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**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS
OF CARING ONLINE**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

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Nursing education is increasingly offered in online settings. In order to continue to convey and sustain caring as a core value in nursing, it has become necessary to better understand what caring means to students in the online nursing classroom setting.

Sitzman & Leners (2006) identified online instructor behaviors that supported students feeling cared for in online nursing education environments. In this study, 122 BSN online students from 6 different universities completed an online Likert-type survey in relation to prioritizing the caring instructor behaviors previously identified by Sitzman & Leners (2006). Respondents also answered one open-ended question related to identifying other caring online instructor behaviors not presented in the survey. A subset of 15 respondents participated in an online interview meant to further clarify why certain instructor behaviors were judged more important than others, the pros and cons of online learning, and perceived importance of peer-to-peer interactions in the online setting. Attributes of caring online instructor behaviors that emerged from the data included Empathic Presence, Clarity/Expertise, Timeliness, Full Engagement/Accessibility, and Flexibility/Openness. Themes that emerged in relation to the attributes helped to clarify specific attitudes and intentions associated with caring online teaching behaviors.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Concept of Caring in the Nursing Profession

Caring is often considered synonymous with the nursing profession and has been explored and formally discussed, in one form or another, within the context of modern nursing since Florence Nightingale wrote “Notes on Nursing: What it is and What it is Not” in 1859. In 1979, Carper published her treatise on “The Ethics of Caring” in the nursing profession and challenged nurse leaders to further explore and define caring as applied to modern nursing. Carper (1979) identified 8 major components of caring, including knowledge, alternating rhythms, patience, honesty, trust, humility, hope, and courage.

Many other nurse theorists further defined caring, with Watson’s Theory of Human Caring at the forefront. Watson (2005) asserted; “...one of the greatest honors and privileges one can have is to be able to care for another person... Caring is such a vulnerable place; first, because we come face to face with our own humanity and ourselves. In this place, we realize that one person’s level of humanity reflects back on the other...we are touching the life force, the very soul of another person” (p. 61). Watson (2002a) identified the purpose of nursing to be “compassionate service to humanity” (p. 4). Watson & Smith (2002) asserted “Caring is considered by many as one central feature within the meta-paradigm of nursing knowledge and practices” (p. 456). Watson described 10 Caritas, or caring practices, that form the underpinnings of caring in

nursing. Genuine caring exchanges, as described in the Ten Clinical Caritas Processes, are possible when the nurse mindfully enacts the 10 Caritas Summarized in figure 1.

Figure 1
Summary of Watson's 10 Caritas (Watson, 1985, 1988, 1999 & n.d.)

Caritas	Summary
Intentional practice of loving-kindness within caring consciousness.	Mindfully attending to shared humanity and intentionally demonstrating love and kindness during interactions with self, friends/family, patients, peers, supervisors, groups, aggregates, and communities
Full presence in the moment, and acknowledgment of personally held beliefs and subjective perspective of self and other.	Understanding that each person (nurse and other) brings to the present moment his or her own past experiences. Each moment of <i>now</i> becomes part of a shared <i>past</i> and lends direction to the <i>future</i> of each participant. Conscious attention, moment by moment, signifies understanding of the primacy of being fully present, since each moment encompasses <i>past, present, and future</i> of self and other.
Cultivation of one's own spiritual practices with comprehension of interconnectedness that goes beyond the individual.	Intentional spiritual practice supports understanding of the unavoidable interconnectedness of self and others in every moment.
Developing and sustaining helping-trusting, authentic caring relationships.	The nurse apprehends that all caring processes/actions are grounded in trust and authenticity that transcend the physical/material world.
Being present to and supportive of the expression of positive and negative feelings arising in self and others.	Caring interventions are given in an atmosphere of acceptance for the expression of both negative and positive feelings since these feelings are all representations of humanity in its' fullest sense.
Creatively using all ways of being, knowing, and caring as integral parts of the nursing process	In addition to using the five senses to problem-solve and accomplish tasks in professional work, the nurse also uses awareness of soul, energy, higher self, and non-physical reality to express/perform holistic caring.
Engaging in genuine teaching-learning experiences that arise from an understanding of interconnectedness, while at the same time recognizing the importance of staying within the other's frame of reference.	Verbal, non-verbal, obvious, and subtle behaviors impart meaning and contribute to understanding the others' frame of reference in fully engaged professional caring
Creating and sustaining a healing environment at physical/readily observable levels, and also at non-physical, subtle energy and consciousness levels, whereby wholeness, beauty, comfort, dignity, and peace are enabled.	Mindfully and <i>care</i> -fully supporting physical, psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual needs, an environment that supports wholeness, beauty, comfort, dignity, and peace can be created
Administering human care essentials with an intentional caring consciousness is meant to enable mind-body-spirit wholeness in all aspects of care, supporting spiritual evolution of self and other	Fully engaged caring practice acknowledges that the body is not separate from the spirit.
Opening and attending to spiritual-mysterious and existential dimensions of existence pertaining to self and others.	Spiritual/existential focus clarifies that self is the source of values and strengths, and brings personal meaning to the realities of life/embodiment and nursing practice

These ten Caring Caritas outline a nursing practice based on the notion that all of life is interconnected. Each interaction is made up of shared energy between all who participate in the interaction. The role of the nurse is to recognize the evolving physical/spiritual being in other(s), and at the same time, nurture the physical/spiritual *self*; for one cannot provide authentic caring to another without first being able to care for self (Sitzman & Eichelberger, 2004).

Caring Defined

Caring is a broad term that encompasses many meanings. Most definitions of caring include the global concept of one person mindfully and appropriately attending to the spoken and unspoken needs of another, or as Sumner (2001) so aptly asserted “recognition of other and reciprocity” (p. 926). Caring has long been associated with the nursing profession, initially in the form of nurses caring for clients, and then extending to nurse educators teaching nursing students (Bevis & Watson, 2000; Hughes, 1992; Watson, 1999). Educators convey caring values through active teacher/student dialogue and modeling, thereby perpetuating caring as a core value in nursing and nursing education (Bevis & Watson, 2000).

Watson (2002b) discussed the emerging phenomenon of online caring interactions, noting that online communication is characterized by a non-linear, free-association format of hypertext and multimedia that is received, read, and responded to, in a location that is physically apart from the message-sender. This creates a disembodied interaction that none-the-less can be intimate, and at the same time is void of a physical/immediately proximal relationship. Watson’s seventh Caritas, which refers to engaging in genuine teaching-learning experiences that arise from an understanding of interconnectedness, while at the same time recognizing the importance of staying within the other’s frame of reference, specifically alludes to the need to understand the student’s frame of reference in relation to caring in online teaching/learning exchanges.

