



REVIEW ARTICLE

Tips for Surviving and Excelling in a Master and Doctoral Program Under the 40s With Honorable Recognitions

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Abstract

There is an imminent need to assist advanced-practice nursing students in decreasing stress and pressure concerning graduate and postgraduate studies. This short manuscript seeks to inspire other students, especially immigrants, and minority individuals, to pursue higher education degrees. The framework of this composition emerges from recent evidence suggesting not only the challenges that students undergo while completing their advanced degrees but also the importance of proper planning, self-care, support systems, and perseverance to ensure success in all academic endeavors. In addition to the recent peer-reviewed literature concerning the many challenges advanced practice students experience while completing their academic degree, this manuscript also contains real stories. These stories arise from a nursing student who survived and excelled in the educational journey and now seeks to inspire other students of all programs to believe in themselves. No doubt, engaging in any academic program brings stress and challenges, but positive practices and inspirational stories can empower all students to take control of their fears and have an enjoyable learning experience. It is time to support and motivate each other to achieve higher education while propelling all professions. Stories are powerful instruments to encourage others through role modeling and support. There is hope for all students experiencing significant challenges. It is a matter of accepting the inspiration of others and believing it is possible.

Keywords: Nursing, Stress, Masters, Doctorate, Success, Inspiration

Introduction

Undoubtedly, all master's and doctoral degrees, like any other advanced degree, are challenging and demanding processes that take a toll on the student and those around them physically and emotionally. Extensive literature worldwide supports that graduate and postgraduate education often produces stress, anxiety, and depression, which can tremendously affect students and their loved ones.¹ Worse, the pressure of completing advanced education has significantly aggravated since the recent COVID-19 pandemic.²

In addition to all these stressors related to completing an advanced program, there is something even more challenging immigrant students like this author with English language challenges must face. Language

barriers, cultural minority differences, fear of being unable to communicate effectively, and lack of opportunities for minorities are just a few challenges affecting immigrant students at all levels of education and professions.³ Students nowadays face several stress factors associated with completing their degree, and there is an evident need to offer meaningful support and guidance that can ease their pathways to success. This composition aims to inspire all students from all backgrounds, immigrants or not, to believe in their dreams while applying helpful tips and hints to survive and excel in their educational journey. It discusses the importance of planning and time management, self-care, support systems, and persistence. The sections of

this article are introduction, background, data sources, overview of the concept, discussion, and conclusions.

Many students suffer from stress and other mental health issues due to the pressure of completing an advanced degree while having other commitments like family and jobs. It is imperative to offer emotional support and guidance to those students undergoing stress while empowering them with the necessary tools to be successful in all aspects of their lives.⁴ The experiences of this author emerge from being a mother and housewife, still in her 30s, a critical care nurse, a nurse educator with master's and doctoral preparations, and a firm intention to contribute to diversity at the highest levels of the caring nursing profession. This author is committed to being a role model for nursing students of different minority backgrounds to pursue all their dreams while advocating for fair and equitable healthcare services. From her first career back home to learning English as an additional language while climbing the stairs of the nursing profession step-by-step, the author has enjoyed every moment of this process. From Health Unite Coordinator to a doctorally prepared nurse leader with the highest honors, the author has advocated for excellence, lifelong learning, and person-centered services. This article seeks to support all students struggling with stress in school while providing simple tips to survive and excel based on personal experiences and support from recent peer-reviewed journal articles.

Background

Recent literature suggests that it is necessary to ensure the required planning and time management, engage in self-care, trust a support system, and persevere to be successful in any task, including school, while having other commitments.⁵ The author's various educational experiences after transitioning from clinical practice at an intensive care unit to education and postgraduate execution offer a tangible example of the practical actions to follow to survive and excel in advanced degrees. These academic experiences include serving Nurse Practitioner (NP) students as a peer tutor and mentor for their advanced research courses while attending graduate school, tutoring NP and Master of Public Health (MPH) students regarding APA writing style, professional work, and scholarly projects, and guiding undergrad and postgrad healthcare students in various institutions. In the following sections, this author shares the most significant insights and learning realizations from all educational and personal experiences in the following paragraphs regarding success.

