

# The Effects of an Academic Course on Student Nurse Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities

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Disability, Education, Attitudes

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is three-fold: 1) to assess student attitudes towards persons with disabilities during progression through the baccalaureate nursing program; 2) to demonstrate whether a specific educational intervention (i.e., a 2-hour academic course about disability) facilitates more positive changes in student attitudes toward individuals with disabilities than is measured in students who do not have such a course as part of the curriculum; and 3) to estimate the reliability and equivalence of a form of the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Survey (ATDP, Form B) that was revised into person first language (ATDP, PFB).

Research questions for this study are:

- 1) Is the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Survey (ATDP, Form B) that was revised to reflect person first language (ATDP-PFB) valid, reliable, and equivalent?
- 2) Is there a difference in mean scores on the ATDP- PFB between students who take the disability course and those who do not at the end of 1 year and 2 years of the nursing program?
- 3) Are there any differences in mean scores on the ATDP based on other demographic factors (i.e. type of nursing program, previous experience with disability, ethnicity, or age)?

**Method:** A voluntary convenience sample of baccalaureate nursing students from 2 different nursing programs from 4 sites was recruited using an IRB approved Protocol. Confidentiality of subjects was protected through the use of numbered questionnaires. A demographic questionnaire, the ATDP, Form B and the ATDP-PFB were administered upon entry to the junior year of the nursing program to gather baseline data. The ATDP-PFB was administered again after completion of the first year of the nursing program.

**Findings:** This study and initial data analysis are in progress. Preliminary findings from the first year of the study will be reported at the time of the poster presentation to answer the research questions.

**Discussion:** It is important to conduct educational research to evaluate student learning and to validate effectiveness of the nursing curriculum. Although it is assumed that people in the helping professions have more positive attitudes toward people with disabilities, prior research indicates that professional care providers often have more negative attitudes than the lay public (Chubon, 1982; Ducksworth, 1988; Pederson & Carlson, 1981). One explanation for this is that care providers, unlike the lay population, are influenced by client manageability, treatability, and likeability (Wills, 1978). Also, attitudes of health care personnel toward people with disabilities vary according to gender, age, education, occupation, length of time in practice, and the quality of the contact (Yuker & Block, 1986). Similarly and unfortunately, beginning health care provider students (nursing, medical, social work students) show more negative attitudes toward people with disabilities than the general public (Bryan, 1996, 1999; Rosswurm, 1980; Wilson & Merrill, 2002). Demonstration that an educational intervention could create change in attitudes could be a model for other educational programs seeking to teach professional care providers about disabilities.