, 2020). Such acquired self-confidence in their abilities may translate into improved academic performance as a deeper understanding of the material is gained.

Through an extended period spent availing themselves of tutoring resources, students unknowingly develop a sense of independence (Elmi, 2020). While tutors provide essential guidance, such individualized instruction includes an emphasis on self-reliance and independent learning. During sessions, tutors encourage students to ask questions, engage in active discussions, and work through solutions on their own. A result of this process can be had in students developing problem-solving skills and a sense of autonomy in their studies. As students become increasingly independent, they develop confidence to believe in themselves and to possess the ability to ask questions and utilize constructive feedback. Through this collective effort, students gain a better grasp of difficult coursework, they develop self-confidence. A newfound confidence may transcend the academic domain and positively affect other aspects of the student's life and contribute to a positive perception of a lived experience as a foundational element of their degree program (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020).

A final primary benefit of tutoring is to foster meaningful peer connections. Beyond individualized instruction, tutoring services can involve peer-to-peer interactions potentially cultivating substantial relationships among the student body. In some instances, fellow students can be enlisted as tutors for other students if they are proficient in a specific subject. These peer tutors offer academic assistance and may role how to successfully navigated the same coursework (Yale, 2020). As a role model, these relationships present a unique opportunity to provide mentorship, encourage collaboration, and promote a sense of camaraderie among students. Developing a sense of such community is seen as critically important in particularly complex degree programs where there is a traditionally high dropout rate, such as in higher education health sciences (Coman et al., 2020).

As institutions offer this universal resource, tutoring can underscore a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility among its student body (Armellini et al., 2021). Tutoring is available to students from diverse backgrounds to ensure equal access to academic support. Beyond accommodating socioeconomic diversity, tutoring provides a way to accommodate individualized needs and preferences within the student body. As an accompaniment to offering this essential, value-added student support service, institutions utilize a variety of means to pay for this labor-intensive support. Separate from tuition, supplemental funding is often available to subsidize such academic interventions by way of grant funding awards for projects designed to provide academic instruction outside of the classroom. Institutions of higher education are able to provide students with a positive lived experience both inside and outside of the classroom by offering support services such as tutoring to overcome difficulties encountered with learning.

Veteran Services

Faced with declining enrollment numbers from historically reliable mainstream sources of traditional students, institutions of higher education have been forced to pivot toward offering services designed to cater to unique populations, such as veterans, in an effort to appeal to the masses. As a focal point of this effort, active duty, reservists, and retired veterans represent a readily available source to attract enrollment (Cable et al., 2021). Veterans possess a unique ability to self-fund enrollment in higher education through the use of individually dedicated funds from the federal government from the G.I. Bill. Under the provisions of this initiative, each veteran who was honorably discharged becomes eligible for a free government-sponsored college education (Ghosh et al., 2020). The symbolic relationship present between institutions of higher education and veterans not only expands access to higher education within the armed

services but also underscores the potential for a mutually beneficial collaboration within the context of postsecondary education.

While attracting a student population who comes equipped with a government-funded subsidy to self-pay for their education may seem like a boon for higher education, veterans may require extensive support to ensure their success. Veterans entering higher education often face a significant cultural and social challenge in transitioning into an educational environment (Barmak et al., 2021). To effectively support a veteran student population, host institutions must employ unique strategies to effectively bridge these potential gaps in support to ease the transition. As a result, offices of veteran services are becoming ever more common across higher education. Leading up to enrollment, veteran services act as an advocate for veterans throughout the application process to ensure veterans receive the benefits they are entitled to and help them navigate bureaucratic processes (Barmak et al., 2021). Veteran services provide basic services, including orientation, peer mentorship, and support network development programs, enabling veterans to connect with fellow veteran students who may better understand their backgrounds and experiences than non-veteran students. In facilitating connections through veteran services, institutions of higher education are able to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion within the community are all essential components for a positive student experience (Briton, 2021).

As a backdrop to supporting the transition into student life, veteran services can act as a conduit for identifying individual mental health needs and linking them to resources available on campus (Perkins et al., 2020). Individual counseling and group therapy tailored to cater to their unique backgrounds and experiences plays a critical role in instilling a sense of stability. Through active treatment, counseling, and group therapy can help veterans manage stress, cope with trauma, and navigate personal challenges in a communal setting (Stevenson, 2020). A focus

on mental health outcomes may help ensure veterans are able to remain fully engaged in progressing through their education successfully.

Beyond socio-emotional support, veteran students may benefit academically from tailored academic support and advisement. Such comprehensive efforts include specialized tutoring, study skills workshops, course planning, and advisement in navigating degree requirements. Through the integration of support services into the veteran student experience, students gain self-confidence and are more likely to be successful when faced with adversity during their academic pursuits (Barry, 2021). In concert with academic advisement, veteran services can continually prepare veterans to transition into the workforce following graduation (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2021). Key milestones supporting societal integration can be achieved through career advisement and guidance, with student veterans being positioned to attain post-graduation employment related to their field of study.

All veteran service resources require continual advocacy and support to be possible. Developing the student experience and ensuring it is a particularly positive one for the veteran student population subset necessitates institutions of higher education must use veteran services as a means to leverage the collective value of existing student support services their campuses have to offer (Buzzetta et al., 2020). Affording these cost-intensive personnel-dependent services requires institutions to rely on a variety of sources to finance such targeted programming. In smaller institutions, tuition alone is often insufficient to pay for student support auxiliary services in their entirety (Murakami, 2020). For these institutions, external funding sources, particularly by way of grant awards, can play a key role in bridging this gap and ensuring a plethora of services stand readily available to student veterans, thus enhancing their individual experiences as academics in a higher education setting.

Academic Grant Utilization

Grant funding in higher education, in its most traditional form, is used as a means to support the attainment and dissemination of knowledge. In an article focused on the academic application of grants, Rasmussen (2022) explained how, academically, grants are used to initiate, expand, and sustain research and dissemination of its findings through academic programming. In the classroom, student success plays a necessary role in ascertaining the extent instructional pedagogy was successful in bringing about student learning achievement. Haddad (2021) explained how crucial the presence of competitive grant making has been in the expansion of academic programming in emerging fields through classroom instruction and experiential learning.

Performance-based benchmarking, in this capacity, becomes complicated as project administration are tasked with developing appropriate quantifiable milestones and used ultimately in the assessment and evaluation of program success (Haddad, 2021). Lacking from Haddad's work is an acknowledgment of the usefulness of comparing conventional evaluation methods to assess programmatic efficacy through assignment grades, course passage rates, overall grade point averages, and program degree attainment rates against the student perceptions of lived experiences from within these programs (Weatherton & Schussler, 2021). All of these provide a ready means of enhanced understanding structured to shed light on desired outcomes as prescribed in comprehensive postsecondary program curriculums.

Experiential Learning

Classroom-based experiential learning plays an important role in higher education healthcare degree programs. Experiential learning pedagogy integrates controlled practical experiences with applied theoretical knowledge. Prior to being eligible for placement in the field

for embedded supervised instruction, students must demonstrate proficiency in baseline skillset competencies specific to their field of study (Adewuyi et al., 2022). In this capacity, institutions of higher education are responsible for furnishing classrooms with the costly instructional equipment, supplies, materials, and technology necessary to facilitate simulation-based learning scenarios (Williams et al., 2021).

The importance of experiential learning in healthcare curriculums is rooted in a fundamental need to prepare students to function professionally in real-world healthcare settings, including community health centers, assisted living facilities, clinics, and hospitals. Skills taught in the classroom are refined through field placement in embedded observation, internships, precepting, and clinical rotations where students can apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations (Robichaux et al., 2022). Supervised, active participation provides a controlled setting to safely develop critical thinking skills, triage ability, and industry-standard communication techniques (Ocaktan et al., 2020). Additionally, this hands-on experience also affords students an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of providing patient care professionally following graduation.

As part of classroom instruction, simulations are routinely executed by students to prepare them for scenarios they may experience in practice. Research has demonstrated the numerous benefits of students being subjected to vigorous classroom-based experiential learning instruction prior to supervised field placement. Sutherland et al. (2021) investigated the impact of experiential learning on nursing student-skillset-core competency attainment. The study revealed students who were subjected to classroom-based experiential learning instruction demonstrated higher levels of clinical competence than their peers who did not. The findings

highlight the value of hands-on educational experiences as a means to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Beyond clinical skillset competency development, experiential learning in healthcare fosters other indirect essential competencies, including interprofessional collaboration, familiarity with industry-standard communication protocols, report development mastery, enhanced clinical situational awareness, and instillation of personal soft skills (Sutherland et al., 2021). Through active collaboration and interactions with diverse patient populations, students gain a deeper appreciation of the importance of teamwork, effective communication, and patient empathy in providing culturally sensitive care. These experiences collectively contribute to the development of an effective, well-rounded healthcare professional capable of providing patient-centered care in an increasingly diverse society (Ocaktan et al., 2020).

Affording Experiential Learning

The significant cost associated with the offering of experiential learning in higher education presents a challenge for both institutions and students. Educational activities, including classroom simulations, clinical placements, active research conduction, and internship placement, while important, all cost significantly more to facilitate than traditional classroom lecture-based format instruction. These activities typically require additional resources and funding support beyond routine academic expenses (Sessions et al., 2020). The need for these resources and their potential impact on degree completion time contribute to the financial burden. Implementation of strategic planning, utilization of external funding sources, and collaborative efforts overall make it possible to mitigate these challenges and provide affordable experiential learning opportunities to students.

Commonplace in the conveyance of experiential learning programmatic activity is an especially high need for institutional resource and infrastructure support. To remain current with industry standards, institutions must continually invest in state-of-the-art laboratories, simulation centers, technology, and equipment to facilitate experiential learning opportunities (Williams et al., 2021). Such facilities come with an associated high cost to establish and maintain, causing additional strain on already tight institutional budgets. As an accompaniment to physical costs, programmatic costs can necessitate the added expense of specialized personnel such as expert faculty, clinical supervisors, and mentors who are needed to provide oversight and guidance during experiential learning activities (Arrojas, 2023).

Beyond the costs associated with classroom-based experiential learning, logistical expenses represent a category that can be considerable. An example of this can be had in study abroad programs burdened with travel, accommodation, and insurance costs. Clinical placements and internships, depending on location, can require travel, housing, and background investigation expenses (Robichaux et al., 2022). Given the elective nature of expenses such as these, institutions typically pass these on to students, potentially amounting to a barrier to entry, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with limited financial resources. In addition to the external expenses, the duration and intensity of experiential learning required can escalate costs. Commonplace in healthcare degree programs is a requirement for students take breaks from coursework to participate in experiential learning, potentially extending the student's time to degree completion and, subsequently, their tuition (Witteveen & Attewell, 2019). Additionally, not all experiential learning opportunities are paid, despite requiring a significant investment of time on the part of the student, thus representing an opportunity cost, given these can occur in place of paid placements.

To manage the high cost of financing experiential learning, institutional administration can explore multiple strategies (Bar-on et al., 2013). First, institutions are able to seek supplemental funding from external sources such as through grants, industry partnerships, and philanthropic organization donations to subsidize the development and maintenance of learning resources. Such arrangements enable institutions to pass on the savings to students by offering more affordable experiential opportunities. Second, institutions can choose to participate in and implement financial aid programs specifically designed to target students who engage in costly experiential learning activities (Knox, 2019) serving as a means for support to be offered to students offsetting costs associated with experiential learning include scholarships, grants, or work-study programs. Lastly, collaboration with local government can play a role in directing public funds to reduce experiential learning costs. Collectively, all of these methods can play a role in ensuring students are afforded the best possible educational experiences at the lowest possible cost. Doing so eliminates cost-prohibitive barriers to entry potentially deterring prospective students from enrolling, in programming.

Quantifiable Success

Higher education grant program efficacy can be demonstrated through a number of capacities. Student success outcomes present one of the most readily available and identifiable means through where deliverables can be quantified (Alyahyan & Dustegor, 2020). Student success outcomes are unique as they can be assessed individually or on a group basis. Additionally, the timeframe during when they are examined can vary as they can be assessed instantly in a singular fashion or multiple times as part of a historical analysis. As Evans et al. (2020) explained with such variability, student success outcomes offer an opportunity for

researchers to collect data-rich information where substantial conclusions can be drawn in assessing efficacy.

Objective quantification of outcomes presents a significant challenge when assessing programmatic successes and failures, underscoring the importance of developing a qualitative understanding of student perceptions of lived experiences with grant funding. Grant program developers must strike a balance between creating projects whose outcomes can be measured straightforwardly while not undercutting the need for sophistication in the data capable of contributing to a comprehensive understanding. Flexibility is key when preparing for unanticipated circumstances and having a fluid program in the face of adversity (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). Complicated grant programs requiring benchmark achievement oversight often lack comprehensive evaluation, leading to the presence of considerable gaps in actionable findings. This is, in part, due to evaluators shying away from initiating inherently complex, multifaceted evaluations due to timeliness, institutional and organizational differences, and the personal preferences of evaluators (Carugi & Bryant, 2020). Consequently, effective assessment based on documented outcomes becomes impossible, lessening the ability of program administrators to identify, separate, and act upon opportunities for potentially impactful changes within the student journey.

