Effective Strategies for Promoting Faculty and Student Success in Online Counselor Education Programs

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While distance education has existed for some time, its rapid growth began in the late 1990s with the advancement of the rapid growth of the Internet (Kentnor, 2015). Naturally, as a result, the question has arisen: can students be successful in their careers if they graduate from an online program? Numerous programs in all fields were asking this question. Since online learning was still relatively new, university programs were continuing to figure out the best way to provide experiences at a distance that promote successful learning. Due to the recent pandemic of 2020, there was even a greater need for determining the best practices in teaching online. This study focuses on the teaching strategies and practices of faculty who prepare, teach, and guide students to complete classes for an online CACREP accredited counselor education program. While this study focuses on gathering ideas from faculty in a counselor education program, the teaching strategies and practices can be applied to almost any online program.

Literature Review

Student and faculty success was critically important for institutions of higher learning. Nevertheless, the definitions of each of these terms, and the implications, vary widely. This literature review will attempt to explore what the current literature has to say about student and faculty success, focusing on success in online education, "one of the most rapidly growing subsections of education" (Bloomberg, 2020, para. 1). As a result of online education, Bloomberg (2020) noted that students look different from what they have in the past regarding age, experience, and outside responsibilities. The term often used for these individuals was non-traditional students. Understanding non-traditional students were essential to their success (Morris, 2016). These students seek out online education for many reasons, including this educational format (Bloomberg, 2020). Because the students and format were different from in the past, faculty must adapt to succeed and help their students succeed.

For the current study, student success was dependent upon faculty actions. Additionally, faculty success was dependent upon students completing courses. Therefore, student and faculty success appeared to be intertwined and were explored conjointly through an exploration of the unique requirements for this success to take place in an online education format. This literature review formed the basis for a mixed methods research study conducted by a team of researchers at a large, private university in the southern United States.

Faculty and Student Success

Student success in higher education typically was tied to student achievement, most often measured by grades and persistence (Bettinger et al., 2017). Several factors contribute to success. Paul and Cochran (2013) pointed out that "interaction and feedback were important behaviors influencing student motivation and involvement" (p. 51). Students also benefit from transparency, including clear goals and expectations, clear communication regarding how to complete assignments successfully, and "specific criteria for which they will be evaluated" (Salis et al., 2016, para. 6). One institution with a history of high rates of online student success found that "quality relationships with program faculty" and "prompt feedback" from faculty were among the top reasons for the satisfaction of students (Clark et al., 2009, p. 54). Additionally, empathy and faculty presence appeared paramount for student success.

Empathy

One key factor to faculty success and, at least in part resulting in student success was empathy, which was particularly relevant to counseling and counselor education. Fuller (2012) noted that "it has long been known that instructors who provide empathy in the classroom develop a strong rapport with their students and facilitate a positive learning environment" (p. 38). In this article, the author discovered eight themes that were used to promote empathy, as listed below:

1) Instructors provide a "tips for online course success" document before class beginning.
2) Empathetic interactive instructors use synchronous chat rooms.
3) Instructors use a conversational tone.
4) Interaction was promoted through careful facilitation in the discussion boards.
5) An empathetic presence was practiced.
6) Design "think forward type lessons" that offer clarity for student understanding.
7) Instructors use frequent checks for learning.
8) Instructors make a personal connection at the start of class.

Faculty Presence

Faculty presence was critical and "has been found to positively impact student learning, cognition, and motivation" (Paul & Cochran, 2013, p. 51). Without question, faculty presence was one aspect of student engagement contributing to student success (Bloomberg & Grantham, 2018). This concept of faculty presence "refers to the instructor actively interacting with learners, and establishing and maintaining a collaborative and supportive working relationship. Through shared interaction, the instructor serves as a model for the discourse, and a learning facilitator" (Bloomberg & Grantham, 2018, p. 4). Mentorship can be useful for faculty members to develop the skill set needed to engage with students effectively.

Faculty to Faculty Mentorship

Faculty to faculty mentorship programs can be effective at helping students to succeed (Elliott, 2018). The results of one qualitative research study highlighted three specific areas: "faculty satisfaction, meaningful relationships, and continuing learning in one's academic field" (p. 39). Successful faculty mentoring can, in part, lead to higher rates of retention among students. Retention was just one aspect of success in online education that will be addressed in the following section for online program success.