Data Sources

Much has been written about time management and planning as helpful tools to achieve success. It is vital to ensure the correct planning and time allocation before attempting to accomplish a goal to promote positive outcomes.⁴ First, to ensure the proper planning for graduate and postgraduate schools, the author's number one recommendation is to write down your goals from minor to big, and to set a feasible date to obtain and focus on those goals one at a time with burning passion and purpose. The second recommendation is to share this written plan with family members, so everyone understands that a person must dedicate the designated time to achieve all academic goals. The author quickly achieved all goals thanks to a comprehensive planning sheet with time specified for everything. Indeed, earning an advanced degree in education is highly challenging and even more when other barriers, challenges, and stressors like being an immigrant and completing the academic journey amid a pandemic are present. Still, the reward of finishing both programs and doing so with the highest honors, a DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Students, a cGPA of 4.0/4.0, and meaningful contributions to nursing is worth sharing. Everyone can do it too, but believing in self is critical.

Overview of the concept

Everyone must engage in self-practices that relieve stress while empowering the person with self-control and meaning. Nurses are well known for being among the most caring professionals while lacking the same caring practices for themselves.⁵ Self-care is not a luxury and should be a priority for all students. Now, this is easier said than done. So here are the most effective tips, based on this author's experiences concerning self-care while in graduate and postgraduate school. First, add simple but enjoyable self-care activities to the planning list. This positive practice can be challenging, especially if students have multiple things to add to the daily list, like this author. Besides being a graduate and postgraduate student, this author was also a young parent with an energetic kid and a sick and elderly pet to care for. Committing to multiple scholarly activities, such as achieving new certifications or renewing several existing ones, is difficult. Academic commitment will take time, but students must dedicate time to themselves regularly despite what is happening around them. Planning does work for everything, including self-care. Second, students should choose things for self-care that make their hearts spark, whatever makes them the happiest,

and commit not to stop doing that while completing their advanced degree.

Discussion

There is no doubt that a person cannot do everything in a solo fashion and expect to have positive results for all stakeholders. Support systems are vital to safe, effective, holistic, and beneficial outcomes.⁶ From students to professionals, novices to experts, everyone needs support to a certain degree. The author's first tip is to seek help and delegate to others as much as possible while completing an advanced degree, so there will be more time to finish all assignments efficiently. The second tip is to be creative in finding support. Students may seek formal or informal mentorship from their work managers or professors. Being an active seeker of learning insights and support systems will also help students grow and expand their career and professional collaborations.

Finally, students must not quit. Life turns harder for all at one point or another. This author remembers when, around this time last year, besides all chaos and losses amid the COVID-19 pandemic, she lost her fur friend of over ten years. It felt like life had stopped, and endless nights without sleep added to the stress of focusing and completing the doctoral assignments aggravating the postgraduate school stress. Based on this author's experience, the most important thing is to continue with the planning sheet, do more self-care than ever during those dark days, trust the support system, and persevere.

Conclusions

In summary, despite the undoubted stress of completing a graduate and postgraduate degree, especially after COVID-19, hope arises from the stories of individuals who have succeeded in this journey. The author hopes that these tips and hints for surviving and excelling in school inspire many to keep going and never stop believing in themselves. Think about this young nurse typing these words, with the added factors of being an immigrant student, with English as one additional language, under 40 years old, with the pressure of starting a family and raising a little one while completing both advanced degrees over the same decade. If that nurse did it, anyone could do it too. Students must believe in themselves as much as this author believes in all of them.

Author Notes

The author wrote this manuscript to inspire excellence and completion of advanced degrees in nursing students

through sharing personal experiences with the support of contemporary research literature.

Declaration

The author has recently worked as an instructor, mentor, and tutor in various healthcare programs and is currently not affiliated with any institution when writing this manuscript and submitting it for publication

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Conflict of Interest

None

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