Qualitative Success

The attainment of quantifiable student success benchmarks readily provides a universal metric to assess outcomes against and monitor project progress. Equally important to successful outcome obtainment is the subsequent development of a comprehensive understanding and establishment of the full context from where the information was derived (Alyahyan & Dustegor, 2020). Doing so enables the project leadership to identify lessons learned and apply them to

future endeavors. To obtain such fluency with the information, a qualitative evaluation must be relied upon as the ultimate means where results are studied, themes are identified, and findings are concluded. Collectively, this such critical self-evaluation plays a crucial role in extracting valuable lessons from the information which can then be applied to shape and enhance future endeavors intended to contribute to student success outcomes.

Qualitatively, much can be had in understanding the full context from the derived information. Examining unique characteristics and challenges surrounding the circumstances of the student's lived experience, researchers can better identify specific goals and outcomes to be considered in the future (Weatherton & Schussler, 2021). An in-depth understanding of informational content enables a more nuanced evaluation capturing the complexities present, which may otherwise be overlooked. In this sense, the exploration of unintended consequences and unforeseen circumstances associated with grant utilization becomes possible. Stated goals and objectives can be compared against actual first-hand accounts of student perspectives. The open-ended analysis typical of quantitative evaluation plays an invaluable role in contributing to findings development. By identifying and investigating unanticipated outcomes, evaluators can uncover innovative practices, unintended benefits, and challenges brought about by the grant program as experienced by students (Harrison et al., 2020). Application of such findings can prove invaluable when planning the continuation and potential expansion of such programmatic efforts on the part of the institution.

Ultimately, qualitative evaluation-based findings play a crucial role in shaping informed decisions as they relate to the utilization of grant funding to support student success outcomes. The rich data collected through qualitative methodology offers valuable insights going beyond the surface and provide meaning behind information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitatively

enhanced understanding gained as a result of contextual analysis offers perspective on project outcomes, student perceptions, transformative experiences, and unintended consequences associated with project work. When properly applied, these learned lessons can be used to maximize the success of future grant funding investment in ensuring students are placed in the best possible learning environment.

Grant Funding Lifespan

The grant funding lifespan typically encompasses several years originating from the time of need identification through the point of program closure and after-action reporting (Koen, 2020). Funding sources in higher education require a logical process leading to achievable outcomes, with student success maintained as a focal point in projects. It is incumbent upon researchers to develop student-centric projects, ultimately enhancing existing or initiating new assets seen as directly aiding the student journey (Facchini et al., 2021). Project variability, lifespans and milestone deliverable sequencing can be vastly different from one grant program to the next. With such inconsistency in the lifespan duration, the importance of outcome attainment measurement and the perceived usefulness of such efforts remains paramount in ensuring the efficacy of future project work.

From a funding standpoint, careful development of the project's conclusion is as important as the structuring of its initial implementation. Proposals must provide clearly defined benchmarks as steps contributing to a logical progression toward attaining student success outcomes (Green, 2021). Dinov (2020) explained how effective project benchmarking correlates with effective program assessment and evaluation. The grant funding lifespan completes its cycle when conclusions drawn from project assessment and evaluation are then utilized for continual improvement. Continual improvement can occur in the capacity of a funding making refinements

to guidelines included in the issuance of future Request For Proposals (RFP), or with a grantee adjusting project structuring as to maximize the positive effect of an overall grant investment impact (Lamia et al., 2021). Once complete, this circular logic can be reapplied as institutions of higher education seek to continually improve their programs by studying cause and effect as demonstrated in their own evaluation.

Summary

The utilization of grant funding in higher education is a practice dating back to the infancy of postsecondary education, where donors made monetary contributions with stipulated outcomes. Today, the system of external funding support has evolved to include federal, state, and private foundations regularly making grant investments in higher education. These restricted funds are used for a variety of applications, including enrollment subsidization, institutional sustainment, ensuring student success outcomes, and goal-oriented program creation, all with intended outcomes and stated deliverables. In relying on grant funding to administer to student needs directly related to outcomes, evaluating results against intended deliverables can present a challenge in assessing program efficacy. Using student involvement theory to attain a deeper understanding of the topic, the reviewed literature assessed grant funding throughout its lifespan, highlighting an absence of uniform evaluative structure, scrutiny, and explanation, thus constituting a gap in the literature, and necessitating research for a more comprehensive understanding of student perceptions of lived experiences in grant funding. By investigating this void more thoroughly, grantors and grantees alike may benefit from a better understanding of best practices in program development and how to effectively benchmark success for the purposes of evaluation. Additionally, the body of knowledge will be expanded pertaining to student perception of lived experiences in the context of student involvement theory. In doing so,

an intangible benefit can be had through a resulting enhanced understanding of student

perceptions leading to more effective future grant funding investments in the classroom by

institutional administration.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program at an RCC in WNY. Chapter three presents the research design of a qualitative study designed to better understand the connections between programmatic grant funding investments and student lived experiences in an RCC in WNY. Information outlining research questions, collection methodology, and the population sample are included. To enable future replication of the study, the procedures are extensively outlined. As with all qualitative studies, the researcher's positionality in relation to the interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions is discussed. Data collection methods, analysis, and data synthesis are included, along with the methods for establishing trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with details regarding the study's ethical considerations.

Research Design

Qualitative methodology, design, and processes are designed to facilitate a hermeneutical phenomenological study into the lived experiences with grant funding investment of nursing program students in a community college. A phenomenological design was most appropriate for this research since data was derived from the field of study within a particular perception of a shared experience to identify and understand the role perceptions of grant funding investment play in student success outcomes (van Manen, 2023). As a phenomenological study providing an understanding of perceptions of a funding system in a real-world context, descriptions of the programs and the roles of study participants were included to help contextualize and understand their experiences with grant funding investment.

The historical evolution of phenomenology provides a collective means to conduct an in-depth and substantial study of the perceptions of lived experiences of nursing program students. Following his initial deviation from classic phenomenological approaches, van Manen (2023) continued to address the need for a progressive interpretation and application of lived experiences as he emphasized the interconnectivity between six research activities as part of what is known as hermeneutical phenomenological research. These six activities carried out by researchers are known as (a) turn to the nature of lived experience, (b) investigate experiences as lived, (c) engage in hermeneutic phenomenological reflection, (d) engage in hermeneutic phenomenological writing, (e) maintain a robust and oriented relation, and (f) balance the research while exploring the parts of the whole (van Manen, 2023). Using these activities, a hermeneutical phenomenology can be aligned as a framework for exploring perceptions of lived experiences of students regarding grant funding in a nursing program through data collection, analysis, and theory development. The simultaneous utilization of multiple methods to identify and finalize conclusions in a hermeneutical phenomenology study, as presented by van Manen (2023), is consistent with insights offered by Poth et al. (2020), who acknowledged the effectiveness of multiple methods in phenomenological work.

A phenomenology research design represents the ideal approach for this dissertation research, given its focus on lived experiences and ability to identify themes leading to the development of subsequent findings (van Manen, 2023). As a phenomenological study, a hermeneutical design type represents a strong correlation to the work as the study was designed to provide a comprehensive interpretative evaluation of the motivations and contributing factors influencing occurrences within a specific situation. A hermeneutical phenomenology endeavored to uncover and interpret the perceptions of experiences involving grant funding investment in a

higher education nursing program. With data triangulated from interviews, focus groups, and artifacts, a detailed analysis of the findings was developed in this hermeneutical phenomenology research design (van Manen, 2023).

The study was designed to be qualitative as it contains data describing qualities and characteristics from multiple sources triangulated to provide an in-depth analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additional literature was included by the researcher related to grant funding utilization trends in higher education, its impact on student success outcomes overall, and associated lived experience perceptions by students. The identified gap in the literature may be narrowed through the development of data-driven findings and conclusions contributing to explanations directed at addressing the central research questions surrounding lived experience perceptions with grant funding investment of nursing program students. With the hermeneutical phenomenological study being conducted in a community college, information was gathered from student participants pertaining to personal experience with grant funding investment in the institution's nursing program. Using inductive reasoning, themes were developed from data gathered from the sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a strength of a qualitative study, the researcher served as the human instrument and sought to follow the data collection methods and provide and analysis of the data to offer insight into the study's overall context.

As a qualitative study utilizing a hermeneutical phenomenological design, the research contributed to addressing significant problems in higher education. With the variety of grants offered to higher education, a uniform understanding of perceptions of grant funding investment by those whom they are intended to support has been limited, leading to voids in the collection of valuable data to guide current and future funding decisions. With the need for grant funding investment in higher education growing, granters and grantees are forced to work in a way where

fundamental questions are going overlooked, such as "Do we fully understand the lived experiences of those who we intend to serve?" This question of programmatic understanding in higher education comes as a symptom of an imbalance between funding availability, utilization, and assessment where one cannot exist in a meaningful capacity without the other two being equally present (Goss, 2022).

Grant funding investment in higher education remains one of the most essential means of student success outcome support and is yet one of the least understood contributing factors (Sato et al., 2021). The impact of grant investment can be demonstrated across a broad spectrum given the variety of applications for where funding is utilized. Grants must be relied upon to bring about student success outcomes. A hermeneutical phenomenological study design offers a comprehensive understanding of how grant funding investment is perceived in the experiences of nursing program students. Such work offers a universal means of assessment can be broadly relied upon to validate findings and conclusions.

Research Questions

A central research question accompanied by three sub-questions served as the basis for this hermeneutical phenomenological study.

Central Research Question

What are the lived learning experiences made possible through grant funding investment of nursing program students at an RCC?

Sub-Question One

How are the learning experiences of grant funding perceived by students?

Sub-Question Two

What are the perceived student success outcomes from grant-funded instruction?

Sub-Question Three

What opportunities and resources do nursing students perceive as being a result of grant funding investment in their program?

<div align="center">Setting and Participants</div>

The section provides information regarding the setting and participants for the study. Insight into the logic contributing to subsequent in-depth analysis of geographic placement and an explanation of the institution chosen to host the study is offered. Beyond an explanation of the geographic setting of the host institution, the population subset, sampling technique, and sample size targeted to participate in the study are identified.

Site

The hermeneutical phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived experience perceptions with grant funding investment of nursing program students in a community college. The setting for the research was limited to studying students enrolled in nursing program at an RCC in WNY and member institute of the greater SUNY system with approximately 4,000 undergraduates and 50 degree and certificate programs (Escobar, 2022). The RCC serves a diverse student population including first-generation college students, non-traditional learners, and individuals from low-income backgrounds. In terms of socio-economic diversity, over 28% of this RCC'S student population self-classified as members of race/ethnicity minorities other than White. (Smith, 2022) The college's president controls the institution and is ultimately accountable to the SUNY board of trustees and chancellor. An institutional review board (IRB) is in place at the RCC to control access of the student population for research.

A unique quality this RCC offered as a host site for the study was the blended composition of its geographic service region of Western and Central Counties, with a combined

population of 251,844 residents containing over 22 rural townships and three urbanized

population centers in the suburban rural metros of Buffalo, NY (Bureau, 2022). Unofficially, the

region offered a significant number of students from neighboring South Central County,

comprised of 950,683 residents from across 25 townships and three urbanized population centers

of Buffalo, NY which is the second largest city in the state of New York outside of New York

City (Bureau, 2022).

Participants

A target of 12 to 15 participants were sought to participate through a purposeful sampling

of students noted to be actively enrolled in the nursing program to be studied and recognized as a

level sufficient to achieve saturation of the targeted population(Creswell & Poth, 2018). With the

RCC student population consisting of 60% female and 40% male, it proved to be conducive to

achieving a gender balance in the study sample population, with three, or 25% of the participants

identifying as male and nine, or 75% identifying as female. In this group, an even distribution

across genders in the sample size was studied (Smith, 2022), consistent with national

postsecondary gender demographic enrollment trends. Additionally, by including traditional

postsecondary learners, as well as a more randomized population subset in a variety of age

groups, the study represented an age range from 18 to 55.

While the institution has over 50 academic degrees and certificate programs, sampling

was limited to the nursing program. Of significance to the study, the nursing program was known

to actively receive grant funding investment and had received funding within the last two years,

sufficient to impact both first and second-year students, or potentially the entire student

population within the nursing program. It was determined by studying a sample size of 12

participants this number adequately represents, within the context of the phenomenological

study, the greater population who are actively involved in the nursing program at the host institution.

Recruitment Plan

For recruitment, a target of 12 to 15 participants were sought to participate in the study resulting in a sample size of 12. In developing a sample pool (N), solicitation was limited to the inclusion of students noted to be actively enrolled in the nursing program (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Recruitment is initiated with an email sonication sent directly to students requesting their voluntary participation in the study. Of the willing prospective respondents, selective sampling was utilized as a means to ensure participants constituted only actively enrolled students in the nursing program.

<div align="center">

Researcher Positionality

</div>

The section provides insight into this researcher's motivation for conducting the study, interpretive framework, and philosophical assumptions. Establishing transparency based on these items is necessary, given the researcher's perspective and own personal experience, all directly influence them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Subsequently, these influences are reflected in the interpretive framework and ontological, epistemological, and axiological philosophical assumptions of this section as they pertain to the study.