Online Success

The preceding section addressed faculty and student success, regardless of educational format. The proceeding section was specific to the online educational format. Online communication, student expectations, and faculty satisfaction all look quite different from the traditional or residential side of education. Also, looking at student success, which includes retention, was unique in the online setting. This section concludes with a summary of online faculty and student success.

Online Communication

First, it was "important that the relationships between instructors, students, and supervisors

were developed appropriately in the online modality to promote effective and ongoing communication" (Cicco, 2012, p. 2). According to Paul and Cochran (2013), there were two primary communication methods that were limited in many online courses. These were tone and facial expression/body language. As a result, many online classes do not provide that "first impression" experience to rely on nonverbal and tone aspects of communication.

Online Student Expectations

According to the Online Learning Consortium (OLC, 2019), "online students put primary value on appropriate, constructive, and substantive interaction with faculty and other students" (para. 1). Online students may have different expectations of faculty than their residential counterparts. Online programs had varying faculty requirements regarding responses to email, grading turn-around time, and phone calls with students. Newbold et al. (2017) noted that they respond to emails within a business day, grade all assignments within three business days except for weekends and holidays, and meet with students for appointments throughout the week and weekend. In their research, they discovered that student excellence was measured in terms of completion rates and quality of work. As a result, they had a 90% or higher retention rate; however, faculty found it more time-intensive than traditional programs and have been leaving to teach in traditional programs (Newbold et al., 2017). Their suggestion was to create spaces for faculty to share their best practices and challenges.

Online Faculty Satisfaction

Satisfaction among online faculty was important as it was a pillar of quality and impacts faculty motivation to help students succeed (Bollinger & Wasilik, 2009). Additionally, faculty member's self-efficacy in online student engagement has been researched, with results determining that there were two significant predictors: "perception of learning and future interest" (Horvitz et al., 2015, p. 312). Female faculty who teach online have higher self-efficacy rates in online instructional strategies, including class management and learning assessment, than their male counterparts. This self-efficacy area also resulted in faculty revealing they were more confident in their online teaching abilities when they "perceive that their students were learning a great deal" (Horvitz et al., 2015, p. 312). Another important outcome from this study was that the longer a faculty member teaches online, the higher their self-efficacy level.

Online Student Success

Ultimately, the success of students completing their education online "may depend on such factors as the accessibility of the course information and students' varying abilities to process it" (Abell et al., 2016, p.2). According to these researchers, online learners must be motivated, receive timely feedback, interact with the faculty and other students, and utilize technology effectively. It can help the online environment if the educator thinks of him or herself as a coach. Retention was a key indicator of student success.

Retention was a problem in online education despite the high number of students that take at least one online course and the high number of colleges and universities (70%) that offer online education (Glazier, 2016). Glazier hypothesized that it was possible to improve online retention only by improving rapport with students. The researcher tested this with 465 online students over six years. Glazier compared sections where she did not focus on building rapport with sections focusing on building rapport. The data revealed "that rapport has a strong, significant, and

consistently positive effect" (p. 438). Students who withdraw from courses were not successful in the completion of those courses.

Additionally, students that completed the course unsuccessfully were more likely not to return. For these reasons, counselor educators need to be aware of the student characteristics, student environment, and course design that reduce retention rates. In this study, to build rapport, the author regularly used videos, posted links to YouTube, provided personalized feedback on assignments, referenced students by their names, was very active in the discussion board, and personally emailed them throughout the semester. The difference between the two groups (the students she focused on building rapport with versus the students she did not focus on building rapport with) reflected "significantly lower attrition and significantly higher grades" among students with whom she intentionally built rapport (Glazier, 2016, p. 437).

Online Student and Faculty Success Summary

Overall, the literature was consistent regarding the factors that were more likely to lead to students and faculty's success using online education. To summarize, Lewis and Husein (2006) noted four broad categories:

- Fostering interaction that should be meaningful and planned,
- Providing feedback that is quick, high quality, individualized, and may include a voice component,
- Facilitated learning such as the use of class announcements, ensuring students understand the syllabus, additional material added to what was already placed into the online classroom,
- Maintaining enthusiasm and organization, including applications to the "real world."