Problem & Significance

Nursing education is increasingly offered in online settings, where this new paradigm of interaction is not fully understood. In order to continue to convey and sustain

caring as a core value in nursing, it has become necessary to better understand what caring means to students in the online nursing classroom setting. A novel implementation of pedagogy must be specifically created for caring-oriented online nursing education. This new pedagogy may be built upon past work in caring in education and caring in nursing education while simultaneously based on research clarifying how caring is conveyed and sustained in online nursing education models. In this way, online nursing education will be evidence-based rather than simply the result of attempting to transpose caring educational practices developed for face-to-face classrooms into online classroom settings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review provides an exploration of the concepts of caring in education, caring in nursing education, student and teacher perspectives of caring online, how interactions in online classrooms differ from brick and mortar classrooms, best practices in online education in general and online nursing education in particular, and student success and satisfaction in online classrooms. Despite extensive knowledge development in these related areas of interest, the question of whether professional caring can be conveyed in online nursing classroom settings is unanswered.

The Concept of Caring in Education

Many educators have explored the concept of caring in education as an integral part of meaningful, transformative teaching learning exchanges (Clouder, 2005; Dewey, 1938; Ford & Coballes-Vega, 2001; Friere, 1968; Friere, 1998; Lambert & McCombs, 1998; Noddings, 1984; Teven, 2001). Clouder (2005) explored the idea of caring as a threshold concept for students in higher education who were preparing to be healthcare professionals, concluding that all educational efforts, in addition to imparting technical skills, should focus on some aspect of caring associated with whatever skills were being taught. Tevin (2001) explored the relationship between teacher characteristics and perceived caring on the part of the student and concluded that immediacy, responsiveness, and assertiveness conveyed caring while verbal aggressiveness conveyed un-caring.

Dewey (1938), in his sentinel work *Experience and Education*, does not even mention the word “caring” in this small volume, however the focus on empathic teacher/student interaction based on the notion that the mindful attention to multiple levels of experience is the crux of good educational practices, alludes to caring. Dewey asserted that full engagement with the human experience (particularly that of self and student) in the here and now, as well as acknowledging and exploring shared and unshared past experiences, enabled the teacher to fully engage in substantive teaching. Three of Watson’s (Watson Website, n.d.) Caritas echo Dewey’s concepts within the framework of engaged caring: Being fully present in the moment- acknowledging the deep belief system and subjective life world of self and other, developing and sustaining helping-trusting, authentic caring relationships, and engaging in genuine teaching-learning experiences that arise from an understanding of interconnectedness, while at the same time, attempting to stay within the other’s frame of reference.

Paolo Friere (1968 & 1998) described emancipatory teaching/learning meant to enlighten and empower participants through active learning where students have as much power in the teaching/learning relationship as teachers, and where no social/political issue is “off-limits” in the teaching/learning exchange. Friere (1968 & 1998) asserted that empathic connection between teacher and student engendered respect for teacher, student, and the educational process, and that genuineness associated with affectivity is appropriate in the teaching learning exchange, i.e. a teacher should be allowed to show caring, joy, empathy, and a gamut of genuine feelings towards students: “My openness to caring for the well-being of my students has to do with my openness to life itself, to the joy of living. A joy that is balanced ...Joy does not come to us only at the moment of

finding what we sought. It comes also in the search itself...teaching and learning are not possible without the search, without beauty, and without joy...pedagogical experience itself is capable of awakening, stimulating, and developing in us a taste for caring and for joy, without which educative practice has no meaning at all” (Friere, 1998, pp. 125-126). Like Dewey, Friere’s philosophy alludes to caring concepts described by Watson in a general sense and also specifically associated with openness, engagement, and acknowledgement of interconnectivity.

Noddings (1984) related caring to providing moral and ethical education to students. She referred to teachers as ones-who-care with the moral imperative to model and support the development of caring in students. Noddings (1984) also considered caring- the demonstration of it by teachers and the instilling of it in students- to be the prime purpose of education. “The one-caring has one great aim: to preserve and enhance caring in herself and in those with whom she comes in contact. This quite naturally becomes the first aim of parenting and of education...It means that rationality, while important and prized, must serve something higher” (Noddings, 1984, p. 172). Noddings’ work is particularly applicable to nursing education because of its focus on caring. Noddings’ (1984) writings parallel sentiments expressed by Bevis & Watson (2000) and Watson (1985,1988, 1999, 2005).

McCombs (in Lambert & McCombs, 1998) asserted that caring was central to the educative process, and that current educational practices often do not take this into account: “The development of a caring culture in schools requires a change in attitude...In essence, schools must be learner-centered and consider the personal needs and development of all learners- students and teachers included- within the larger context

of their families and communities...” (p. 383). McCombs also noted that, among other things, students learn best in an environment where their “...need for and individual perceptions of interpersonal caring, acceptance, and support” (p. 405) are recognized by the teacher.

Ford & Coballes-Vega (2001) created a model to clarify their belief that educators in higher education should be caring intellectuals. Educators who are caring intellectuals should be change agents, lifelong learners, reflective professionals, and skillful practitioners who have expertise in culture, diversity, learning, pedagogy, content, and curriculum. Ford & Coballes-Vega (2001) specifically defined caring: “Caring means more than being nice to others. A *caring* educator is one who can understand the perspective of the cared for- the “other.” A *caring act* involves stepping out of one’s personal frame of reference into the other’s. When we care, we consider the other’s point of view, the other’s objective needs, and what the other expects of us. We act (or sometimes choose not to act) so as to promote the well-being of the other” (p. 14). Ford & Coballes-Vega’s definition of caring parallels Watson’s (Watson Website, n.d.) focus on intersubjectivity and mindfully attending to the needs of self and other, and presents a compelling example of what should form the basis of pedagogy relative to caring online teaching practice.