Interpretive Framework

For this study, the paradigm of pragmatism was used, given its unique ability to support the pursuit of answers to real-world questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). On this basis, pragmatism aligned well with the study's goal of exploring the perceptions of lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding in a community college. Multiple perspectives on personal experiences with programmatic grant funding investment were examined in assessing

this. Beyond supporting the exploration of student perceptions of lived experiences as part of the study, pragmatism supported combining multiple data collection methods as students in a single program were studied, findings identified, and substantive conclusions developed.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions provided insight into the composition behind the researcher's positionality on the study's topic and direction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of qualitative research, the researcher was responsible for identifying and openly acknowledging their own assumptions given the implications inherent in such positionality present throughout the research.

Ontological Assumption

An ontological assumption is one made by the researcher on the existence of reality and its characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the study, the researcher believed a single grant project can be experienced in multiple ways based on the subject relationship to the funding. To this end, data collection was structured to capture these perspectives from students through individual interviews, facilitation of a focus group, and evaluation of artifacts as presented by students. Data was triangulated and utilized in the identification of common themes among the participants about their perspectives on grant funding via these multiple methods of data collection. It was believed by the researcher, however, while there are multiple perspectives present, there was still one universal reality acting as an underlying unifier in grant funding utilization.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions establish a relationship between the researcher and the study as it relates to identifying knowledge and understanding the justification behind this

classification (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As part of this study, the research was conducted in a physical setting where grant-funded programmatic activity was carried out daily in a nursing program where it was experienced by students. Doing so enabled the researcher to attain fresh perspectives on recent relevant experiences by participants. By spending time conducting multiple interviews and holding focus group discussions, the researcher became more intimate with the factors influencing the research that may not otherwise be readily transparent.

Axiological Assumption

An axiological assumption discloses the values and beliefs of the researcher, which could otherwise be perceived as contributing to an inherent bias in the work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the interest of full disclosure, I state that I have made a career as a grant administrator in higher education and, at the time of the research, still served in this capacity. In this role, I maintain it affords me a unique perspective as a researcher trying to understand the perceived lived experiences with grant funding investment in higher education. Having familiarity with grant funding enhanced the acuity of my findings and conclusions drawn in the research, particularly as I bracketed my thoughts by memoing after interviews.

Researcher's Role

As a grant program administrator in higher education, I was able to empathize with and understand what participants offered as perspectives on their personal experiences as they related to nursing program grant funding utilization. Being experienced in writing grant proposals, onboarding awards, monitoring grant programs, and reporting on impact, I uniquely understood the grant funding lifespan process within higher education. Serving my community in such a capacity inspired me to want to learn more about what contributes to making a grant investment genuinely impactful in the lives of students. With this being the case, I acknowledged it was

possible my conclusions could be viewed as biased, given my employment is dependent mainly on the understood success of grant programs within my institution's funding portfolio.

As the human instrument working on a qualitative research study, the researcher undeniably impacts the collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Being the sole researcher in this hermeneutical phenomenological study, I conducted individual interviews, held focus group discussions, and documented artifacts. All work was conducted to broadly explore the lived experience perceptions with grant funding investment in nursing program students in a community college.

Procedures

The procedures section outlines the steps taken as deemed necessary to carry out the hermeneutical phenomenological study. The first step in this study was to attain IRB approval from LU (Appendix A) contingent on attaining permission from the RCC's IRB to conduct research on-site with nursing program students (Appendix B). Upon receiving permission from both institutions, the second step was to initiate outreach to potential research participants to participate. Out of the pool of respondents to the canvas request for participation (Appendix C), the third step was to select 12 to 15 participants via email provide consent forms (Appendix D) to be completed as a precondition to voluntarily attend individual interview sessions at a set date, time, and location on the RCC's campus. As an accompaniment to individual interviews and the second form of data collection, the fifth step was to invite participants to present a personal artifact from their program and explain its significance. Constituting the sixth step, participants were afforded an opportunity to conduct member checks of their recorded responses to ensure the validity of the raw data.

The seventh step was to conduct the third method of data collection through a focus group session with the individual interview study participants to attain potentially unintended findings resulting from the group dynamic (Yin, 2018). Similar to the individual interviews, as eighth step, participants were provided an opportunity to conduct member checks of their recorded responses. In step nine, using the information generated from individual interviews, the focus group, and artifacts, findings were combined into a single set of common themes. In triangulating the methodological outputs, findings from the individual interviews and focus groups were used to develop a context for conclusions drawn from the artifact analysis for the research overall (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Plan

In conducting a qualitative, hermeneutical phenomenological study into the lived experience perceptions with grant funding investment of nursing program students in a community college, interviewing, focus groups, and artifacts were utilized as methods of data collection (van Manen, 2023). Through this holistic approach designed to assess and evaluate the lived experiences of nursing program students in relation to grant funding investment, all research sought to answer the central research question and sub-questions. Given this exploration was based on students within a CTEA-classified nursing, allied, and physical health program in postsecondary education at a community college, this combination of data collection methods was deemed most appropriate.

Data collection was sequenced to initiate with semi-structured interviews, then a focus group discussion, and conclude with an analysis of artifacts presented by participants from both the interviews and focus group. Depending on participant preference, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students either in person or virtually over Zoom from the nursing program

being studied to assess their perceptions of lived experiences in the classroom where grant investments were made. A focus group comprised of program students was gathered to examine their collective perceptions in relation to lived experiences related to grant funding investments. Lastly, artifacts, as presented by students from both the interviews and focus group were analyzed for contextual meaning as they related to individual lived experiences from within the classroom.

Interviews

Critically important to the successful interpretation, understanding, and subsequent application of lived experience perceptions, individual interviewing was included as a data collection method. Interviewing enabled the researcher to obtain raw data and identify anomalies, test for understanding, and develop theories. Interviews contributed to story creation and contrast from the verification theory developed (Ababacar & Liu, 2020) that by its very nature, offered greater insight and clarity into the perspectives being evaluated.

Individual interviews were used to develop a personal rapport with participants in the study to help decipher the lived experiences of nursing program students (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). In addition to being interviewed, students were invited to present an artifact they brought with and to explain its personal relevance to their lived experience in the nursing program. A request to voluntarily bring artifacts was included in the solicitation to participate in the study outright. The sample population included program students from the nursing, allied, and physical health division's nursing program at the RCC. In terms of execution, following introductions, subjects were given an explanation of the research and its rationale. As part of the criterion, minors were excluded from the study. All participants were made aware that interviews and content produced from interviews would remain confidential. Pseudonyms were used for the

names to protect participant identities. Materials were stored behind a lock and key before it will ultimately be destroyed after six years, consistent with federal record retention duration standards.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about what you see as one of the most meaningful learning experiences you have had as a student in the nursing program. CRQ

2. Describe what you see as the role grant funding investment plays in higher education, particularly in your program. CRQ, SQ1

3. Explain both the positive or negative experiences of learning in your program. CRQ, SQ1, SQ3

4. Describe why you believe faculty instruction benefited or suffered from the utilization of grant funding investment in the classroom. SQ1, SQ2

5. Describe how you believe students could benefit from using grant funding in the program. SQ2, SQ3

6. Describe how your program has benefited from the utilization of grant funding. SQ1, SQ3

7. What do you believe are the long-term benefits of grant-funding investment mutually benefiting students and faculty in the nursing program? SQ1, SQ3

8. Describe how you would like to see grant funding used in your program differently in the future. SQ1, SQ2

9. Please share an example of a project in the nursing program that was funded by grants and explain how it influenced your learning experience. CRQ, SQ3

10. Describe how you think grant-funded research and projects in the nursing program contribute to the advancement of healthcare practices. CRQ, SQ2

11. Please elaborate on any challenges or barriers you have experienced as a student when it comes to implementing grant-funded programs within your nursing curriculum. SQ2, SQ3

12. Please describe what criteria should be considered when deciding how to invest future grant funds in the nursing program. SQ1, SQ2

13. Please share your thoughts on the impact sustainability of grant-funded projects in the nursing program and how they can have a positive impact beyond the initial investment. SQ1, SQ3

14. Please share any ethical considerations or potential conflicts of interest you think should be addressed when using grant funding in higher education. CRQ

15. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with grant funding utilization in higher education that we have not already discussed? CRQ

Focus Groups

As the second data collection method, the focus group method broadly posed questions to a group during open-ended discussion. The inclusion of a focus group discussion was deemed desirable given its ability to ask expansive follow-up questions whose inclusion is identified as necessary due to the individual interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Members of the focus group were chosen based on the shared common lived learning experiences in a nursing program subsidized by grant funding. On a group level, responses were sought to help round out and contextualize any oddities that had emerged from the data collected. Information derived from the focus group acted as a means to confirm and expand on patterns and themes revealed in the

analysis of initial data (Patton, 2015). The findings offered insight into the importance of the perceptions of lived experiences of nursing program students involved in the various facets of program grant funding utilization as they recognized and interpreted what was happening around them (Ouimet et al., 2004).

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe the role grant funding investment played in your academic experience? CRQ, SQ2

2. How has the inclusion of "hands-on instruction" using grant-funded equipment in the classroom aided your skills competency development? CRQ, SQ3

3. How has grant funding impacted the availability of resources and technology in your program, and how has this affected your education? CRQ, SQ3

4. What do you believe are the long-term benefits of grant-funded initiatives for both students and faculty in the nursing program? CRQ, SQ3

5. Explain the significance of having time to utilize classroom instructional equipment in relation to experiential learning outcomes? SQ2, SQ3

6. Discuss any collaborative efforts or partnerships between your nursing program and external organizations or institutions that have been enhanced by grant funding. CRQ, SQ3

7. Explain why you believe their teacher's expertise was important to rendering substantial instruction on classroom equipment? CRQ, SQ1

8. What benefits did students realize during field placements by entering into them with an existing competency in instrument-aided skillsets from the classroom? SQ2, SQ3

9. Recall a time when you encountered trouble passing a skills competency-based exam due to a lack of experience? SQ1, SQ3

10. What else would everyone like to add to our discussion concerning collective experiences with grant funding utilization in higher education that we have not already discussed? CRQ

Physical Artifacts

In participating in the study, subjects were invited to bring artifacts as an accompaniment to their individual interviews for presentation to the researcher. Physical artifacts, as provided by the student participants, represented a unique opportunity for students to influence the findings by presenting an artifact of personal significance (Edwards & I'Anson, 2020). Given the ability to add contextual layers to what learning meant to student participants from interviews and focus group discussions alike, artifacts were deemed to be an essential component for data collection. Central to the study and subsequent evaluation was attainment and review of artifacts as presented by the student interview and focus group participants at the research host site institution. A formal request was approved by the host institution's IRB to allow for solicitation of student participants to present artifacts during their interviews. Upon presentation of a particular artifact, students were asked to explain the artifact's context in their educational experience from within the nursing program. Inclusion of artifacts, as presented by program students offered a significant variable in the sourcing of data in there was no way for the researcher to predict what kind of items would be brought to be shared as artifacts.

The student's explanation of the artifact was digitally recorded with the interview, itself transcribed in its entirety by the researcher. The conversation was then hand-coded by the researcher to aid in the identification of underlying themes. Observations made were transcribed

and triangulated with the other data sourced from earlier interviews and the focus group. As an

accompaniment to anecdotal interviews and focus group content, student program artifacts

provided an additional layer of information on the record regarding the perceptions of lived

experiences of nursing program students in relation to grant funding investment in the classroom

(Wood et al., 2020). Conclusions were represented as findings reached as a result of the research

in the analysis and discussion.

Data Analysis

Using the information generated from individual interviews, the focus group, and

artifacts, findings were consolidated into a single set of common themes. To ensure the

trustworthiness of the research, triangulation, and member checking were integrated into the

methodology. In triangulating the methodological outputs, findings from the more subjective and

anecdotally based individual interviews and focus groups were used to establish a context for

conclusions drawn from the artifact analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through triangulating the

data, conclusions drawn from findings were corroborated by multiple sources substantiating

validity (Yin, 2018).

All interviews were digitally recorded using an internet-based interface in Zoom, with

interviewer observations noted on each response to ensure understanding of the conversational

context, otherwise known as memoing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure accuracy, each

interview was transcribed by the researcher who in the interest of privacy, protected the

individuals' identities by the use of pseudonyms. Responses will then be treated as raw data as

they are categorically organized by theme, representing the data for coding in the form of an

interpretation of the uncertainty inherently present (Midway, 2020). Coding was used to develop

an in-depth portrait of student experiences as part of a themes and coding table. Information was

organized using axial coding to establish similarities and differences in the data. Using a Venn diagram, the coding data results were presented graphically to provide a visual comparison of themes (Ho et al., 2021). Identifying and establishing themes was critically important to the analysis of interview data as the researcher endeavored to develop conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Focus group interviews were digitally recorded with the interviewer's observational notes taken for each response to ensure understanding of the proper context, otherwise known as memoing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure accuracy, transcriptions were developed from the session where in the interest of privacy, the individual's identities were protected by the use of pseudonyms. Using the interview transcriptions, hand coding was conducted to break down responses and identify themes by the researcher. Responses were organized into a matrix functioning as a themes and codes table designed to delineate individual responses as they pertained to specific questions. The matrix identified trends within the group responses to establish a consensus on agreement, dissent, non-response, or indifference on the subject's perspective of the stated questions (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Using the matrix, the researcher input responses into a Venn diagram to identify response patterns within the group in relation to each individual question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through charting, key findings from the focus group results were identified in a narrative analysis summary statement.