Additionally, faculty collaboration with other departments within the institution (such as connecting with advisors and librarians) can help student success (Guy & Eimer, 2016). With all of this in mind, the current study was developed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the best practices among counselor education faculty who have consistently demonstrated successful student outcomes in online classes. This study also explored the effective strategies these faculty utilized to promote student engagement in the online format. Although recent research has been conducted on online counselor education programs, few studies specific to practices for online counseling classes were found (Chen et al., 2020; Snow et al., 2018). This current study focused on promoting success, specifically in online counselor education graduate counseling classes. The two research questions posed were:

1. What were the effective teaching strategies that promote student success in online counselor education classes?

2. What were the effective teaching strategies that increase student engagement in online counselor education classes?

Method

Overview

This study utilized a mixed-methods design that included quantitative data from a survey and qualitative data from a focus group with a select group of faculty members from a counselor education program at a large university in the southern United States that has been teaching courses to students at a distance since 1985. Counseling specific courses have been taught using an online format for the past 15 years. The counseling program has 372 faculty as of 2020.

Sample

The sample consisted of 20 full-time online instructors who taught courses in the counseling program at a large university during the 2018-2019 academic year. Participants in the quantitative survey included a blend of 20 Caucasian and African-American instructors. The six participants in the focus group were Caucasian except for one Brazilian participant.

Data Collection

Survey (Quantitative)

A quantitative survey was sent out on two separate occasions (see Appendix A). Initially, the survey was sent to 40 faculty members via email based on an institutional report which provided overall success rates (S-rates) for faculty based on the previous academic year. This "S-rate" was defined by the institution as a B- or higher for graduate classes and C or higher for undergraduate classes within institutional guidelines. Recognizing that not every class has the same difficulty level, the class difficulty level was controlled by having a separate course success rate (course S-rate) and faculty S-rate. The research team met with the information technology statistician who programmed the S-rate reports to consider the best way to determine faculty who excelled given the variance in course difficulty, impacting overall course, and faculty success rates. (For example, the success rate of a research course typically was lower than upper-level core courses offered in the program.) It was determined that faculty with a 10% increase of the faculty S-rate over and above the average course S-rate would be identified as potential participants, and 40 faculty met this criterion.

This quantitative survey was also sent to 39 faculty who were intentionally chosen by their faculty mentor and Department Chair based on their excellent performance evaluations in their online classrooms. All online faculty at this university was assigned to an administrative faculty mentor who mentors from 15-20 faculty members. The faculty mentors evaluate each faculty member bi-annually. Faculty members were likely included in both the S-rate report recruitment and those intentionally recruited by their faculty mentor and therefore received the survey twice. A total of 20 faculty responded to the survey.

Descriptive statistics and frequency tables were run for the available information. Future research will be desirable to establish identifying information so that correlations and t-tests can be used to look for differences between groups. It should also be noted that "grade inflation" was controlled for by using faculty recommended by faculty mentors for this sample and eliminating those professors with a 100% pass rate.

Instrument. Seventeen quantitative questions were developed as part of a departmental

program evaluation to assess faculty's habitual practices with higher ratings (as measured by S-rates and supervisor evaluations) in their interactions with students and their classes overall. Researchers have investigated the habits and practices of effective clinicians and indicated more research was needed to identify the habits of highly effective counselor educators (Pope & Kline 1999; Wampold, n.d.). The Faculty Habits Survey (See Appendix A) was further divided into three areas based on university expectations for evaluation to identify habits of successful faculty and look for trends and interactions. The three domains assessed and their corresponding areas included on faculty portfolio evaluations were included in parentheses:

- Time (university standards of instruction – i.e., 36-hour email response time)
- Interactions (feedback on assignments, discussion board interactions, email communication)
- Supplemental interactions (research and scholarship, and any area not covered by the faculty portfolio)

Data Collection

Focus Group (Qualitative)

In addition to the survey, a focus group of six top-rated graduate counseling faculty members was formed to obtain additional subjective information regarding their best practices in teaching online. Their faculty mentor recommended the top-rated professors. The university faculty mentors were selected for their positions based on their proven excellent performance in the online classroom. While these positions had an administrative component, the focus was on mentoring faculty to do their best to meet or exceed the department's standards. At the time of this study, the Counseling Department had 16 faculty mentors who evaluated the performance of 15-20 faculty members as part of their mentoring role. Each faculty mentor provided the names of the top three-four faculty members under their supervision. The faculty mentors selected the faculty based on formal and informal evaluations of their online classroom performance. Two formal evaluations were conducted throughout the year, while informal evaluations occur as the faculty mentor sees a need. The formal evaluation encompassed discussion forum interactions, feedback on assignments, timeliness of grading, and substantive student interactions both through announcements and individually. Informal evaluations were ongoing as the faculty mentors interact with their faculty throughout the year. Student feedback was also a factor that was provided to faculty mentors at the end of course surveys.