The Concept of Caring in Nursing Education

The phenomenon of caring in nursing education has been explored within the context of one-to-one interactions where participants are in close enough proximity to one another to experience the other’s voice, body language, facial expressions and shared physical context, as found in face-to-face classroom settings (Beck, 1991; Bevis &

Watson, 2000; Cook & Cullen, 2003; Dillon & Stines, 1996; Halldorsdottir, 1990; Hanson & Smith, 1996; Hughes, 1992; Leininger & Watson, 1990; MacNeil & Evans, 2005; Miller, Haber, & Byrne, 1990; Paterson & Crawford, 1994; Simonson, 1996; Sitzman, 2001; Slevin, 1987; Stein, 1986; Tanner, 1990; Wade, 2004; Watson, 1999). Online interactions are different from face-to-face interactions (Kanuka, Collett, & Caswell, 2002; Kennedy, 2002; Ryan, Hodson, & Ali, 1999, Ryan, Hodson, & Ali, 2004; Shovein, Huston, Fox & Damazo, 2005; Sternberger, 2002), and the question of whether these interactions (ones that could be translated into an online environment) might engender an environment of caring in online settings is unanswered. Dewey (1938), on whose philosophy much of the modern United States educational system is based, asserted that students form longstanding, transformative knowledge based on the total educational experience (not just because of exposure to content), and this would seem to support the notion that providing an online learning experience grounded in caring engenders the development of caring skills in the learner. This has become a consideration for nurse educators who, in response to the need for more widely accessible nursing education, have created online nursing courses and/or programs (Ryan et al, 2004).

Student & Teacher Perspectives of Caring in Nursing Education

Caring has long been considered a central component of nursing practice and nursing education. There has been much nursing knowledge development regarding the concept of caring in nursing education associated with face-to-face interactions between teacher and student in brick and mortar settings (Beck, 1991; Bevis & Watson, 2000; Chou, Tang, Teng & Yen, 2003; Cook & Cullen, 2003; Cumbie & Wolverton, 2004; Diekelmann, 1990; Dillon & Stines, 1996; Halldorsdottir, 1990; Hanson & Smith, 1996;

Higgins, 1996; Hughes, 1992; Hughes 1993; Hughes 1998; Kosowski, 1995; Leininger & Watson, 1990; Miller, Haber, & Byrne, 1990; Paterson & Crawford, 1994; Simonson, 1996; Sitzman, 2001; Tanner, 1990; Wade, 2004; Watson, 1999). Themes associated with caring in nursing education have emerged, as illustrated by six representative studies discussed below. These six studies are described here because they all explored caring in relation to nursing education in ways that paralleled knowledge development related to best practices in online education and caring in general education.

Six Studies

A descriptive study conducted by MacNeil & Evans (2005) explored the concept of caring in nursing education from the perspective of the student. Students met in groups with the researchers and were asked to describe moments of caring that they had experienced in a nursing education setting. Themes identified in this study included connectedness, support, presence, respect, and the promotion/support of personal growth.

Chou, Tang, Teng & Yen (2003) conducted a qualitative study exploring nursing faculty perceptions of humanistic teaching in BSN programs. Study participants (BSN faculty) identified caring as one of 5 major components of humanistic teaching meant to support optimal academic and existential development of every student. The other components included availability, authenticity, empowerment, and transformative curriculum. Chou et al referred to caring as a central component in nursing and nursing education, as validated by participants in the study.

Results of a phenomenological study conducted by Halldorsdottir in 1990, identified 4 main components that constitute professional caring as described by students and

demonstrated by nursing instructors; professional competence, genuine concern, positive personality, and professional commitment. These components, when enacted by the teacher, lead to developing an appropriate teacher-student relationship that included attachment, mutual acknowledgment of personhood, professional intimacy, negotiation of learning outcomes, and student-goal directed work. Student responses to instructor mediated caring included; sense of acceptance and self worth, personal/professional growth and motivation, appreciation, role modeling, respect, and long-term gratitude towards the teacher.

Dillon & Stines (1996) conducted a phenomenological study to better understand caring interactions between students and faculty. Caring behaviors on the part of the instructor, as identified by students, included honesty, respect, understanding, kindness, compassion, taking extra time, remembering details, praise, individualized instruction, attentive/non-judgmental listening, sense of humor, sensitivity to students' needs, and positive role modeling (Dillon & Stines, 1996). Students saw the teachers who demonstrated the listed caring behaviors, as positive role models.

A study by Miller et al (1990) reported that caring between teacher and student, as reported by the students, occurred within a climate of support, and emerged out of a perceived need of the student that came to the attention of the teacher. "Students perceive that an essential dimension of the caring interaction is the faculty's holistic concern for the student, personally and academically. Students identified caring teachers as being nonjudgmental, respectful, patient, available, dependable, flexible, supportive, open, warm, and genuine" (Miller, et al, 1990, p. 129).

Simonson (1996) completed a phenomenological study exploring the concept of caring between teacher and nursing student. According to student perceptions described in this study, traits of caring teachers included genuinely caring about what happens to others, sensitivity to the uniqueness of each student, promoting awareness of self in each student, cultivating acceptance of differences in others, sharing genuine life/professional experiences, and provision of a supportive emotional, sociocultural, and spiritual environment.

Commonalities Among all Six Studies

The six studies described above had several commonalities. Shared key components underlying instructors' ability to convey caring to students included authenticity, attentiveness, respect, non-judgmental attitude, supportiveness, openness, and sharing of self. Supporting/empowering student success was also a common theme. It is important to note that there was the assumption/expectation that instructors had the capability to successfully and intentionally *communicate* caring to students. Effective communication is necessary to facilitate the process of conveying caring to students. Inquiry relative to what specific actions/behaviors effectively communicate caring in nursing education, both face-to-face and online, supports evidence-based approaches to caring educational practices in nursing.

Results of these six studies clarify what constitutes caring environments in face-to-face nursing classroom settings. No literature was found that clarified the extent to which these concepts, in relation to intentional caring, might apply to online classroom settings.

How Online Interactions Differ from Face-to-face Interactions

Online classroom interactions in and outside of nursing are different from face-to-face interactions. Knowledge development regarding these differences has focused primarily on 3 areas of interest listed below (Cravener, 1999; Kanuka et al 2002; Kennedy, 2002; Langford & Hardin, 1999; Peterson & Caverly, 2006; Ryan et al 1999, Ryan et al, 2004; Shovein, et al, 2005; Sternberger, 2002):

1. Defining and describing the online classroom setting, with special attention given to differences between online versus brick and mortar settings.
2. Identifying instructional approaches that are effective in both face-to-face and online teaching/learning environments so that teachers who have traditionally taught in brick and mortar settings have the opportunity to recognize and build upon already familiar teaching practices when learning to teach online.
3. Development of novel content delivery methods within an online environment that is unique for its' absence of consistent time structures and absence of the physical presence of teachers and peers.