A compilation of interviews on presented artifacts was gathered and included in the research report. Responses were digitally recorded, transcribed, and then compared against the recording to ensure the accuracy of the data. Using the raw data, hand coding was conducted to aid in the researcher's conduction of a trend analysis. A bullet chart was used to graphically represent program artifacts against positive or negative perceptions of the student presenter

(Rodgers, 2021). Findings from this were used to help contextualize individual interview question responses, and more fully understand the focus group conversation. Ultimately, conclusions were compiled into a report summarizing progress against benchmarks in the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences of experiential learning made possible through grant funding investment.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness represents an intangible fundamental component of qualitative research. In qualitative research, trust was understood to be inherently present upon its substantiation and subsequent establishment by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an imperative fundamental component of research, trustworthiness was upheld through the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research. It was incumbent upon the researcher to implement the best practices and procedures necessary for the study to be recognized as trustworthy to the audience. Contributing factors to this include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility was an underlying component of research whose presence was taken in good faith on the part of the reader unless given reason to believe otherwise. Confidence in credibility allows the reader to accept the inferred presence of the published work's integrity and authenticity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The credibility of research findings was partially achieved through triangulation or research methods and peer debriefing. Triangulation occurred by including and comparing tangible documentation and transcription of subject statements made during individual interviews and focus groups and were reviewed for validation by participants.

Transferability

Transferability states remove outcomes can be achieved in alternative settings, separate from what is known to be present in the study. Transferability of this study was supported through a variety of validation strategies applicable to individual interviews, focus group interviews, and artifact study. In qualitative research, transferability was based on the inclusion of extensive detailed descriptions of the context, location, subjects, analysis, and trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A limitation of transferability exists since researchers can only create conditions for transferability but cannot guarantee success in replication by others.

Dependability

Dependability was a direct reference to data findings being consistent and duplicable in subsequent reproductions of the research work through a detailed description of the research procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Critically important to dependability was the reliability of sources used to develop research methodology in interviews, a focus group, and documentation. An additional layer of dependability was achieved by having an external entity review and analyze the data. An additional layer of dependability was achieved through the conduction of triangulation and member checks of collected data.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent the neutrality inherent in the findings from the research is upheld in the absence of inherent bias by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research methods such as triangulation, audit trails, and confirmability audits were all techniques used in this study to demonstrate confirmability. Through this combination of data auditing, other scholars are able to follow the process, evaluate its logic, compare it to research aims, and link it to findings (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Ethical Considerations

A variety of means can uphold ethical conduct throughout the course of the research project. Beginning with the attainment of IRB approval from Liberty University, IRB approval represents a foundational element in research ethics. IRB approval signified the interests of all stakeholders had been adequately respected and provisioned as part of their voluntary participation in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As part of IRB approval, informed consent was attained by all study participants to ensure concerns were addressed and information regarding the study was fully disclosed. Pseudonyms of the participant names and site location names were used to ensure confidentiality. Triangulation and member checks were used to increase the validity of data and ensure ethical standards were met. Collected data was digitized and saved to a password-protected external drive and was stowed in a locked cabinet when not in use. Permission to use sites for research, participant consent forms, predetermined record lifespan durations, and the custodial maintenance of such documentation by the researcher were all components included in the IRB approval.

Permissions

In compliance with published Liberty University (LU) IRB standards and the RCC's IRB, full approval was sought for site permission access and subsequent access to persons and documentation related to the study. In recognizing the presence of an IRB at both the sponsoring institution, LU, and at the proposed research site, conditional approval was requested from LU contingent on the RCC allowing for the research to be carried out on site. Information about the study was made available to the proposed host campus community before, during, and after research was conducted to ensure full disclosure and transparency.

Following IRB approval, the process for participant recruitment was initiated, constituted

by geographic sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Starting with an open solicitation posted on traditional announcement boards across the host institution's campus and in the weekly campus email notification system, nursing program students were invited to voluntarily participate in individual interviews and focus group conversations voluntarily. A sample size target of 12 to 15 participants was set, as a minimum of 12 were required to guarantee a sufficient number of subjects were included to contribute to the development of information-rich data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Likewise, a participant capacity limit of 15 subjects was set, given the limited likelihood of new information being discovered by numbers more than this saturation limit. If the initial pool of volunteers exceeded 15, the researcher was prepared to initiate a selection process to choose a sample size composed of males and females in proportion to the program's gender ratio of students.

Purposeful sampling was determined to be most conducive to the research, given the researcher's ability to solicit and select from those who voluntarily choose to participate in the study (Stratton, 2021). Prior to conducting individual interviews, participants were requested to complete an informed consent form. Once all consent forms had been completed and returned, a list of participants was finalized. After completing the individual interviews and focus group conversations, participants were allowed to review individual responses to confirm and ensure accuracy by way of member checks.

Summary

Chapter three provided an in-depth overview of data collection tools, procedures, and the research design to be utilized in the execution of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study. Data was collected through individual interviews, a focus group session, and an evaluation of presented artifacts. With the researcher serving as the human

instrument, information gained from these sources was coded, analyzed, and synthesized as part of the collective process of developing findings and conclusions. Participant confidentiality was part of ethical conduct and upheld to the highest of standards throughout the duration of the project. The trustworthiness of the research has been ensured by establishing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program in a rural community college in Western New York. The purpose of chapter four is to discuss participant perceptions, conceptualize themes using graphical representations, and evaluate the commonality of findings. This hermeneutical phenomenological study analyzed the experiences of 13 participants chosen from a pool of students actively enrolled in a nursing program. Participant descriptions are used as a basis for contextualizing raw data and information gained from the research. Study results derived from personal interviews, a focus group, and artifact collection are included in this chapter. Findings are graphically presented in a Venn diagram, matrix, and bullet chart and are then summarized in a narrative analysis as emerging themes, sub themes, and research questions are discussed. The charts are detailed in Appendix H.

Participants

The group of those who participated in the study consisted of 13 students, all of whom were actively enrolled in a nursing program at a rural community college. The 13 participants were representative of the western and central counties of New York State. Independent of the results, the gender composition of the participant group was three males and 10 females. Of the field of participants, one had to be excluded as they were unable to complete the study after only having participated in a personal interview. At the time of the study, all participants were actively enrolled in a nursing program and were currently engaged in classroom-based coursework. Included in chapter four is a brief overview of each participant. To protect the

confidentiality of participants, the names of the participant's school was excluded and

pseudonyms were randomly assigned that were in no way connected to their government name,

gender, or race.

Table 1

Student Participants

Student Participant	Semesters Enrolled	Program of Enrollment	Highest Degree Earned
Alfred	1	Nursing	Secondary
Amy	3	Nursing	Secondary
Ava	1	Nursing	Secondary
Barbara	4	Nursing	Masters (unrelated field)
Chantel	1	Nursing	Secondary
Christopher	3	Nursing	Secondary
Deborah	1	Nursing	Secondary
Emily	1	Nursing	Secondary
Lynn	1	Nursing	Secondary
Mary	3	Nursing	Secondary
Taylor Marie	3	Nursing	Secondary
Wayne	3	Nursing	Secondary

Alfred

Alfred is currently completing his first semester as a full-time student in the nursing program. Prior to enrollment, the highest level of education attained by Alfred was that of a secondary high school diploma with no previous experience or education in the medical field. As a nursing program student, Alfred had a notably positive learning experience and recognized the value of classroom instruction being supplemented by experiential learning in a laboratory setting, "Learning how to properly address a patient prior to using instrumentation to obtain readings for evaluation was very helpful. I can already see how I will use what I learned in the lab during practice."

Amy

Amy is a third-semester student in the nursing program who had only graduated high school prior to enrolling in college. Before beginning the program, Amy was not entirely certain she wanted to be a career nurse and looked to her instructors and educational experience overall to obtain insight into the field. Field experiences, in particular a shadowing experience with a provider whose practice collaborates in partnership with the program, proved to be influential for Amy. "I always thought my classroom learning was important, but the day I spent observing in a hospital really showed me why. It made me understand how what we learn in the classroom can save lives." Amy also acknowledged classroom simulations had contributed significantly to her becoming comfortable with the idea of practicing patient care as a career.

Ava

At the time of the study, Ava had been enrolled in the nursing program for a single semester and was admitted immediately into the nursing program after graduating high school, representing the highest level of education obtained prior to beginning college. As a student who

was entirely new to postsecondary education, Ava was not readily able to recognize the presence of grant funding investment in her program of study. An embodiment of this disconnect between investment and student perception can be had in Ava's observation where she offers the candid remark, "I guess I never knew that there was grants used in our classes. Even though the classes looked nice with everything in them, I just assumed the school had paid for it all."

Barbara

As a student in her fourth semester of the nursing program, Barbara was unique as she was a non-traditional adult learner. As a student more senior than her peers, Barbara had a broadened worldly perspective seemingly influenced by her previous career and master's level education previously obtained in an unrelated field of study. "Coming into nursing, I had no illusions things would be different than what I was used to and that I would have much I needed to quickly learn," said Barbara. "Having the time and ability to practice skills in the classrooms and labs has been huge for me. Thanks to the program, I have been able to line up some great work for after I graduate that I am excited about," Barbara further elaborated. Barbara's observations provide a unique window of insight into the significance of the skill set obtained from within the classroom in finding gainful employment by healthcare employers who place a premium on day one competencies in their staff.

Chantel

At the time of the study, Chantel was in the process of completing her first year of study as a student in the nursing program. Obtainment of a high school diploma was the highest level of education achieved for Chantel prior to enrolling in college. Studying nursing has taken on a deeply personal meaning to Chantel given her family's history with medicine and perceptions of her destiny to join the profession. As a student, Chantel was grateful to the program for affording

her learning opportunities, which otherwise may not have been possible without external intervention. Chantel offered, "Becoming a nurse has meant everything in the world to me. Learning to check patients and understand their health signs made me think of what it was like growing up and watching my grandmother be taken care of." Such a statement indicates the student was able to make a connection between learned skill set attainment and the substantial amount of instruction associated with its conveyance.

Christopher

Nearing completion of a third semester in the nursing program, Christopher saw his education as a work in progress. Having only earned up to a high school diploma prior to enrolling in the nursing program, Christopher has participated in the degree program with an open mind and saw value in everything he learned. An asset unique to the program Christopher was particularly grateful for was the ability to participate in formalized field placements with healthcare industry program partners. "Visiting my grandparents in a nursing home was a completely different experience for me than precepting in a sub-acute rehab facility; which I learned, are not one in the same."

Deborah

As a first-semester student in the nursing program, Deborah acknowledged having already learned a lot going beyond her high school education. Prior to enrolling in college, a high school diploma was the highest level of education completed by Deborah. Lacking a comprehensive support network, "Growing up, not many people thought I could do well in school and they told me to quit. But since I came here, things have changed with all I have learned." An influential force continually surfacing throughout Deborah's participation was the feeling of closeness felt through the mentorship offered by the program faculty.

Emily

Emily is a first-year student studying nursing, who completed high school immediately before entering the program. Emily has been impressed by the variety of experiential learning opportunities she has been able to take advantage of in the classroom. As a nursing student, simulation plays a significant role in the student's ability to observe, participate, and master various skill sets necessary to practice in the field. "I was surprised by how much nurses need technology to work and glad I have been able to learn how to use as much as I have of it."

Lynn

Lynn is a first-generation college student from her family who upon enrolling in the nursing program, had only attained a high school diploma similar to others in her family. While recognizing the prospect of success in the program would not be without challenges, Lynn acknowledged she felt comfortable relying on her professors to help her. "My professors helped show me how to use everything in the lab that I am going need to know for patient care. They placed me in touch with a couple of groups whose facilities use what I am learning about." Lynn's perspective is unique in the way she appreciates the benefit of having experienced faculty in the classroom to teach nursing techniques as well as help make valuable connections with industry outside of the classroom.

Mary

Mary was a third-semester student in the nursing program who had earned a high school diploma as the highest form of education before entering college. Mary appreciated the ample time and opportunity she has had through the program to develop patient care-oriented competencies. "The hours I spent practicing in lab were super helpful. I love that I can say I know how to use a Pyxus machine because practically every in-patient facility has them."

Foundational proficiency in the dispensing of medication represents a desirable skillset competency whose attainment may not be possible without the use of costly training systems.

Taylor Marie

Taylor Marie entered the nursing program immediately following completion of her high school education and was in her third semester at the time of the study. In reflecting on her time in school, Taylor saw the field placement for her clinical practicum as one of the most valuable experiences she had. Taylor said, "Placement for my clinical hours went a long way to helping me decide the kind of care I want to get into after I graduate." Such statements are reflective of the variety of roles and specializations available to nurses to practice under when they enter the field.