A total of 46 names were submitted by the faculty mentors. This list was also reviewed by the department chairs, who took into consideration the quantitative S-rate reports of these faculty members and their observations to prevent possible bias of the faculty members. An email was sent to all 46 faculty members asking for volunteers to participate in the focus group. A total of 14 volunteered for the date and time in which the focus group was scheduled. While research (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011) was varied on the precise ideal number for a focus group, six was the set number hoped for in the focus group. The research team all voted on the six faculty members who would be selected out of the group of 14 volunteers. The final six were contacted and sent the informed consent to be signed before the focus group meeting.

The focus group took place in a video-conferencing format utilizing the "WebEx" program. The meeting was recorded, and the chat feature was also utilized. While the chat feature was not encouraged, the participants readily took advantage of it. They allowed the researchers to obtain

more information than what would typically occur in a face-to-face focus group. Two researchers from the research team served as leaders for the focus group. One leader asked the questions while the other leader took notes and monitored the chat feature. The length of the focus group was approximately 55 minutes. The recording was transcribed, and three members of the research team analyzed it, looking for common themes.

Results

Faculty Success Quantitative Analysis

To assess faculty success, 40 faculty were invited to participate in this study and intentionally selected through recommendations from supervisors (faculty mentors and Department Chairs) along with their good S-rate scores. A total of 20 responded, leading to a 50% response rate. For this study, "success rates" were defined as the number value of students who completed the course with a B- or higher. The class difficulty level was also controlled by having a separate "Course Success-rate (S-rate)" and "Faculty S-rate," and by selecting participants with the 10% increase of the "Faculty S-rate" over and above the "Course S-rate." Potential grade inflation was mitigated by excluding faculty with 100% success rates. Potential faculty participants were identified based on these criteria, and then twenty were invited to participate based on supervisor recommendations.

Seventeen quantitative questions were developed to measure how faculty who have higher S-rates and excellent supervisor recommendations interact with students in their classes overall. Researchers used SPSS IBM 26 to conduct descriptive statistics, including frequency analyses. As the results were tabulated, one question (number 9) was removed from the analysis due to 100% "yes" responses, even though it was included in the list found in Appendix A. The quantitative questions were further divided into three areas for evaluation to see how successful faculty spent their time and to look for trends and interactions. These descriptive statistics were provided for time, interactions, and supplemental interactions.

Time

Time was defined within each question and measured by minutes, hours, or days on various educational activities. Questions 1, 2, 6, and 10 relate to this variable (see Appendix A). The number of courses a faculty member taught during any given 8-week term was also considered. To summarize this data, 60% of faculty teach one or two courses each 8-week term, while the remaining 40% teach three or more classes each term. While in these classes, 75% of the faculty surveyed spent eight or more hours in each course per week, whereas 25% spent six or fewer hours in each course per week.

Another aspect of time involved the time spent on grading assignments. Eighty-five percent of successful faculty spent 30 minutes or less grading per small assignment, with the remaining 15% spending 31 minutes or more grading each small assignment.

Finally, 100% of the faculty selected to participate based on their high "S-rates" reported that they answer their emails within 36 hours. Of those, 70% responded to emails within 24 hours or less.

Table 1

Average Amount of Time Spent Facilitating Each Course, Each week

Time Spent	Faculty Course Facilitation	
	n	%
4 Hours	1	5
6 Hours	4	20
8+ Hours	15	75

Note: *N* = 20.

Table 2

Average Amount of Time Spent Interacting with Students on Each Weekly or Biweekly Discussion Board Forum

Time Spent	Faculty-Student Interaction	
	n	%
2 Hours	9	45
3 Hours	3	15
4+ Hours	8	40

Note: *N* = 20.

Interaction

Interactions refer to exchanges and communications that were required by the university that faculty must have with students. Questions 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 were related to this variable (see Appendix A). Over half (55%) of faculty spend three hours interacting with students in the discussion boards, with 45% spending two hours or less in the same interactions. While in those discussion boards, 95% interact with four or more students, with only 5% of faculty interacting with three or less. Sixty percent of the faculty used at least three methods (rubric, written feedback, and summary feedback) in delivering feedback to students in the discussion boards, with 40% using at

least one of the three methods to give feedback.