Kennedy (2002) defined the online classroom setting in terms of communication between teacher and student. Kennedy (2002) analyzed frequency of communication between teacher and students in 2 class modules taught by one teacher. One class module was taught online and the other was taught face-to-face. Kennedy (2002) found that "...communication time between the teacher and students in the distance education form of the module is 29% greater than the communication time in the classroom-based form. The most significant feature of the communication pattern is the greater quantity of individual communication between student and teacher in the distance education format" (p. 409). This greater quantity of individual communication between student and teacher

could significantly support caring online learning environments if teachers become knowledgeable regarding what online behaviors support caring, and then apply these behaviors during increased teacher/student interactions described in Kennedy's (2002) study. This is one of the many reasons research relative to conveying and sustaining caring in online classrooms could ultimately be so valuable to teachers.

Kennedy (2002) also described multiple "Dimensions of Distance" (p. 413) that influenced communication in the online classroom setting. These dimensions included geographical, educational, cognitive, role, and access distance. About geographical distance, Kennedy (2002), concluded that, "Geographical distance is not an educational barrier for the distance-learning students. The support they receive is closer than the support that the classroom-based students receive. In fact, the personal nature of the support they receive makes one ponder if it is the classroom-based students who are disadvantaged by distance" (p. 413). About cognitive distance, Kennedy (2002) asserted, "...the distance-learning student has more opportunity to bridge cognitive distance in a personal collaborative manner than the classroom-based student" (p. 414). Role distance "...refers to the gap in status that can exist between the student and the teacher" (Kennedy, 2002, p.414). Kennedy (2002) asserted that the role distance associated with teachers in online classroom settings was less-associated with hierarchical power structure than in face-to-face classrooms because in online classrooms, the teacher monitored participation rather than attendance, the place of instruction was equally taking place in the personal space of both student and instructor, and the learning pace was more under the direction of the student than the teacher. A power gradient still existed in online

classroom settings, with the teacher occupying a position of power and authority, however this power gradient was less pronounced than in face-to-face settings.

In a study by Kanuka et al (2002), it was found that knowledge and intentional use of effective face-to-face instructional approaches provided a strong foundation for effective web-based instruction. In the same study, Kanuka et al (2002) used Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance (Saba & Shearer, 1994) as a framework for inquiry, and found that teacher assessment of learner autonomy in web-based classes should be assessed in order to adjust teaching strategies to meet student needs, for example more autonomous students required less structure and more open dialogue than less autonomous students. This finding supported Moore's theory, which asserted that varying modes of learner independence/autonomy necessitated increasing or decreasing the amount of structure and dialogue in the online setting, with more autonomous learners requiring less structure and more dialogue than less autonomous students in the same setting.

Ryan et al (1999) evaluated face-to-face classroom teaching methods versus course delivery online. Based on student responses to a series of questions, it was found that in the face-to-face classroom setting associated with this particular study, content was covered more adequately, and there was more interaction and participation due to the presence of immediacy, availability of verbal and non-verbal communication, and physical availability of the instructor and classmates. Students described the online setting as providing opportunities for independence in learning and assignment completion, fuller participation of all classmates, learning from classmates as well as the instructor, and improvement of technical and writing skills. Students also commented that the online setting saved time and money due to not having to travel to campus for class.

Negative aspects of online learning reported by students included feelings of isolation and not enough interaction/spontaneous discussion. Also of concern was lack of clarity regarding how well one was performing in the class at any given time.

Another study by Ryan et al (2004) was based on the premise that "...distance learning has become common practice in schools of nursing, leading to the need for faculty to discover how to adapt their teaching styles and instructional methods, and adapt to a new role to move into this new paradigm" (p. 74). This quote from Ryan et al (2004) alludes to the overall need for the development of an evidence-based pedagogy in online nursing education. In the study, twenty nursing faculty who taught online were interviewed using questions based on themes identified in a previous study conducted by Diekelmann (2001). Diekelmann's themes that Ryan et al based the interview questions on included: "Losing familiar landmarks, challenging conventional pedagogies, awakening new roles, learning from experience, and creating new pedagogies. As a result of this study completed by Ryan et al (2004), characteristics of online instruction in nursing were described. Please refer to Figure 2.

Figure 2
 Characteristics of Online Instruction in Nursing (Ryan et al, 2004)

Characteristic	Example
Positive characteristics in general	Thoughtful responses Socially comfortable Flexible Know students better Effective way of doing business
Negative characteristics in general	Delayed responses Social isolation Lack of spontaneity Miss face-to-face
Faculty role changes	Increased workload Role change from authority figure to facilitator Increased partnering and teamwork
Increased awareness of course	Design, content, outcomes Creating new ways to teach/learn
Collaborative learning	Creating a community of learners Managing diversity

Shovein et al (2005) discussed online teaching/learning and emancipatory teaching strategies, and asked three questions: “Can teacher-student interactions that are not face-to-face promote emancipation, education, and caring in students? Can learning activities accomplished on the computer promote the process of becoming more fully human, helping learners discover how to change their world? Can personal involvement be magnified and intensified by interactions via the computer?” (p. 342). While these questions remain unanswered, Shovein et al thoughtfully explored these questions during a five-year period between 1999- 2004 through participation in a national collaborative grant meant to promote the use of distance learning methodologies for rural nurses to achieve baccalaureate education. Conclusions at the end of the grant period clarified the

importance of "...authentic, meaningful dialogue that promotes caring in all learning situations, regardless of the activities or technology used to support the pedagogy" (Shovein et al, 2005, p. 342-343). Specifically, "The challenge is to create learning with learner-centered strategies and activities and extensive interaction among students- postings and responses on bulletin boards, e-mails, and chat rooms that elicit more involvement than is typical in traditional classrooms. In addition, the teacher must recognize a new role as guide, rather than gatekeeper, when it comes to information" (Shovein et al, 2005, p. 343).

Commonalities & Differences

There were commonalities discussed by these authors between face-to-face and online classroom settings. Despite a shift from structured, teacher-mediated learning in face-to-face classrooms to collaborative learning in online education, it was found that a power differential still existed between teacher and student (Kennedy 2002). Effective communication was identified as key in both face-to-face and online settings, although effective techniques used in face-to-face versus online interactions were inherently different (Kennedy, 2002; Ryan et al, 1999; Ryan et al, 2004). It was also noted that instructor knowledge and intentional use of effective face-to-face instructional approaches supported effective web-based instruction techniques (Kanuka et al, 2002).