Wayne

Wayne is a third-semester student in the nursing program who entered college with a New York State Board of Regents High School Diploma. In completing his third semester in the nursing program, Wayne offered a forward-looking perspective on his career as a student and what the future may hold. "After next semester, I am transferring into a four year program hopefully leading to a chance at then going after a master's degree in nursing," Wayne explained. Continuation onto a four-year degree from a two-year program represents an opportunity for improved prospects of career advancement prior to entering the field.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program in a rural community college in Western New York. Analysis of the data collected from the conduction of individual interviews, a focus group, and artifact

presentation was coded. Results were then manually organized into a Venn diagram, matrix, and bullet chart format to aid in the identification of themes without the aid of an analysis software program. Chapter four outlines the procedures implemented for data analysis and examines emerging themes. In the context of theme development, an analysis of the participant responses to research questions.

Theme Development

The analysis of data collected throughout the study yielded three principal themes and numerous subthemes founded in student perceptions of lived experiences in an academic capacity. The emergence of organization structure of themes and their basis were conducive to qualitative graphical presentation accompanied by narrative contextualization as information pertaining to the research questions and sub-questions. In breaking down the participant response transcripts developed during individual interviews, a focus group, and artifact presentation, hand coding was recognized as a suitable means to identify significant terms, phases, and statements. Themes and correlating subthemes emerged as the coded results were individually charted for each of the three data collection methods and are detailed in Appendix H.

Theme 1: Lecture-Based Learning

Classroom lecture-style instruction presented as the first major theme from data collection and analysis. As a foundational element in nursing instruction, classroom lectures served as a means to present concepts to students and explore their meaning as well as implications in practice. Students recognized an order of operation with lectures directly preceding hands-on instruction in a laboratory setting. Wayne explained:

Everything we did was pointed toward our practice in the field. In the classroom, we

were taught about the history, reasoning, and concepts behind quality care. Eventually,

we would take everything we learned and use it while we practiced in the lab. All of this was taken and used as we precepted during field placements.

Beyond providing a contextualization of best practices and skill set development, classroom lectures also provided students with a forum to demonstrate intangible aptitudes in science, mathematics, and English. With nursing calling on multiple skill sets directly related to these topics, academic capability presents as a critically important component of an effective healthcare practitioner in the field. Beyond lecture, (1) interactive discussion, (2) case study analysis, and (3) foundations coursework were found to represent the subthemes of lecture-based learning.

Interactive Discussion

Open discussion of lessons learned provided a forum for students to participate in a curated conversation on healthcare topics in the classroom. Lively conversations among peers allowed students to delve deeper into the concepts explored during lectures. Participation afforded students an opportunity to question, analyze and apply components of the professor's lecture in a more dynamic and engaging manner. "Some of the most fun I had in the program was in the debates on patient care ethics where we had to take a position on a topic and defend it against our classmates," Lynn stated. In participating in classroom debates, students are exposed to different perspectives and are able to consider them in relation to their own personal position on the topic. This aspect of learning is crucial for students in the health sciences, particularly nursing, as it helps them to hone critical thinking skills and understand the practical implications of theoretical knowledge over its application in the field.

Case Study and Analysis

Case study represents an integral part of lecture-based learning in the health sciences. Students are able to examine specific patient scenarios or healthcare situations overall and learn from them. Deborah explained, "When we read about what some of these patients had to go through under care, it was a reminder to us all of what we should and should not do when caring for people." Case studies enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to scenarios in the textbook as they develop their ability to analyze complex situations, make appropriate judgment calls, and better understand the nuances of patient care. Such structured work not only enhances the student's problem-solving skills but prepares them for the unpredictable nature of healthcare work as they think through potential scenarios they may experience.

Foundations Coursework

Science, mathematics, and English were discovered to embody foundational elements crucial to command proficiency when advancing in the degree program as well as preparing to practice in the field. Nurses must be capable of conducting conversions when dosing medications, understanding the science behind the medicine, and being able to put the work into writing when issuing orders to their peers concerning patient care. "Not only was the math hard, but writing it all down in an order so others could understand what needed to be done was not easy either. Nursing has standardized notation for nearly everything," said Wayne. Such foundational knowledge is crucial as it is continually called upon when advancing through the nursing program curriculum and preparing to practice in the field. Fluency in medical foundations ensures students have a solid understanding of core concepts and possess the cognitive skills necessary for providing effective patient care.

Theme 2: Simulation-Based Experiential Learning

Simulation-based experiential learning emerged as the second major theme from data collection in understanding the perceptions of lived experiences of nursing program students in a rural community college. Responses from individual interviews, as well as throughout open discussion during the objective-driven focus group conversation, students consistently referenced their time spent in the classroom and campus laboratories utilizing simulation equipment. Students highlighted the benefits of coupling guided lab instruction with the offering of open hours for instructional lab space and how this impacted their skillset competency development. Simulation-based experiential learning provides students with a safe environment to try a variety of techniques and establish personal preferences while becoming masterful in the usage of the latest technology available. Experiential learning provides a contextualization of classroom theory-based instruction as it is applied to the practice of medicine for students endeavoring to become professionals in the field. Three subthemes emerged from the simulation-based experiential learning theme in (1) skillset mastery, (2) learning style stacking, and (3) lessons learned application.

Skillset Mastery

Separate from soft skills, lab-based learning plays a significant role in the development of technical skills and practical knowledge essential for nursing. While working through simulation exercises, students acknowledged being afforded an opportunity to use and practice the operation of state-of-the-art technologies, similar to what they might expect to find in the field. Additionally, outside of classroom sessions, simulation equipment was made available to students during open hours. With skillset development, Emily described a phased learning process beginning in the classroom and ending in the lab with independent study, "Even though

classroom demonstrations did a lot to show me proper technique when using equipment on patients, it was when I was in the open labs by myself where I could practice bringing it all together that really helped." Advanced simulation equipment and technologies have opened new avenues for guided and independent immersive learning experiences. These technologies allow for more realistic and varied simulations, providing students with an opportunity to be exposed to an even broader range of clinical situations common in the field.

Learning Style Stacking

Integrating classroom lectures into lab sessions allows for experiential learning to be presented to the student in multiple forms. Programs featuring different forms of available learning formats are conducive to individual learning styles. By having traditional lecture-based instruction coupled with lab work, a type of stacking occurs where students are exposed to the same concepts through multiple forms of presentation. Experiencing the same lesson through repetition provides faculty an opportunity to reinforce concepts from textbooks and lectures, creating a cohesive educational environment. Emily offered, "I have always been a visual learner. Before class, I would read about the lesson in the book and then later be able to follow along more closely." Through pedagogical design, students live out a single lesson several times by reading about it, hearing about it in lectures, and then seeing it enacted in the lab. This progressive exposure is crucial in helping students develop the confidence and competence necessary for patient care.

Lessons Learned Application

A primary benefit of classroom instruction and lab-based application is it provides an opportunity for students to apply lessons learned and practice techniques as they endeavor to achieve mastery in a safe, controlled environment. This aspect of nursing education is crucial as

mistakes made in practice can have serious consequences for those being treated. "Over the years, there were a few times when I had to be helped by the lab assistant when trying to practice technique," explained Barbara. Beyond preparing students to practice in the field following graduation, such a comprehensive approach affords the faculty and students a forum to discuss the ethical considerations of nursing practice, preparing students for the moral dilemmas they will likely encounter during their careers.

Theme 3: Field Placement Experiential Learning

The third and final theme to emerge from the data was the impressions students took away from field placements in fulfillment of their clinical hour requirement as part of the nursing degree program. Reflecting on their experience in the nursing program, students were able to recognize the progression from classroom lecture to laboratory-based simulation to field placement. Progress was not possible without satisfying the educational requirements incumbent on the students. "My first clinical placement made me rely on what I learned in my training from the program. Using what I learned, I was able to assist instead of just being stuck there watching," said Taylor Marie.

Four subthemes emerged as beyond clinical placement representing the culmination of knowledge obtained, it represented a significant opportunity for students to (1) exercise a degree of independence, (2) apply lessons learned, (3) practice skills under supervision, and (4) network development in the field.

Exploring Independence

In progressing through a nursing program, developing an ability to function with a degree of independence represents a significant milestone for students. Clinical placement enables students to step outside the confines of the classroom and apply their knowledge in practice as

part of a real-world setting. Success in this translation of theoretical knowledge into application is crucial for students transitioning from being a learner to practitioners. "Working with the nursing staff taught me to rely on myself and to trust my instincts more," Taylor Marie stated. "As a learning experience, clinical was an eye opener for me with how fast choices needed to be made," said Chantel. During the transition, students begin to make decisions, prioritize patient care, and manage their time effectively, all while under the supervision and mentorship of an experienced professional. The process is integral to student development finalization as it instills a sense of confidence and self-reliance. The ability to act independently while in a supervised, educational environment prepares students for the realities of the nursing profession, where fast thinking and autonomy are often required.

Applying Lessons Learned

Students were able to live out the realities they read about in the classroom and practiced in simulation labs while out in the field. Clinical placements offer an ideal environment where techniques simulated can be attempted and perfected under the guidance of a professional. Equipment and technologies learned about in simulation can also be utilized while being closely monitored. Wayne explained, "My mentor was surprised by how much I already knew about using a Pyxis machine to dispense meds." The transition from theory to practice reinforces student learning and helps context the practical implications of academic knowledge. The hands-on practice bridges the gap between knowing and doing, ensuring students possess mastery of the program curriculum and are readily able to use it in the field.

Skills Practice

Working under varied circumstances provides students with an opportunity to practice their technique under less-than-perfect conditions. Basic care can take on an entirely new

meaning when working on a patient under duress who is actively providing feedback. "Concentration was the biggest thing I was told I needed to work on. Wound care was pretty tough; people were in a lot of pain and had a hard time holding still or remaining calm when we would bandage them," Christopher explained. In working alongside an experienced nurse, students are able to practice their skills in a controlled situation, allowing for mistakes to be made, recognized, and corrected in a safe and educational capacity. The process, overall, helps students refine their own techniques, learn nuances of patient care, and understand the importance of adhering to protocols and guidelines. Clinical placement not only builds technical proficiency but aids in the development of the critical thinking and decision-making that goes into the application of skills.

Network Development

To students, clinical placements were not just about gaining practical experience; they also provided intangible opportunities. Participating in field placement positions placed students in direct contact with professionals from the field who may later aid in the attainment of gainful post-graduation employment. Beyond exposure to nurses, students interact with a variety of healthcare professionals, from nurse aides and physicians to allied health staff, giving students insight into the interdisciplinary nature of healthcare. "The same as with my professor, I made good friends and even better contacts during clinical. Finding work should be no problem once I graduate thanks to this," said Wayne. Establishing these connections can lead to mentorship opportunities, internships, career prospects, and the creation of a personal support system within the healthcare community. The inevitability of network development during clinical placements can open doors to various career paths and specializations within nursing. The clinical

experience and its overall benefits contribute to a smoother transition from student to practicing nurse.

Outlier Data and Findings

Throughout the course of data collection and analysis, two findings diverged from the initial research questions and stood apart from emerging themes. These findings stood out not only from a contextual standpoint but also in the very nature of the experiences they described. In expanding upon previous results as they came in from the field, the findings provide a new perspective and an unforeseen dimension in the research.

Time Insufficiency

During the focus group session, when questioned on their experience with passing skills-competency-based exam work, students reported having a summarily negative perspective on the aspect of practice time. Barbara offered insight the group generally agreed with, "Classroom time alone was never enough to master what we were tested on during simulations. If I wanted to pass, I learned early on that I needed to spend time practicing during the open lab hours." While students all shared the general experience of feeling rushed in skills competency development, there was consensus this issue could be remedied with more time. Unfortunately, students were not able to consistently participate in simulation lab open hours for various reasons, possibly causing them to perform poorly.

Instructional Mastery

Student responses indicated there was a premium placed on the perception of classroom faculty possessing masterly level fluency in the equipment, technology, and techniques taught in the classroom. Christopher explained, "It is hard enough trying to learn how to calibrate equipment properly, let alone when you're being shown wrong by someone who does not know

what they're doing." Such sentiments substantiated the importance of adequate training and professional development accompanying the acquisition of new equipment for the classroom.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program in a rural community college in Western New York. The research questions shaping the study were centered on understanding the lived experiences of nursing program students. The themes identified corresponded with the questions and were supported by the detailed responses recorded through individual interviews, a focus group, and the presentation of artifacts. Relationships between the research questions and corresponding themes are featured in Table 2 and discussed in the narrative.

Table 2

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

Research Question	Corresponding Theme
CRQ: What are the lived learning experiences made possible through grant funding investment of nursing program students at an RCC?	Field Placement Experiential Learning; Simulation-Based Experiential Learning
SQI: How are the learning experiences of grant funding perceived by students?	Simulation-Based Experiential Learning
SQ2: What are the perceived student success outcomes from grant-funded instruction?	Field Placement Experiential Learning
SQ3: What opportunities and resources do nursing students perceive as being a result of grant funding investment in their program?	Lecture-Based Learning; Simulation-Based Experiential Learning

Central Research Question

What are the lived learning experiences made possible through grant funding investment of nursing program students at an RCC? Student participants described their lived experiences primarily on the basis of whether or not their perception of a recollection was positive or negative. Students often made reference to the state-of-the-art simulation-based equipment they were taught in the classroom, practiced in simulation labs, and then utilized during field placements. While students were generally appreciative of having exposure to cutting-edge instructional technology through the program, they were left wanting more time to practice this utilization of said technology and associated skill sets. "Passing clinical depended on me using what I learned back at school," explained Mary. The themes identified in this study consisted of (1) lecture-based learning, (2) simulation-based experiential learning, and (3) field placement experiential learning.