Table 3

Average Method of Feedback Provided to the Discussion Board Forum

Feedback Method Used	Faculty-Student Feedback	
	n	%
Rubric Only	2	10
Written Feedback	5	25
Summative Feedback	1	5
All The Above Methods	12	60

Note: *N* =20.

Table 4

Percentage of Faculty Who Offer Optional Face-to-face Webex[1] Sessions

Webex Sessions Offered?	Faculty WebEx Activity	
	n	%
Yes	6	30
No	14	70

Notes: *N* =20. [1]WebEx © was a video-conferencing platform used by the university.

When discussing the qualitative components of the feedback given to students, the results were varied. Approximately half of the faculty (10 out of 20) surveyed reported 75% of their qualitative comments were positive, with the other half of faculty reporting anywhere from 10% to 50% of their comments as positive. Again, half of the faculty members reported that they considered 50% of their feedback as constructive or corrective. One faculty member noted that 100% of their feedback was constructive. This may be evidence that faculty see both positive and corrective feedback as constructive, as discussed below.

Supplemental Interactions

Supplemental Interactions were those exchanges and communications that were *not* required by the university but were strongly encouraged to enhance the learning environment. Questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 were related to this variable (see Appendix A). Beginning with question 11, there was a wide variation: 85% of faculty spoke with at least one or more students per eight-week term via a phone call, while the remaining 15% used mainly email for their communications.

The majority of faculty (70%) reported *not* having set office hours, with the remaining 30% saying they keep regular office hours. One hundred percent of the sample reported speaking with students by phone or email in the evenings. An additional 95% of faculty reported speaking with students by phone or email on the weekends. The only one reported not having interactions with students on the weekends.

The vast majority (90%) of participants reported providing additional or supplemental information to augment course material. The remaining faculty do not use supplemental information, preferring to use the provided course material. The majority of faculty (70%) said they do not offer optional WebEx (Video conferencing) sessions.

Finally, 85% of faculty in the sample said they reply to each student introduction in the discussion platform in the learning management system.

Table 5

Average Amount of Time Spent Grading Individual Assignments (Not Including Research Papers/Large Projects)

Time Spent	Faculty Assignment Grading	
	n	%
1 to 15 Minutes	5	25
16 to 30 Minutes	12	60
31 to 45 Minutes	2	10
46 to 60 Minutes	1	5

Note: *N* =20.

Faculty/Student Success Focus Group Report - Qualitative Analysis

In the focus group, five general themes appeared to be consistent with all the participants

throughout the discussion: connection, intentional, "care-first," approachable, and grace. Each of these will be discussed briefly in turn.

Connection

Faculty recognized the need for connection in the online learning environment and pursued connection by using video and additional midweek announcements that one faculty member referred to as "helpful tips." All participants appeared to look for ways to support students and be timely and comprehensive in their responses to students. Additionally, being in a faith-based program includes the connection between spirituality and course material. Courses have a specific Collaboration and Community Center, and one faculty stated he sees this as a way to engage students and feel connected with a community of learners.

Intentional

Faculty reported being intentional in their approach to grading, with the majority having a structured approach to their week. Some graded very early in the week, and others spaced grading throughout the week, with all grades being posted within five days of assignment due dates. One faculty member mentioned that she does more "constructive" feedback on papers than "positive" feedback. Another mentioned his comments were more "descriptive" in nature. One faculty member indicated that he typically provides three positive comments for every negative comment when grading assignments. While there was a variety in how faculty members incorporated intentionality, the focus on being intentional appeared in communication, grading, and overall care for students.

Care-First

One participant described this as "care first about the person before I get into anything else." This provides a personal focus that invites students to share their personal experiences and allows them to understand how these experiences may impact academic work. Another faculty member emphasized that "personal touch was super important" to him. One faculty member acknowledged an effort to "be caring" but "also maintain the standards" with importance on being "fair with the whole class." A faculty member also mentioned having a "sense of caring and personal touch" to everything he does.