The general difference between online and face-to-face nursing classroom environments was summed up well by Ryan et al (2004, p. 77): "Teaching in the classroom provides a defined physical area with familiar surroundings and occurs in a specific time and space. Transformation to a portable, anywhere, anytime environment can result in loss of familiar landmarks." According to Ryan et al, (2004), this difference

requires deliberate re-thinking of online versus face-to-face-classroom approaches in order for online educators to be optimally effective.

Best Practice in Online Education

Currently accepted best practices for online nursing education are based on ongoing extensive knowledge development undertaken by scholars in the discipline of general online education. Best practice guidelines address effective communication strategies, technical components, and curriculum approaches. Literature contributing knowledge in these areas is categorized in the figure below:

Figure 3
Summary of General Online Education Literature

General Best Practice Guidelines	Authors General Online Education
Effective Communication Strategies	Ali, Hodson-Carlton, & Ryan, 2004; Aragon, Johnson, & Shaik, 2002; Billings, Connors, & Skiba, 2001; Chickering & Gamson, 1989; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; DeVerneil & Berge, 2000; Halstead & Coudret, 2000; Ko & Rossen, 2004; Koeckeritz, Malkiewicz, & Henderson, 2002; Kozlowski, 2004; Lee & Gibson, 2003; Peterson, Hennig, Dow & Sole, 2001; Preece, 2004; Rose, 2004; Saba & Shearer, 1994; Sherrod & Shelton, 2003; Thiele & Hirsch, 2003; Thurmond, 2003; Tu & McIsaac, 2002; Vangen, 2002; Woods & Ebersole, 2003.
Technical Components	Barker, 2003; Billings, Connors, & Skiba, 2001; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Cravener, 1999; DeVerneil & Berge, 2000; Fulton & Kellinger, 2004; Halstead & Coudret, 2000; Hugie, 2003; Jairath & Stair, 2004; Ko & Rossen, 2004; Kozlowski, 2004; Lee & Gibson, 2003; Olsen & Shershneva, 2004; Thiele & Hirsch, 2003.
Curriculum Approaches	Bentley, Cook, Davis, Murphy & Berding, 2003; Billings, Connors, & Skiba, 2001; Broom, Daniels, Ryan, Davis, Tucker-Allen, 2000; Christianson, Tiene, & Luft, 2002; Cobb, Billings, Mays & Canty-Mitchell, 2001; DeVerneil & Berge, 2000; Halstead & Coudret, 2000; Ko & Rossen, 2004; Olsen & Shershneva, 2004; Rosenlund, Damask-Bembenek, Hugie & Matsumura, 1999.

Caring has not been expressly identified as a component of best practice in the studies listed above, however best practices would constitute caring if approached with the specific intent to engage in reciprocity while mindfully and appropriately attending to the needs of another. The intent to care, grounded in a teaching pedagogy based on caring, is the missing link between simply engaging in best practice behaviors to support

positive outcomes and truly conveying and sustaining caring as a core value in nursing education.

Watson (1988) created a conceptualization of nursing practice that is useful in clarifying the difference between best practices and intentional caring related to nursing education. In Watson's (1988) conceptualization, there are two components of nursing practice- the core and the trim. The core consists of a global "caring" frame of reference that is the immutable essence of nursing. The core is the basic caring intent inherent in every nurse-mediated interaction regardless of the place in time or specialty area. The core provides purpose and meaning. Applying Watson's conceptualization to nursing education, caring teaching pedagogy would constitute the core. The trim is made up of all of the explicit activities, duties and procedures associated with nursing practice at a given time in a given specialty area. Best practices in online education are similar to the trim that Watson (1988) describes in relation to nursing practice. The trim (best practices) cannot meaningfully exist without the core (caring). Envisioning nursing (and nursing education) made up of only the trim brings to mind a large, bright, thin-skinned balloon that will easily pop when touched by a sharp or hot object, and if left to its' own devices will eventually deflate into a small wad of useless misshapen rubber membrane- the appearance of substance giving way to the reality of flimsiness. Conversely, envisioning nursing (and nursing education) made up of both core and trim brings to mind an orange. The skin (the trim), which elegantly provides concrete form, a shell, and protection for the heart of the orange, is beautiful to behold in all of its rich color. In nursing education, the basic competencies, and the technical, aesthetic, personal, and ethical knowledge required to be a competent Registered Nurse comprises the skin. This skin (the trim)

defines and protects a deep core of nutrient and seed (the core) that will provide nourishment in the present, and then provide the beginnings of yet another orange- fluidly assuming the role of sustenance while at the same time embodying generativity to ensure that oranges will exist into perpetuity. In nursing education, the core is made up of the intention to wholistically *care* as it is conveyed and modeled by nurse educators and perpetuated by nursing students as they are mentored and guided into the nursing profession by caring educators. Understanding how to convey and sustain caring in online nursing classrooms is related to protecting and nourishing the core of nursing.

Best Practices Described

Ali et al (2004) studied students' perceptions of online learning and formulated a list of implications for faculty aimed at supporting successful online nursing education.

These implications are summarized in the figure below:

Figure 4
Supporting Successful Online Nursing Education (Ali et al 2004)

Implications	Examples
Goals of learning	Develop learning outcomes within context of meaningful activities. Create learning experiences based on previous knowledge. Employ problem solving, reasoning, and critical thinking strategies and engage in activities that require reflective and active participation.
Conditions of learning	Create a realistic and relevant online classroom environment. Provide many opportunities for social interaction and negotiation. Employ multiple learning modes. Encourage independence and autonomy. Support student self-evaluation and ownership of the learning process.
Methods of instruction	Clearly state learning outcomes. Use course management tools creatively. Ask students how they prefer to learn. Assess learning styles of the students and design/redesign assignments accordingly. Provide timely feedback. Return assignments within a reasonable time period. Give students the opportunity to critique each other. Recognize excellent work. Appreciate differing perspectives. Ensure technical problems are resolved promptly.

These implications described by Ali et al (2004) in the table above reflect common themes found in other studies meant to identify best practices for online instruction (Aragon et al, 2002; Barker, 2003; Bentley et al, 2003; Billings et al, 2001; Chickering & Gamson, 1989; Cobb et al, 2001; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Halstead & Coudret, 2000; Hugie, 2003; Ko & Rossen, 2004; Koeckeritz et al, 2002; Lee & Gibson, 2003; Peterson et al, 2001; Thiele & Hirsch, 2003; Thurmond, 2003).

