

Evaluating the Effects of Distance Learning on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination Pass Rate

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Purpose

The goal of this study was to compare PANCE pass rate of graduates from physician assistant programs utilizing distance learning to the national average.

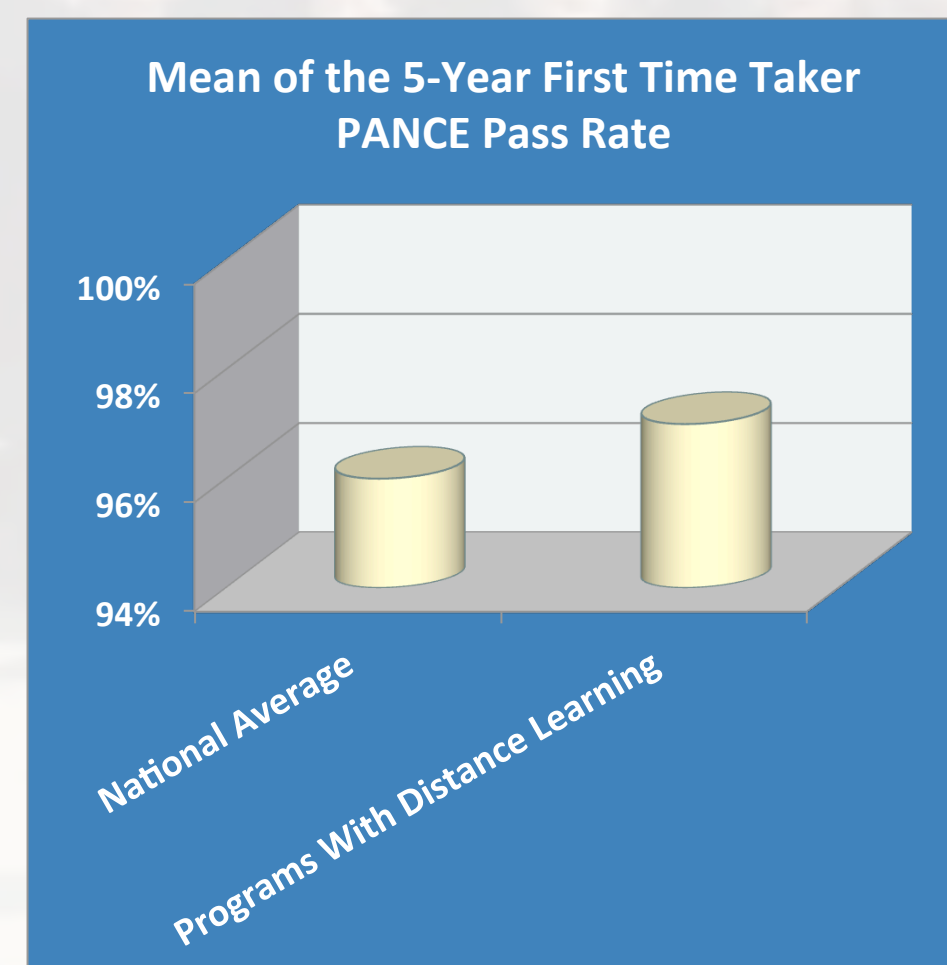
Background

- Many institutions of higher education have placed greater emphasis on increasing student enrollment numbers. This could be a result of both financial and geographic needs of the institution. Today's students expect flexibility in the delivery mode and structure of their college education.
- The needs of the universities coupled with the demands of the students and the rapid advancements in technology have led to a change in the traditional environment of the classroom. Pedagogical practices have evolved to include distance education as an increasingly popular method of instruction in higher education.
- Distance education can be used in conjunction with, or as an alternative to, traditional classroom teaching and can overcome the limitations of time and space. There is increasing interest from PA programs to offer distance learning.
- While there are many benefits to offering distance learning, there has not been any published research evaluating the effect this variable may have on the pass rate of the PANCE.

Methods

- Information from the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) program directory and the PAEA Research Program Report #33 were utilized to obtain the name and number of PA programs that offer distance learning in their curriculum.
- The National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) PANCE Exam Performance Summary Report was reviewed for each PA program offering distance learning.
- The five-year first-time taker mean pass rate for PA programs offering distance learning was calculated and compared to the five-year national first-time taker average for all PA programs in the United States over the same five year period.

PA Programs Offering Distance Learning or Online Education	5-Year First Time PANCE Pass Rate Average
Anne Arundel Community College	96%
Drexel University	96%
St. Francis University	98%
LeMoyne College	97%
Grand Valley State University	100%
Idaho State University	95%
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences	97%
University of Nebraska	100%
University of North Dakota	93%
University of Wisconsin - Madison	99%



Results

- There were 10 PA programs listed on the PAEA Program Directory web page that utilized distance/online learning and had accreditation that was not provisional.
- The five-year first-time taker PANCE pass rate mean for PA programs offering distance/online learning was 96.9%.
- The five-year national first-time taker PANCE pass rate mean was 96%.
- A review of each program's curriculum and coursework focus revealed the delivery of instruction and courses taught using distance education varied across programs with some programs offering only a few didactic courses while others offered all didactic year courses in an online/distance format.
- All 10 PA programs utilized a blended learning strategy by incorporating asynchronous (70% of programs), case-based (50% of programs), team-based (50% of programs), problem-based (30% of programs), and systems-based (90% of programs) learning in their didactic curriculum.

Conclusions

- The results of this study show that graduates from PA programs that utilize distance learning prepare students to pass the PANCE as effectively as PA programs that do not offer distance learning.
- As many institutions of higher education are placing increasing pressure on faculty to reduce costs while maintaining student outcomes, the results of this study provide PA programs with valuable information.
- Incorporating distance education into the PA curriculum is one solution that can benefit the institution and the student. The benefits include reducing costs, providing more flexible access to educational resources and material, increasing self-direction in the learning process and maintaining student outcomes.

References

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