Approach

There was a consensus from the faculty on the need to be proactive in communicating with students and offering additional support beyond the course content. One faculty participant stated, "I want to make sure that I appear very approachable, and I want to help students understand that I am more than just a person on the screen, that I am accessible." In this, the faculty member will often share what was occurring in the week and include prayer time. One faculty member reported in most weeks. An "introductory video" was posted for students sharing aspects of what was occurring for the week. This also adds a more personal touch to the online classroom. Another mentioned she liked using what she called a "collaborative approach" when assisting a struggling student.

Grace

The faculty that were interviewed all agreed they have a focus on grace in their approach

with students. One faculty member reported the tendency to "err on the side of grace" when working with students. With this grace, there remains a level of accountability for students to submit quality work. This grace-filled approach provides an opportunity for additional teaching of course material and professionalism in work. Another faculty member reported giving the "benefit of the doubt early on." Finally, a faculty member stated that in some circumstances, "grace was the right answer."

Grace was not a term that may be common to all faculty members. This essentially means that faculty were reporting they benefit from the doubt to students (including grading), give extensions graciously, and work diligently to help students succeed. Though a grace-filled approach was reported, standards of instruction were not compromised.

Discussion

The faculty in this sample invested considerable amounts of time and energy facilitating their courses. The faculty participants had higher success rates and supervisor satisfaction than other faculty from their institution. These faculty meet the requirements at their respective institution, but the majority (70% - 90%) provide supplemental interactions that exceed the requirements. These faculty also worked to provide positive, constructive, and corrective feedback to students. The majority of faculty interacted with students in the evening and on weekends, indicating faculty availability could also be a contributing factor in success. As a final point, an essential factor to students' feeling "connected" to the class may be that most of this sample faculty strived to reply to each student in the Introduction Discussion Board in the first week of class. This may be another important factor in enhancing student satisfaction throughout the 8-weeks and lowering drop rates.

Some researchers have investigated the link between faculty lifestyle habits and student success (Boateng et al., 2016), finding a correlation and suggesting that future research should investigate time spent using electronic media. This research contributes to the existent body of literature by providing insight into some electronic media habits of faculty.

As discussed above, most of the selected faculty provided supplemental instruction and offered enhanced opportunities for connections with students. This quantitative data was supported in the qualitative focus group. Faculty showed intentionality in their efforts to connect with students and provide instruction leading to focused learning and student understanding of concepts presented in courses. There was an overall consensus on the importance of caring for students, consistent with the conclusion from a previous study (Huun & Kummerow, 2018). This included faculty taking the time to learn of the students' personal experiences to gain a greater understanding of their lives and experiences and the resulting impact on coursework. Faculty identified the importance of being accessible to students. This accessibility was fostered through intentional engagement in class discussions, emails to individual students, and course announcements, including video announcements. This led to a personal touch that fostered increased engagement.

Consistent with previous research (OLC, 2019; Paul & Cochran, 2013), both the quantitative and qualitative measures noted the importance of faculty interaction and constructive feedback. The theme of connection was consistent with previous research by Cicco (2012), noting the importance of the faculty and student relationship, especially in an online environment. The importance of social presence, including timely feedback and interaction (24-36 hours email response, timely grading of assignments) was highlighted in both the quantitative data and

qualitative results with the theme intentionality, also consistent with previous research (Newbold et al., 2017; Richardson & Swan, 2003). The consistency between the quantitative and qualitative data highlights the selected faculty members' willingness to engage with students in meaningful ways actively, have increased availability, and provide grace and care beyond their respective institution requirements.

Recommendations for Future Research

It may be helpful to study a group of faculty all teaching the same course in order to fine-tune the data and provide helpful information to inform psychoeducational training for faculty, designed to increase faculty engagement in activities associated with higher S-rates. Future research should utilize faculty teaching the same courses to limit confounding variables and compare variation in faculty-student interaction frequency. A pre-post test with control comparison after a treatment application, including psychoeducational training to enhance faculty motivation, tools, and strategies for effective student engagement, may provide valuable data regarding which psychoeducational strategies were most effective for enhancing faculty activity successful outcomes.

Surprisingly, the topic of faculty satisfaction did emerge. As noted by Bollinger and Wasilik (2009), faculty satisfaction can influence commitment to student success. Further exploring the connection between faculty satisfaction and student success was warranted.

The theme of grace emerged in the qualitative data, which was not currently in the research. However, there seems to be a parallel between the concept of grace and a coach persona reported by Abell et al. (2016). Investigating the possible connection between the concept of grace and the coach persona in faculty would provide further information about the picture of a successful online faculty member.