Current best practice guidelines in online education in general, and in nursing online education in particular, outline effective communication strategies, teaching/facilitation approaches, technical components, and curriculum, but no mention was made of specific caring components that could be intentionally enacted in online classroom settings (Ali

et al 2004; American Association for Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2003; Aragon et al 2002; Barker, 2003; Bentley et al 2003; Billings, 2002; Billings et al 2001; Broom et al 2000; Bushy, 2003; Cartwright & Menkins, 2002; Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996; Chickering & Gamson, 1989; Christianson et al 2002; Cobb et al 2001; Conrad, 2002a; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Frith & Kee, 2003; Fulton & Kellinger, 2004; Halstead & Coudret, 2000; Hugie, 2003; Jairath & Mills, 2006; Jairath & Stair, 2004; Ko & Rossen, 2004; Koeckeritz et al 2002; Lee & Gibson, 2003; Moore, 2002; Munro, 1998; Olsen & Shershneva, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Peterson et al 2001; Rosenlund et al 1999; Saba & Shearer, 1994; Sherrod & Shelton, 2003; Thiele & Hirsch, 2003; Thurmond, 2003; Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications, 1997).

Intentional Caring in Face-to-face Classrooms Improves Student Success & Satisfaction

The term “intentional caring” is used by this author in relation to teachers engaging in teaching/learning interactions with the overarching intent to convey caring as described by Watson (1985, 1988, 1999, 2005) during each exchange. The 5 studies discussed in this section all allude to the concept of intentional caring, though they do not specifically use this term. Intentional caring in face-to-face teaching/learning environments in nursing education has been shown to improve student outcomes in the way of enhanced learning, enhanced student self-esteem, perceived competency, retention, and program completion (Grams, Kosowski, & Wilson, 1997; Halldorsdottir, 1990; Hanson & Smith, 1996; Hughes, 1992; Kosowski, 1995, Miller et al, 1990; Shelton, 2003).

A phenomenological study completed by Grams et al (1997) involved exploration of the lived experience of associate degree nursing students who participated in care groups for two years during the completion of nursing school. Care groups made up of nursing students and faculty were formed as a strategy for the students to learn professional caring. Grams et al (1997) reported that “Participants reported being more aware of the meaning and importance of caring in their personal and professional lives, being more accepting of others, and valuing caring and self-care more” (p.10), indicating enhanced learning in the area of professional caring.

Halldorsdottir (1990) conducted a phenomenological study exploring caring and uncaring encounters between students and nursing instructors. Positive student responses to instructor caring included enhanced self-acceptance and self-worth, personal/professional growth and motivation, appreciation and role modeling, and long term gratitude and respect.

Hanson & Smith (1996) explored nursing students’ perspectives of caring and not-so-caring interactions with nursing instructors. Caring interactions supported feelings of encouragement, confidence, competency and comfort, while uncaring exchanges resulted in feelings of rejection, discouragement, dismissal, confusion, and discomfort.

Results of a phenomenological study completed by Kosowski (1995) described teaching the concept of intentional caring to a group of baccalaureate level nursing students. Through the process of learning to enact intentional caring, students reported feeling good, connecting, advocating, being holistic, and being competent, thereby demonstrating personalized and enhanced learning.

Shelton (2003) conducted a study of 458 associate-degree nursing students to explore the relationship between nursing students' perceived support given by nursing instructors and program retention. "Students who persisted in a nursing program from their first clinical nursing course to the final semester had significantly greater perceived faculty support, in terms of both psychological and functional support, than students who withdrew either voluntarily or because of academic failure" (p. 68). The perceived psychological support described in this study mirrored caring faculty behaviors described in many other studies (Beck, 1991; Bevis & Watson, 2000; Cook & Cullen, 2003; Dillon & Stines, 1996; Halldorsdottir, 1990; Hanson & Smith, 1996; Hughes, 1992; Leininger & Watson, 1990; Paterson & Crawford, 1994; Simonson, 1996; Sitzman, 2001; Wade, 2004; Watson, 1999), and included faculty characteristics such as approachability, respect, confidence in students' ability to succeed, correcting without belittling, listening, praising, patience, authentic interest in students, creating optimal learning environments, and promoting self-efficacy (Shelton 2003).

Student Success & Satisfaction in Online Nursing Classrooms

Several studies have sought to identify factors that influence student success in online education in general, and also nursing education in particular, however these studies have not specifically addressed the notion of caring online and how it might relate to student success in the online setting (Allen, Bourhis, Burrell & Mabry, 2002; Bloom, & Hough, 2003; Conrad, 2002b; DeBourgh, 2003; DeTure, 2004; Frith, & Kee, 2003; Kearns, Shoaf, & Summey, 2004; Kemp, 2002; Leasure, Davis, & Thievon, 2000; Morris, Buck-Rolland & Gagne, 2002; Neuhauser, 2002; Thiele, Allen & Stucky, 1999;

Thurmond, Wambach & Connors, 2002; Washer, 2001). Factors related to student success and satisfaction online included those discussed in the studies described below.

Neuhauser (2002) compared two sections of the same course, one taught online and the other in a face-to-face setting. Results from this study showed no differences between test scores, assignment scores, participation grades, and final grades. The conclusion was that “equivalent learning activities can be equally effective for online and face-to-face learners” (p. 99).

Allen, Bourhis, Burrell & Mabry (2002) conducted a meta-analysis to compare student satisfaction with distance education versus face-to-face classrooms. “The findings [of this meta-analysis] support those of researchers arguing that distance education does not diminish the level of student satisfaction when compared to traditional face-to-face methods of instruction” (p. 83).

Bloom and Hough (2003) explored student satisfaction with technology-enhanced learning in nursing education. It was found that faculty expertise in the creation, selection, and use of technology was a major factor influencing student satisfaction.

Conrad (2002a) sought to increase understanding of “learners’ perceptions about how the first ‘class’ in an online course should be and to further understand how learners’ experiences in the first class contribute to their sense of well-being and engagement in online courses” (p. 205). It was found that learners’ initial sense of engagement was strongly associated with connection to the learning materials, and that the role of the instructor at the very beginning of a course was more functional than personal, with the instructor being initially judged on the clarity and completeness of presented course materials rather than interpersonal communication skills (Conrad 2002a).