Sub-Question One

How are the learning experiences of grant funding perceived by students? The theme of simulation-based experiential learning spoke most directly to this question, along with its three subthemes focused on (1) skillset mastery, (2) learning style stacking, and (3) lessons learned application. As evidenced in Appendix H, perceptions of learning experiences with grant funding by students were overwhelmingly positive. In recognizing the value of grant funding, students cited having positive experiences with lessons taught in lectures and then being practiced in simulation before being lived out in the field during clinical placement. Students realized a successful clinical placement would not be possible had it not been for the integration of instruction on industry-standard technology. A common negative aspect experienced by students seemingly unrelated to grant-funded programming was being limited in time to practice on

equipment during instruction, causing them to need to seek out open lab hours for additional access. Barbara stated, "I was late to work one time because I had to stay after class on campus so I could catch open lab hours to practice using the heart rate monitor."

Sub-Question Two

What are the perceived student success outcomes from grant-funded instruction? Field Placement-Based Experiential Learning as a theme addressed this question through its four subthemes: 1) exercise a degree of independence, (2) apply lessons learned, (3) practice skills under supervision, and (4) develop a network in the field. Field placement represented to most students the culmination of success had in the classroom and simulation lab prior. As students practicing under supervision in the field, they were afforded a unique opportunity to showcase their abilities and talents while working with professionals. "I was able to get a job offer lined up that I am interested in exploring for after I graduate this summer," said Wayne. An intangible benefit perceived as a success under the nursing program at this stage is embodied in the network of contacts students develop during clinical placement. These contacts can later prove to be invaluable for students as they can provide guidance, peer support, letters of recommendation, or offer employment opportunities outright.

Sub-Question Three

What opportunities and resources do nursing students perceive as being a result of grant funding investment in their program? Lecture-Based Learning and simulation-based experiential learning as themes both addressed this question, each with its unique sets of subthemes. For subthemes, Lecture-Base Learning offered 1) interactive discussion, (2) case study and analysis, and (3) foundations coursework, while simulation based experiential learning had (1) skillset mastery, (2) learning style stacking, and (3) lessons learned application. To student participants,

classroom lectures were significant as they featured foundational knowledge from the textbook taught nowhere else in the program while at the same time affording students an opportunity to participate in curated classroom discussions of the lesson. "Talking about the material, and not just reading about it, helped me to better understand some of the more complicated parts of the course," explained Deborah.

Empowered with theoretical knowledge from lectures, students were appreciative of the opportunity to spend time in the simulation labs developing their technique and perfecting methodology. "On days where I had clinical exams, I would spend the evening before in lab with classmates running through the procedures and practicing until we had everything perfect," Chantel shared. Recognition of the value classroom lectures and simulation-based learning offered is significant because these settings generally represent the physical areas where grant funding investments are realized within an institution. Between these educational environments, grant investment can constitute tangible assets such as equipment, supplies, and materials. Additionally, in a less tangible but equally important capacity, courses are taught by expert faculty who are continually trained through professional development. Students, by way of this pedagogical progression, experience education as they are immersed in a learning environment, leading to a command of theory and practical skills necessary to succeed in the field.

Summary

Chapter Four provided an overview of each student participant in the study and a description of the results from the data analysis. For this study, a qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological approach was utilized and data was collected through individual interviews, a focus group, and artifact presentation from 12 student participants. Through data analysis, reoccurring, positional, and substantial words and phrases were identified and developed into

themes and subthemes. The three emerging themes were lecture-based learning, simulation-based experiential learning, and field placement experiential learning. Using these themes, the perceptions of lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding were described in narrative format under the results section of Chapter Four, where findings were also graphically represented and referenced in Appendix H.

The study's data effectively responded to the central research question and its three sub-questions. The student participants shared their perspectives on lived experiences in the nursing program in a rural community college. A reoccurring point made throughout the study was a need for hands-on instruction with medical technology, complimented with an abundance of time to practice. Balancing the use of classroom lectures with simulation lab time must be carefully managed by program faculty to ensure the students grasp the logic behind theory as they endeavor to develop mastery of clinical skill sets. Students highlighted clinical placement as an opportunity to be mentored by healthcare professionals uniquely afforded to them through their involvement in the nursing program. Students acknowledged having a positive experience learning in the nursing program and benefiting richly from the benefits afforded to them by grant funding investment.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program in a rural community college in Western New York. The problem addressed in this study was grant funding investment efficacy in higher education remains one of the most critically important means of student success outcome support, yet it is one of the least understood contributing factors (Balzer, 2020; Chattopadhyay, 2022; Edmund, 2020; Tight, 2020). Investigation of this phenomena entailed data collection from 12 nursing program student participants through individual interviews, a focus group, and artifact presentation. Data collected from these methods was coded before being organized into a Venn diagram, matrix, and bullet chart format to aid in the identification of themes. Data analysis was conducted using Astin's (1984) student involvement theory as a theoretical framework.

Discussion

Through data analysis, the findings revealed students recognized the value of grant funding investment in higher education as it presented thematically through lecture-based learning, simulation-based experiential learning, and field placement experiential learning. Five sections are discussed including (a) Interpretation of Findings; (b) Implications for Policy or Practice; (c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; (d) Limitations and Delimitations; and (e) Recommendations for Future Research.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Three themes were identified through this study in lecture-based learning, simulation-based experiential learning, and field placement experiential learning. As a focus of theme one,

lecture-based learning was perceived by students as a means to have concepts presented and explore their meaning as they pertain to practice. In theme two, simulation-based learning was looked on by students as an opportunity to practice patient care techniques and equipment utilization leading to achievement of prescribed outcomes in a controlled environment. For the third and final theme, field placement experiential learning was recognized as an opportunity to apply lessons learned in lectures and simulations under the guidance of a professional out in the field. Using the themes and associated subthemes identified, an interpretation of the findings are identified and discussed.

Interpretation of Findings

Exploration of the emerging themes contributed toward a deeper understanding of the implications of when institutions of higher education lack a comprehensive understanding of grants and their perceived usefulness in application. Nursing education in higher education is founded on the elements of theory comprehension, skillset development, and their application in the field where progression from one level of instruction to the next cannot occur without mastery being achieved in the level prior. In exploring the perceptions of nursing program students further, findings are broken down and interpreted into the subsequent sections.

Lecture Instruction

The student experience with grant funding investment took on a phased approach, beginning with lecture-based learning. In this initial learning phase, students were placed in a classroom with faculty who would devote the course to presenting theories, reviewing textbook content, and curating discussion amongst peers. Students were then challenged to demonstrate what they had learned as they completed homework assignments, wrote essays, took quizzes, and completed exams. Such demonstration of knowledge attainment was particularly significant as

there was a void in previous research work recognizing the appropriate implementation of such

milestones and conventional evaluation methods (Haddad, 2021).

In order for this initial exposure to theory-based content to be successful, students were

largely dependent on the expertise of their instructor. As educators, it is incumbent on program

faculty to possess a command of the foundational theories they teach. Additionally, the faculty

must remain current on the latest industry trends and best practices so they can explain their

relevance to the medical field today. Such consistent ability requires an ongoing commitment to

professional development on both the part of the faculty and institution of higher education. This

dependency on the program to deliver on what is perceived as a relevant classroom education

places responsibility on institutional leadership to make wise decisions when investing in the

classroom and the future moreover.

Simulation Learning

As a progression of lecture-based learning, simulation-based instruction stands as the

second phase in the learning process for nursing program students. Simulation-based laboratory

instruction represented to students an immersive learning experience where hands-on practice is

the primary means of conveyance. Time spent in the simulation labs affords student an

opportunity to witness demonstration of proper technique and best practices across a variety of

clinical technologies. As an accompaniment to demonstration, students can then practice their

technique while being observed and critiqued by laboratory faculty. Passage of laboratory

coursework is dependent on the student's successfully executing task mastery of prescribed skills

during laboratory practical examinations.

Simulation-based learning, as possibly the most expensive form of education in the

nursing program, students and faculty alike depend on the host institution to maintain an offering

of cutting-edge technology consistent with what is used in the medical field. In order for laboratory instruction to support achievement of student success outcomes, these state-of-the-art facilities must be staffed by faculty possessing expertise in the proper calibration, operation, and interpretation of technologically advanced diagnosis and treatment equipment. Failing to produce graduates proficient in the usage of industry-standard technology and techniques places students at a competitive disadvantage when vying for post-graduation employment.

Experiential Learning

Field placement experiential learning presented as the third and final phase of learning experienced by nursing program students. As a terminal stage, students recognized field placement as an opportunity to apply theories and techniques they had been taught in the program up until this point. Successful clinical placement pairs nursing program students with professionals in the field where they are able to observe patient care in practice. Equally important to observation is the student's ability to apply theory and demonstrate their clinical aptitude in front of their mentorship experience.

Unlike the student-structured learning experiences had by students through classroom lectures and simulation lab instruction, field placement is far less prescribed in its outcomes beyond the satisfaction of time duration requirements. In this stage, students are empowered to exercise a degree of freedom where they use their judgment in deciding how much, or how little to do while they participate in a measured capacity of providing healthcare to patients. Consistent with the teachings of Astin (1984), students at this point in the program get out of it what they put into it. While some content themselves to achieving program graduation, others realize success so profound they obtain viable post-graduation employment offers as result of their academic work.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings in this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study revealed the perception of lived experiences of nursing program students with grant funding investment in a nursing, allied, and physical health program in a rural community college in Western New York. The findings had implications in both policy and practice concerning various community stakeholders.

Implications for Policy

The results of this study carry significant implications for policy-making. In exploring the perceptions of student subpopulations intended to benefit directly from grant funding investment, a gap emerged between project deliverables and understanding student perceptions of successful outcomes. Actively monitoring and assessing a project using feedback from the students could prove to be instrumental in enacting changes to increase student satisfaction with their educational experience. An opportunity to institutionally remedy this shortcoming could be to enact a policy mandating the creation of an academic student advisory council tasked with assessing and providing feedback. Using this targeted information, grant project administration could implement changes so mistakes can be mitigated and successes can be furthered, all while strengthening the program.

In addition to a void in student input contributing to project administration, there appeared to be an inability for healthcare stakeholders to provide input on program curriculum development as well as feedback on recent collaborations with students, particularly in field placements. An institutional-level policy remedy to this disconnect could be to recruit and create a local industry advisory council and mandate feedback contributed from the council be implemented in the grant project as possible. Key items a local advisory council could advise on

would be competencies in technique and instrument usage they need students to possess upon graduation. Such input could influence program technology purchases and potentially simulation lab technique instruction.

Implications for Practice

Drawing from data collection, analysis, and findings, the study results offer significant practical implications impacting faculty, students, and healthcare sector employers. A key deliverable emerging from the data was employers valuing student graduates as prospective hires who are proficient in the operation of various healthcare technologies requiring minimal training upon hire. In translating this prospective hire capability premium into practice, faculty could restructure program curriculum to incorporate more time devoted to hands-on instruction on medical technology. In addition to rebalancing time, new practices ensuring the purchase of an adequate amount of instructional equipment may be enacted to eliminate the need to share equipment and allow for continual practice by students during instruction. Such changes in practice would also directly administer to a common criticism in students reporting as having received an insufficient amount of time to practice during simulation laboratory sessions.

In complementing the practice of adequately outfitting laboratory space with instructional equipment, institutions may consider mandating the practice of mandating faculty to be trained on the operation of all equipment. Students benefit when taught on equipment by faculty possessing mastery level skills in its operation. Mastering the operation of instructional equipment enables faculty to offer insight into best practices, techniques, and understanding of technical outputs. Instituting policy requiring faculty to undergo extensive professional development in the achievement of mastery level ability could enrich student skill sets as a result.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The themes emerged through the study set reflect a phased progression of student

learning and skillset development. In corroborating the teachings of Astin's (1984) student

involvement theory, the extent students perceive experiencing their education positively or

negatively directly correlated with the amount of effort they set forth. Empirical and theoretical

implications for this study are discussed.

Empirical Implications

A systematic review of current research revealed there was a gap in the understanding of

nursing student perceptions of lived experiences with grant funding in an RCC. The literature

substantiated the importance of understanding student perceptions of grant funded learning

experiences in the classroom and the potential for a disconnect to form between aspirational

academic deliverables and actual experiences as lived out by students (Spencer & Temple,

2021). Further complicating this limited understanding from current literature, is a lack of

uniform assessment and evaluation of grant funding crucial to ascertaining what grants are used

for and knowing if they worked (Slavin, 2020). With such variability surrounding assessment

and evaluation, institutions are left with few constants to assess against when studying multiple

grant funded programs beyond the students themselves and their perceptions of lived

experiences. While examination of student perceptions may offer uniformity in the sourcing of

raw data, it is important to factor in how multiple students may experience a single event

differently, causing inconsistency in the structure of assessment and evaluation (Spencer &

Temple, 2021). Student participants described having different experiences in the simulation lab

where the nature of the experience was significantly influenced by their perceived ability to

learn. This inherent reality surrounding data sources revealed by prior research was corroborated

in this study with student participants from a single program offering different responses to the same set of questions. Within this gap lies vulnerability for higher education institutions to miss potential opportunities to administer directly to student needs through grant funding investment based on reliable data.