Limitations of the Study

This study consisted of a relatively small sample from one institution and may not represent all higher education academic institutions. The sample was intentionally selected through recommendations from an automated report and faculty mentors; however, each faculty member could have varying qualitative definitions of success. This study also used self-report survey instrumentation, which was potentially limited by a lack of self-awareness (Spector, 1994; Reason, 1993). Additionally, some of the terms in the quantitative survey need further clarification. Specifically, the concept of constructive feedback appeared to be perceived differently by faculty, with one faculty member stating that 100% of the feedback given was constructive. Another limitation to the focus group interaction occurred when one leader asked participants to state in general terms if they do something similar to what has already been shared, so faculty "are not repeating the same information." This statement may interfere with the ability to determine themes adequately. Another limitation was the lack of diversity in the focus group participants.

Further study with a more diverse group of faculty members would be beneficial. The chat feature in the focus group was both a limitation as well as a strength. The limitation took place as the participants often provided a chat comment to add to a former answer, making it a challenge for them to keep up with the information provided. At the same time, this additional information allowed the leaders to gather more information than typically gathered in a face-to-face focus group.

Conclusion

This study examined the best practices utilized by faculty teaching students in an online format. Prior research (Cicco, 2012; Newbold et al., 2017; OLC, 2019; Paul & Cochran, 2013) indicating best teaching practices were also similar to the best practices that promoted students' success in an online counselor education program. Faculty engagement with students portraying empathy and care was an important relationship factor while also providing prompt constructive feedback. Successful faculty were also intentional in looking for ways to help students succeed, including supplemental materials or tips. They were also accessible and willing to help mentor students in meaningful ways while providing reasonable grace and additional assistance when students faced personal difficulties. Overall, finding ways to connect with students personally increased retention rates and provided overall faculty and student satisfaction.

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Appendix

Faculty Habits Survey

Question 1: On average, how many courses do you teach at one time? (Time)
*answer choice*s: 1; 2; 3; 4 or more

Question 2: On average, how much time do you spend facilitating each course, each week? (Time)
answer choices: 2; 4; 6; 8 or more

Question 3: On average, how much time do you spend interacting with students on each weekly or bi-weekly discussion board forum? (Interactions) *answer choices*: 0; 1; 2; 3; 4 or more

Question 4: How many students do you interact with on each discussion board? (Interactions) *answer choices*: 0; 1; 2; 3; 4 or more

Question 5: On average, how do you provide feedback to the discussion board forums? (Interactions) *answer choices*: I prefer to use just the grading rubric; I give written feedback in the comment box; I provide a summary feedback to the class as a whole; I do all of these when providing feedback

Question 6: On average, how much time do you spend grading each individual assignment (not including research papers or large projects)? (Time) *answer choices*: 1 - 15 minutes; 16 - 30 minutes; 31 – 45 minutes; 46 – 1 hour; More than an hour

Question 7: On average, what percentage of your comments were positive feedback? (Interactions) *answer choices*: 10%; 25%; 50%; 75%; 100%

Question 8: On average, what percentage of your comments were constructive or corrective feedback? (Interactions) *answer choices*: 10%; 25%; 50%; 75%; 100%)

Question 9: Do you utilize a grading rubric to provide feedback on assignments? (Interactions) *answer choices*: Yes; No

Question 10: On average, what was your email response time? (Time) *answer choices*: Less than 24 hours; 24 – 36 hours; 48 hours; 2 days or more

Question 11. On average, how many students do you talk with by phone during each term? (Supplemental Interactions) *answer choices*: 0; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5 or more

Question 12: Do you have set office hours? (Supplemental Interactions) *answer choices*: Yes; No

Question 13: Do you speak with students in the evenings (via phone or email?) (Supplemental Interactions) *answer choices*: Yes; No

Question 14: Do you speak with students on the weekends (via phone or email?) (Supplemental Interactions) *answer choices*: Yes; No

Question 15: Do you provide supplemental information to the course (information that was in addition to what was already in the course)? (Supplemental Interactions) *answer choices*: Yes; No

Question 16:   Do you offer optional Web-ex sessions? (Supplemental Interactions) *answer choices*: Yes; No

Question 17: Do you reply to each introduction discussion board? (Supplemental Interactions) *answer choices*: Yes; No