DeBrough (2003) conducted a study to investigate graduate nursing students' satisfaction with distance education. It was found that the quality and effectiveness of the instructor and course content, not the technology, was associated with overall levels of student satisfaction. Factors identified that supported instructor effectiveness, and thereby supported higher levels of student satisfaction are summarized in the figure below:

Figure 5
Factors to Support Instructor Effectiveness (DeBrough, 2003)

Factors	Examples
Enhancing immediacy, social presence, and interaction	<p>Send individual introductory e-mails to students before the start of the course.</p> <p>Project instructor identity at the outset, sharing personal stories, interests, professional history, and instructional philosophies.</p> <p>Offer multiple modes of communication for the students to reach the instructor such as e-mail, chats, discussion boards, and telephone.</p> <p>Provide specific guidelines for how often and the depth at which communication in the course is expected.</p>
Enhancing access and creating a learning community	<p>Enable students to enact both learner and instructional roles within the course to enhance collective knowledge building.</p> <p>Foster familiarity among students by requiring an introductory posting by each student, addressing students by name as often as possible, posting pictures of students where possible.</p> <p>Provide easy links to other learning resources on campus such as the library and technological support services.</p> <p>Create content that fosters threaded discussions and ongoing learning exchanges between students.</p>
Enhancing instruction and course management	<p>Design a consistent graphic organizational layout and simple navigation pathways.</p> <p>Make learning materials available well in advance of required learning activities.</p> <p>During synchronous chats, and/or live presentations, allow for pauses so students have the opportunity to ask questions.</p>

Frith & Kee (2003) studied the effects of communication on nursing student outcomes in a Web-based course. "A significant group difference was found for student satisfaction with the course, indicating carefully planned communication strategies can improve satisfaction" (p. 350). Successful communication strategies included using a

mixed conversation method wherein frequent online communication among students and/or between instructor and students occurred using chat rooms, e-mail, and discussion forums.

Kearns et al (2004) compared performance and satisfaction of nursing students in Web-based and face-to-face course delivery environments. It was found in this study that students in Web-based courses scored higher than students in brick and mortar classrooms with regards to academic performance, while students in brick and mortar classrooms were more satisfied than online students with the interpersonal learning experience.

Leasure et al (2000) compared student outcomes in face-to-face versus Web-based classrooms in a nursing research course. There was no significant difference in examination scores (academic performance) between the two groups.

Overall, it seems that online and face-to-face instruction might have similar but not identical academic performance and satisfaction outcomes, however the research is inconclusive and ongoing. Clarification regarding how to fully support student success and satisfaction in online nursing classrooms is needed.

Two Pilot Studies in Online Caring

Sitzman & Leners (2006) and Leners & Sitzman (2006) conducted 2 studies on the topic of caring online. One explored Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) student perceptions of caring online (Sitzman & Leners, 2006) and the other concerned graduate student perceptions of caring online in nursing classrooms (Leners & Sitzman, 2006). There were both similarities and differences between the responses of BSN and graduate nursing students. The similarities facilitated the creation of a list of caring practices for

nursing instructors meant to sustain caring online classroom environments for all online nursing students. These practices along with examples for clarification are summarized in the figure below:

Figure 6
Online Caring Practices (Sitzman & Leners, 2006; Leners and Sitzman, 2006)

Caring Practice	Example
Respond to postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours.	Alert the students ahead of time if there will be periods of time when you will not be posting/responding online, i.e. if it is your policy not to go online on the weekends or if you are going on a trip.
Promptly respond to student challenges.	If a student has not been online for a week, or is demonstrating difficulty with postings or other communications, call or e-mail the student to find out what is going on and offer support and/or constructive guidance when needed.
Recount challenges experienced in the online setting	Discuss how you were able (or not able) to remedy them.
Express the belief that students will be successful in the online setting.	An occasional note to individuals or the group that says, "We are halfway (1/4 way etc.) through the semester, keep up the good work!" or a periodic comment such as "You are (all) really doing well in this online setting" is helpful encouragement for students who may be wondering if they are doing well.
Write out and post clear instructions.	Include schedules, due dates, online etiquette, and acceptable length/quality of required online communications (postings, papers, projects, e-mails etc.)
Provide students with multiple contact opportunities.	Include face-to-face meetings (at the beginning of the semester if possible), scheduled telephone availability, e-mail, discussion board, virtual office hours, and scheduled chats.
Share informal glimpses of self.	Include casual instructor introductions, posting of fun/personal photographs, sharing of hobbies or extracurricular interests, and discussions of past scholarly work and experiences.
Provide (at minimum) weekly praise and encouragement to individuals and/or groups for work that is well done.	A simple, "You guys did a great job on that!" is sufficient to bolster student's feelings of success in the class.
When providing correction and/or guidance to individual students, do it via personal e-mail or telephone rather than in any public venue.	Carefully word any public posting and avoid conveying anything but positive/supportive messages in the public forums.
When responding to student work, refer to specifics so that students feel assured that their work has been thoroughly read.	Example: "Your posting was excellent. The thoughts you shared regarding recent events at work were particularly applicable to the topic!"
Verbalize enthusiasm for learning when communicating with students.	Example: "Research statistics are sometimes confusing, but once you learn the basics, it becomes really interesting. There are several excellent readings for this week that will clarify things considerably. Hang in there, keep trying, and you will get it!"
Demonstrate respect for the learning process by exhibiting excellence in creating/presenting online content	Whatever online delivery medium is used, ensure proper referencing. Update presentations annually. Use timely information from referenced sources. Use creativity in locating sources of information that students may not have the expertise or knowledge to access on their own.

Themes identified by the graduate students and not the BSN students in Leners & Sitzman (2006) included “being the best I can be” and “feeling the passion of caring online.” In addition, the graduate students, although not the BSN students, alluded to the hope that online teachers might be able to sense student overload from subtle clues presented in the online discussion. Themes identified by the BSN students and not the graduate students in Sitzman & Leners (2006) included “need for clarity”, “teachers’ commitment to learning”, and “second fiddle worries.” Five scholarly works addressing caring in education support findings of Sitzman & Leners (2006) and Leners & Sitzman (2006). These five works are briefly discussed below.

Gross & Burford (2000) conducted a study to identify key instructor behaviors that support students feeling cared for in online educational settings. Three themes emerged: Orientation and facilitation, in which students were given clear instruction regarding what to do and how they were doing during the course of the online class, frequent reassurance regarding quality of student work, and encouragement. These themes echo results in the Sitzman & Leners (2006) study, specifically numbers 4 & 7 of the 10 caring processes suggested to support caring in online nursing classrooms.