Theoretical Implications

This study's exploration of nursing program students' perceptions of lived experiences with grant funding was underpinned by the theoretical framework of Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. The study's findings may contribute to the expansion of the theory. Student participants described their perceptions of lived experiences being educated under a nursing program curriculum. Insight gathered demonstrated a clear causal relationship between the amount of effort students put into an experience having a direct influence on their subsequent perception of said experience. Astin's student involvement theory proved to be an appropriate lens to explore student perceptions in relation to grant-funded learning, given the systematic nature of grant project work (Cunningham, 2020). Students who put considerable effort into their education realized tangible results beyond prescribed academic outcomes. By exploring the perceptions of students using student involvement theory framework, the findings produced by this study offered valuable insight into the experiential learning needs of nursing program students as they progress through a skills-intensive curriculum. The study expanded the scope of the theory to consider the impact perception of resource availability has on student success outcomes.

Limitations and Delimitations

Three major limitations encountered throughout the conduction of the study were sample size, a narrow target population, and geographic location. These limitations and delimitations are

discussed throughout the rest of the section.

Limitations

The first limitation presented as the study being limited to an initial group of 13 student participants, which later narrowed to 12; the sample set consisted of nine females and three males. Using such a limited sample size presented a challenge when trying to generalize the findings to be reflective of community college nursing programs across the United States. The sample composition could contribute to a bias materializing in the findings of the study.

A second limitation was the study only included students from a nursing program while omitting students of the nearly 50 other academic programs at the host institution. Narrowing the exploration of the study to a nursing program provides potentially valuable insight into other academic programs also using grant funding. Limiting the study to one program weakens findings as there is seemingly no way to compare and contrast the perceptions of students or grant funding utilization practices, policies, and procedures between programs.

A third limitation of the study was geographic location, as it only included student participants from a rural community college in Western New York. By conducting the study at a community college, similar students enrolled in nursing programs at four year institutions of higher education were omitted from inclusion. This omission weakens the study's findings in terms of the generalizability and transferability of findings when applied across higher education.

Delimitations

The study contained numerous delimitations primarily by way of parameters set by the researcher intended to protect the scope and focus of the research. The first was the criteria set for participant eligibility for inclusion in the study, with students needing to be actively enrolled in a nursing program at a host institution and be over the age of 18. This delimitation ensured

participants were able to provide responses based on the breadth of their experience in a nursing program. A second delimitation was the selection of a host site for the study in a rural community college in Western New York. Hosting at a notably smaller environment than a traditional public four-year university ensured students came from a more intimate instructional setting conducive to experiential learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this hermeneutical phenomenology exploration provided insight into the perceptions of lived experiences with grant funding by nursing program students, more research is needed to understand and support improvement of educational student success outcomes. In light of the study findings, limitations, and delimitations present in the study, it is recommended future research broaden its scope to include a wider range of schools, participants, and stakeholders encompassing both two and four-year institutions of higher education. Additionally, the study could be expanded upon by including a more varied sample population through incorporating institutions of higher education from both urban and rural settings. Doing so would facilitate comparison of the unique life experiences, background knowledge, and technical aptitude in healthcare. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent normalization of remote learning in higher education, future research might focus more directly on comparing the experiences and success outcomes of nursing program students who participate in their education remotely versus those who attend in person. To gain a deeper understanding of student success outcomes in grant funded academic programs, a quantitative approach might be considered for use as a study design. Doing so could enable the research to include definitive information more directly indicative of student success outcomes, such as test scores, course completion rates, and degree program graduation rates. Lastly, future research may benefit from having data collected

over a greater duration of time so as to afford input from multiple semesters with more students in order to ensure the highest degree of diversity in the data set possible.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of lived experiences with grant funding investment by nursing program students in a rural community college in Western New York. A hermeneutical phenomenological research design was utilized to gain insight into the perceptions of lived experiences by students and afford them an opportunity to provide direct feedback. As a theoretical framework for the study, Astin's (1984) student involvement theory underpinned theme identification and development. Data collection occurred through the conduction of individual interviews, a focus group, and artifact presentation with 12 student participants who were actively enrolled in a nursing program. Data analysis identified a progression among the learning elements of theory comprehension, skillset development, and their application, where one cannot progress until mastery is achieved in the level prior. It was within these levels of education where students provided invaluable insight into their experiences learning and how they perceived them. Ultimately, the findings affirmed grants provide critically important investments in faculty instructional expertise, classroom technology availability, and the means for field placement experiential learning, are all essential components in a healthcare curriculum that successfully graduates nursing professionals into the field.

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Appendix A: Liberty University Institutional Review Board Approval Form

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 27, 2023

Brian Michel
Holly Eimer

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-692 EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NURSING PROGRAM STUDENTS WITH GRANT FUNDING INVESTMENT IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Dear Brian Michel, Holly Eimer,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Site Permission

Office of the President

Wm. J. [redacted] Ph.D.
President

10/5/2023

Brian R. Michel

Dear Mr. Michel,

[redacted] is pleased to support the research you are conducting for your PhD. on "Exploring Perceptions of Lived Experiences of Nursing Program Students With Grant Funding Investment In A Community College". As a senior administrator at a community college with a breadth of experience in higher education grant administration, I am certain your research stands to offer a great deal of insight into the intricacies of student perceptions of lived experiences as they pertain to effective grant funding utilization in higher education.

Ph.D.
President

Board of Trustees

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. degree. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of nursing program students lived experience perceptions with grant funding in a community college and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, and are college students who are actively enrolled in a nursing program at a community college. Participants will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded in-person interview (30 minutes), review their transcript for accuracy (15 minutes), take part in an audio-recorded focus group luncheon-format meeting (60 minutes), and also present a personal artifact relevant to their program study as part of their personal interview (15 minutes). It should take approximately 2 hours to complete the procedures listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

If you would like to participate, please contact myself at ███████████████████ for more information on the study and participation.

A consent document is provided as the first page that is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the personal interview.

Each eligible participant who completes all study procedures will receive a $20 Walmart gift card and be offered lunch during the focus group.

Sincerely,

Brian R. Michel

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: _Exploring Perceptions of Lived Experiences of Nursing Program Students With Grant Funding Investment In A Community College_____

Principal Investigator: Brian R. Michel_____, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

<table>
<tr><td align="center">Invitation to be Part of a Research Study</td></tr>
</table>

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age and actively enrolled in a nursing program at a community college.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

<table>
<tr><td align="center">What is the study about and why is it being done?</td></tr>
</table>

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of lived experiences with grant funding investment by nursing program students at a community college. This study is being conducted as a required component of a Ph.D. program.

<table>
<tr><td align="center">What will happen if you take part in this study?</td></tr>
</table>

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
1. Participate in an audio and video recorded in-person interview (no more than 30 minutes).
2. You will be able to review your transcript and make revisions for accuracy (no more than 15 minutes).
3. Participate in an audio and video recorded luncheon-format focus group with other participants (no more than 60 minutes).
4. Present an artifact (if applicable) relevant to your program and explain its relation to your learning experience (no more than 15 minutes).

<table>
<tr><td align="center">How could you or others benefit from this study?</td></tr>
</table>

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include:
- The potential to inform educators on how to better utilize grant funding investments to benefit students in the future.
- To potentially influence the educational outcomes of nursing program students who receive grant funding investments both inside and outside of the classroom.

<table>
<tr><td align="center">What risks might you experience from being in this study?</td></tr>
</table>

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

All participant records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through pseudonyms (fictitious names). Interviews will be conducted through Zoom recording the interaction (or in person, according to the preference of the participant) in a secure area.
- Data will be stored in a password-protected computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for six years and then erased. The researcher and his doctoral committee team members will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Each eligible participant who completes all study procedures will receive a $20 Walmart gift card and be offered lunch during the focus group session.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or ███████████████████████. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Brian R. Michel. You may ask any questions you have prior to agreeing to participate in the study. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to

contact him at ██████████████████████ or call ███████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Holly Eimer, ██████████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix E: Research Questions

Central Research Question (CRQ)

What are the lived learning experiences made possible through grant funding investment

of nursing program students at an RCC?

Sub-Question One (SQ1)

How are the learning experiences of grant funding perceived by students?

Sub-Question Two (SQ2)

What are the perceived student success outcomes from grant-funded instruction?

Sub-Question Three (SQ3)

What opportunities and resources do nursing students perceive as being a result of grant

funding investment in their program?

Appendix F: Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about what you see as one of the most meaningful learning experiences you have had as a student in the nursing program. CRQ

2. Describe what you see as the role grant funding investment plays in higher education, particularly in your program. CRQ, SQ1

3. Explain both the positive or negative experiences of learning in your program. CRQ, SQ1, SQ3

4. Describe why you believe faculty instruction benefited or suffered from the utilization of grant funding investment in the classroom. SQ1, SQ2

5. Describe how you believe students could benefit from using grant funding in the program. SQ2, SQ3

6. Describe how your program has benefited from the utilization of grant funding. SQ1, SQ3

7. What do you believe are the long-term benefits of grant-funding investment mutually benefiting students and faculty in the nursing program? SQ1, SQ3

8. Describe how you would like to see grant funding used in your program differently in the future. SQ1, SQ2

9. Please share an example of a project in the nursing program that was funded by grants and explain how it influenced your learning experience. CRQ, SQ3

10. Describe how you think grant-funded research and projects in the nursing program contribute to the advancement of healthcare practices. CRQ, SQ2

11. Please elaborate on any challenges or barriers you have experienced as a student when it comes to implementing grant-funded programs within your nursing curriculum. SQ2, SQ3

12. Please describe what criteria should be considered when deciding how to invest future grant funds in the nursing program. SQ1, SQ2

13. Please share your thoughts on the impact sustainability of grant-funded projects in the nursing program and how they can have a positive impact beyond the initial investment. SQ1, SQ3

14. Please share any ethical considerations or potential conflicts of interest you think should be addressed when using grant funding in higher education. CRQ

15. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with grant funding utilization in higher education that we have not already discussed? CRQ

Appendix G: Focus Group Questions

1. Describe the role grant funding investment played in your academic experience? CRQ, SQ2

2. How has the inclusion of "hands-on instruction" using grant-funded equipment in the classroom aided your skills competency development? CRQ, SQ3

3. How has grant funding impacted the availability of resources and technology in your program, and how has this affected your education? CRQ, SQ3

4. What do you believe are the long-term benefits of grant-funded initiatives for both students and faculty in the nursing program? CRQ, SQ3

5. Explain the significance of having time to utilize classroom instructional equipment in relation to experiential learning outcomes? SQ2, SQ3

6. Discuss any collaborative efforts or partnerships between your nursing program and external organizations or institutions that have been enhanced by grant funding. CRQ, SQ3

7. Explain why you believe their teacher's expertise was important to rendering substantial instruction on classroom equipment? CRQ, SQ1

8. What benefits did students realize during field placements by entering into them with an existing competency in instrument-aided skillsets from the classroom? SQ2, SQ3

9. Recall a time when you encountered trouble passing a skills competency-based exam due to a lack of experience? SQ1, SQ3

10. What else would everyone like to add to our discussion concerning collective experiences with grant funding utilization in higher education that we have not already discussed? CRQ

Appendix H: Theme Development

Table 3

Individual Interview Response

Name	Lab Simulation	Field Placement	Classroom Lecture	Total
Alfred	5	6	7	18
Amy	6	8	3	17
Ava	8	1	4	13
Barbara	9	6	8	23
Chantel	4	5	7	16
Christopher	4	9	3	16
Deborah	7	0	10	17
Emily	8	1	6	15
Lynn	8	1	5	14
Mary	7	8	2	17
Taylor Marie	5	9	3	17
Wayne	8	6	12	26
Total	79	60	70	209
Percentage	38%	29%	33%	100%

Lab Simulation
79 (38%)

Classroom Lecture
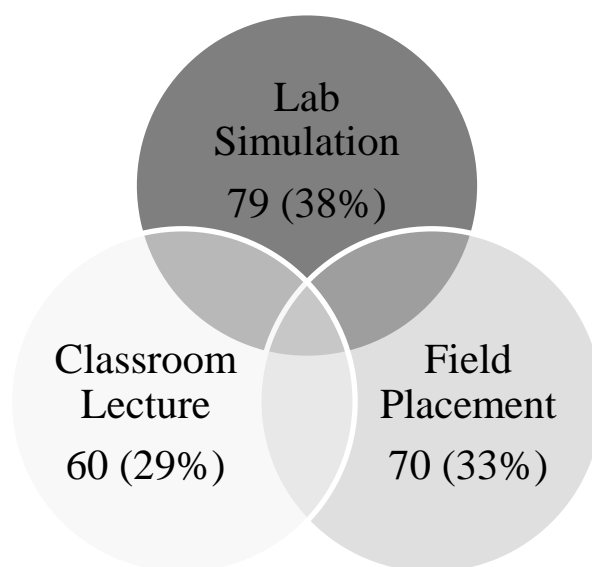60 (29%)

Field Placement
70 (33%)

Table 4

Focus Group Responses

Question Number	Positive Experience	Negative Experience	Mixed Experience	Indifferent Experience	Total
1	8	1	3	4	16
2	6	3	3	2	14
3	5	1	1	6	13
4	7	0	2	3	12
5	9	2	1	1	13
6	6	0	1	5	12
7	7	4	5	1	17
8	5	2	4	4	15
9	0	9	2	3	14
10	8	1	1	3	13
Total	61	23	23	32	139
Percentage	44%	17%	17%	23%	100%

Positive Experience		Negative Experience	
Question Number	Response Tally	Question Number	Response Tally
1	8	1	1
2	6	2	3
3	5	3	1
4	7	4	0
5	9	5	2
6	6	6	0
7	7	7	4
8	5	8	2
9	0	9	9
10	8	10	1
Total	61	Total	23
Percentage	44%	Percentage	17%

Mixed Experience		Indifferent Experience	
Question Number	Response Tally	Question Number	Response Tally
1	3	1	4
2	3	2	2
3	1	3	6
4	2	4	3
5	1	5	1
6	1	6	5
7	5	7	1
8	4	8	4
9	2	9	3
10	1	10	3
Total	23	Total	32
Percentage	17%	Percentage	23%

Table 5

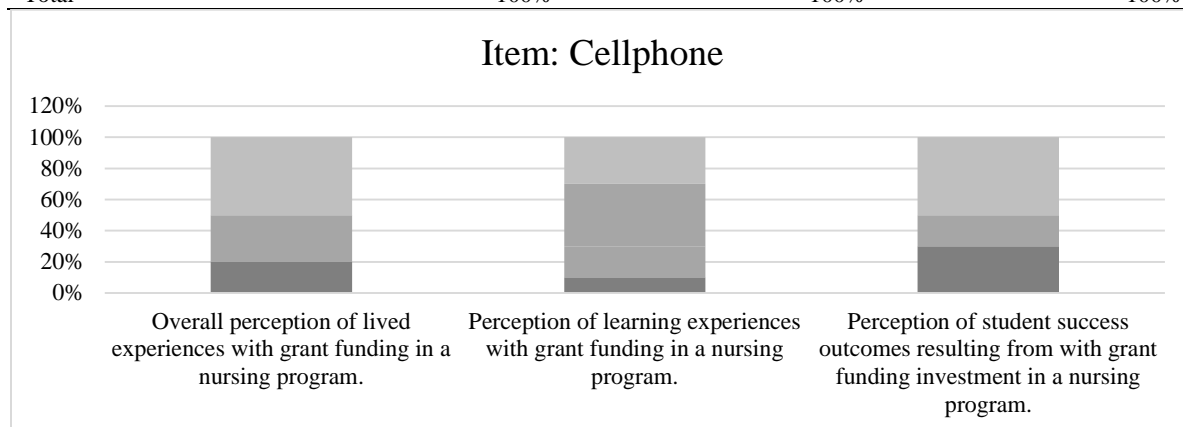*Artifact Presentation Responses*

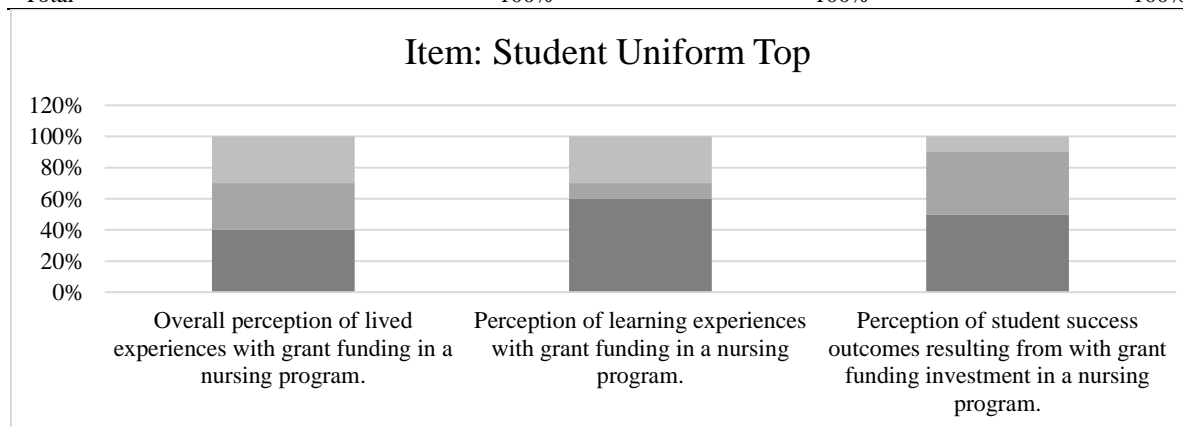| Item: Pen	Overall perception of lived experiences with grant funding in a nursing program.	Perception of learning experiences with grant funding in a nursing program.	Perception of student success outcomes resulting from with grant funding investment in a nursing program.
Positive	60%	70%	0%
Mixed	20%	10%	50%
Indifferent	20%	20%	50%
Negative	0%	10%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Item: Pen

Item: Notebook	Overall perception of lived experiences with grant funding in a nursing program.	Perception of learning experiences with grant funding in a nursing program.	Perception of student success outcomes resulting from with grant funding investment in a nursing program.
Positive	50%	20%	70%
Mixed	20%	50%	30%
Indifferent	30%	10%	0%
Negative	0%	20%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Item: Notebook

152
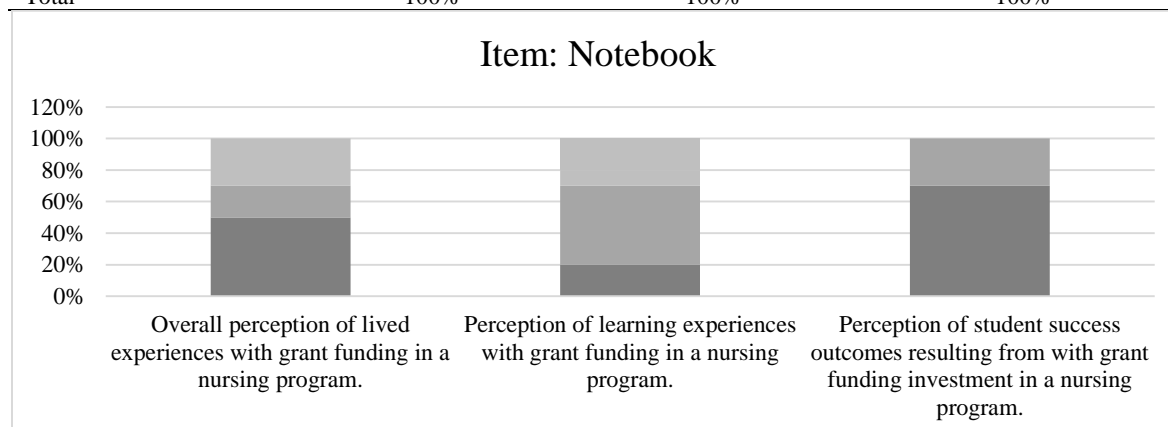
Item: Cellphone	Overall perception of lived experiences with grant funding in a nursing program.	Perception of learning experiences with grant funding in a nursing program.	Perception of student success outcomes resulting from with grant funding investment in a nursing program.
Positive	20%	10%	30%
Mixed	50%	20%	0%
Indifferent	30%	40%	20%
Negative	0%	30%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Item: Cellphone

Item: Student Uniform Top	Overall perception of lived experiences with grant funding in a nursing program.	Perception of learning experiences with grant funding in a nursing program.	Perception of student success outcomes resulting from with grant funding investment in a nursing program.
Positive	40%	60%	50%
Mixed	30%	10%	40%
Indifferent	30%	30%	10%
Negative	0%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Item: Student Uniform Top

Appendix I: Individual Interview Transcript Example

[Brian Michel] 19:18:02

Good afternoon, I'm Brian Michel, a doctoral student currently enrolled in Liberty University's School of Education. Today, we're going to be discussing your experience as a nursing program student and your perception of the presence of grant funding throughout the program. We'll be asking you 15 questions. So please be as truthful and complete as possible.

[Brian Michel] 19:19:35

Number one, tell me about what you see as one of the most meaningful learning experiences you have had as a student in the nursing program.

[Chantel] 19:19:59

One of the most meaningful experiences I have in nursing program was the direct interaction with the patient care for me in nursing.

[Brian Michel] 19:20:20

Thank you. Number two, describe what you see as the role grant funding investment plays in higher education, particularly in your program.

[Chantel] 19:20:38

I think the grant funding allows for the most up to date simulation equipment to prepare nursing students on for direct skills with patients.

[Brian Michel] 19:20:52

Thank you. Number three, explain both the positive or negative experiences of learning in your program.

[Chantel] 19:21:04

The positive experience is when you're receiving an education from this program, you will be well prepared to go further in a nursing career and the negatives is it's very demanding with high turnover or fail rate.

[Brian Michel] 19:21:33

Number four, describe why you believe faculty instruction benefited or suffered from the utilization of grant funding investment in the classroom.

[Chantel] 19:21:48

I think that grant funding benefited faculty because a lot of them taught students this year with some of the best equipment that was available.

[Brian Michel] 19:22:07

Thank you. Number five, describe how you believe students could benefit from using grant funding in the program.

[Chantel] 19:22:20

It just could probably benefit from using funds to order different types of equipment that is needed in nursing so we can learn how to use it properly such as scissors, tape measures, and stethoscopes, to name a few.

[Brian Michel] 19:22:54

Thank you. Number six, describe how your program has benefited from the utilization of grant funding.

[Chantel] 19:23:03

The program benefits from grant funding because the students have the opportunity to have hands-on experience thanks to all of the tools we have to learn how to use.

[Brian Michel] 19:23:14

Thank you. Number seven, what do you believe are the long-term benefits of grant-funding investment mutually benefiting students and faculty in the nursing program?

[Chantel] 19:23:30

Long term benefits are that it allows the program to earn a certain reputation for graduating quality professionals into practice within the healthcare community. It's also great because you know you're going into a program that has great equipment and things that are available. These alone can impact your choice on which nursing school to go to.

[Brian Michel] 19:24:01

Thank you. Number eight, describe how you would like to see grant funding used in your program differently in the future.

[Chantel] 19:24:17

I'm not sure if grants can do this but they would be helpful for the cost of books given nursing and medical books are very expensive.

[Brian Michel] 19:24:33

Thank you. Number nine, please share an example of a project in the nursing program that was funded by grants and explain how it influenced your learning experience.

[Chantel] 19:24:50

Grant funding helped provide new IV pumps and supplies to be used during phlebotomy skills lessons and those same pumps are usually in most hospital settings so they're there for you to learn to use the IV pump appropriately before you even start on the job.

[Brian Michel] 19:25:21

Thank you. Number 10, describe how you think grant-funded research and projects in the nursing program contribute to the advancement of healthcare practices.

[Chantel] 19:25:36

The grant funding allows the program to purchase the most up to date equipment that is used in the healthcare field where the equipment is changing all the time.

[Brian Michel] 19:25:55

Thank you. Number 11, please elaborate on any challenges or barriers you have experienced as a student when it comes to implementing grant-funded programs within your nursing curriculum.

[Chantel] 19:26:05

One of the greatest barriers I noticed possibly caused by a lack of grant funding was there was not being enough supplies in the class for students to not have to take turns sharing. Having to share slowed down our work and made it hard to get the technique down because we were constantly stopping.

[Brian Michel] 19:26:22

Thank you. Number 12, please describe what criteria should be considered when deciding how to invest future grant funds in the nursing program.

[Chantel] 19:26:45

The size of the program should be taken into account. Bigger programs need more money to run, it's as simple as that.

[Brian Michel] 19:27:20

Thank you. Number 13, please share your thoughts on the impact sustainability of grant-funded projects in the nursing program and how they can have a positive impact beyond the initial investment.

[Chantel] 19:27:42

The positive impact is that beyond the actual money for these nursing programs is that it prepares nurses to care for people. Otherwise, I see that these purchases will likely be around for a while so these can benefit later classes of students.

[Brian Michel] 19:27:58

Thank you. Number 14, please share any ethical considerations or potential conflicts of interest you think should be addressed when using grant funding in higher education.

[Chantel] 19:28:27

I don't think that there is any.

[Brian Michel] 19:28:31

Thank you. Number 15, what else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with grant funding utilization in higher education that we have not already discussed?

[Chantel] 19:28:50

I think grant funding could provide funds to support students directly that are in the nursing program. Like, assist them with possibly housing or paying for transportation to get to each clinical site. Transportation can be a barrier for students to enter into the program because it's required to go to multiple different facilities in order to complete the program where if you don't have a means of transportation, it can be difficult to complete the nursing program.

[Brian Michel] 19:29:38

Thank you. Alright, this concludes our interview for today.