Gillespie’s (2005) qualitative study exploring the empathic connection between nursing teachers and students found that sharing glimpses of self outside of school and nursing fostered connections that enhanced the teaching/learning relationship. The overall lesson from this study was that students benefit from feeling connected to the teacher. Sitzman & Leners (2006) alluded to this concept in items 5-9 of the 10 caring practices meant to support caring online classroom environments for online nursing students.

Results of a study completed by Brewer & Dattilo (2002) exploring BSN students' experiences of effective and ineffective faculty teaching behaviors indicated that instructors who provided ongoing positive encouragement supported students feeling cared for in in-person clinical learning environments. Brewer and Dattilo's (2002) results echo those voiced by the online nursing students in both Sitzman & Leners (2006) & Leners & Sitzman (2006), specifically relating to number 7 of the 10 caring online nursing education practices listed in Sitzman & Leners (2006).

Palloff & Pratt (2003) confirmed findings from the Sitzman & Leners (2006) and Leners & Sitzman (2006) studies, specifically numbers 1, 2, 4, & 7 of the 10 suggested caring practices in Sitzman & Leners (2006), saying that, among other things, online students wanted: "Reassurance that the ideas they are posting to an online discussion are on track, clear instructions about course expectations and for completing assignments...and Prompt, unambiguous feedback (p. 129).

Bushy (2003) mentioned the need to clearly define expectations and for teachers to model positive online communication strategies. These assertions are in line with findings of the Sitzman & Leners (2006) and Leners & Sitzman (2006) studies, specifically numbers 4, 5, & 9 of the suggested 10 caring online practices listed in Sitzman & Leners (2006).

Summary

There has been ongoing knowledge development in the areas of caring in face-to-face nursing education classrooms, student-teacher perspectives of online education, differences between online versus face-to-face classroom environments, best practices in online education generally and also specifically in nursing education, and student success

and satisfaction in online classroom environments. Clarifying understanding of the online classroom setting by identifying optimal caring approaches for teachers in online settings are important topics for nurse educators who, in response to the need for more widely available nursing education, have created online nursing courses and/or programs (Ryan et al 2004).

Is it possible for nursing instructors to convey, sustain, and model caring in online classroom settings so that students have the opportunity to fully apprehend the core value of caring in nursing? This question remains unanswered.

Conclusion

Continued exploration of caring within online teaching environments will elucidate similarities and differences in caring as conveyed in online versus in-person classroom settings and clarify how teachers may effectively create caring online environments for students. Intentional caring practices in face-to-face nursing classrooms have been shown to improve student outcomes. Identifying and intentionally enacting caring online practices may also enhance online teaching/learning outcomes. Data generated from studying this dimension of nursing education will provide a template for nursing instructors who wish to deliberately create caring online teaching pedagogies/environments for nursing students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The problem related to creating an atmosphere that supports and promotes caring teaching/learning exchanges in online classroom settings in baccalaureate level nursing education. Sitzman & Leners (2006) explored this question on a small scale and identified online instructor behaviors that supported students feeling cared for in online nursing education environments. Presentation of the identified caring online behaviors to a larger sample of Registered Nurse (R.N.) students was needed to further explore caring instructor behaviors for the purpose of clarifying best practices associated with a caring online teaching pedagogy.

Research Questions

The general research question was:

Are instructor online caring behaviors, as previously identified in the literature, validated with online R.N. students?

Other, more specific questions included:

1. What (if any) caring behaviors are more important than the others?
2. What is the degree of importance of each of the individual caring behaviors?
3. In addition to the caring behaviors identified by Sitzman & Leners (2006) and alluded to in the literature, are there other preferred instructor behaviors that support students feeling cared for in the online nursing education setting?

The Likert-type survey in Appendix A, created for this study, lists the specific questions that clarified the answer to the general research question and the more specific questions listed above. Online interview questions that were given to a subset of 15 respondents who first completed the Likert-type survey, remained within the framework of the general research question, and included the following:

1. Please discuss what factors influenced your choices in relation to “Extremely Important” caring instructor behaviors that you selected on the main survey. Here is an example for clarification: Suppose you chose “Responds to postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours” as an “Extremely Important” caring instructor behavior. I am interested in knowing if this behavior was designated as “Extremely Important” because quick responses relieve anxiety regarding personal class performance, or because quick responses allow for the successful completion of assignments/coursework based on timely instructor feedback? Or was it a combination of both factors mentioned above? If it was none of the above, then discuss your own reasons for choosing that specific behavior as important. For each instructor behavior that you designated as “Extremely Important,” I am interested in knowing why that behavior was important to you in relation to feeling cared for and supported in the online classroom setting.
2. Please compare and contrast your online versus face-to-face learning experiences. List both positive and negative aspects related to online and face-to-face learning environments.
3. Is peer interaction in the online setting important for establishing a caring classroom environment? Do you think any of the instructor behaviors listed on the survey should also apply to peer interactions in the online environment? Why or why not? Please list peer-to-peer caring online behaviors that you feel are important in establishing and maintaining a caring online classroom environment.

Research Design

A triangulated approach encompassing exploratory quantitative inquiry and qualitative inquiry best fit the research topic because the research question encompassed both quantitative and verbal/subjective in nature. This triangulated study validated and further clarified instructor behaviors that baccalaureate level nursing students reported as significant in creating/sustaining caring online classroom environments. The use of a

Likert-type survey format coupled with the use of open-ended questions on the survey addressed the need to clarify the efficacy of past study results while still offering the opportunity for new and expanded viewpoints. In addition to the Likert-type survey, an open-ended online interview was conducted with a subset of 15 study participants who expressed willingness to participate in an online interview. The selection of the 15 participants was based on convenience sampling of any participant who expressed an interest in participating. An online interview format was chosen as the data collection method for the subset of 15 participants because data generated during an exploration of events occurring in the online medium should originate in the online medium to support congruity.

Data Collection

The data in this study consisted of responses to Likert-type questions, one written response to an open-ended question, and, for a subset of 15 survey respondents, an e-mail interview with open-ended questions. The survey responses and e-mail interview were obtained via e-mail and/or web page. There was no face-to-face contact involved in the data gathering process. Development/assessment of the results of the Likert-Type questions was based on Dillman (2000), Gillis & Jackson (2002), Salant & Dillman (1994), and Watson (2002c). Textual analysis blended with concepts from narrative analysis was used to explore the written data gleaned from responses to the one open-ended question on the Likert-type survey, and from the e-mailed interview questions. This approach included reading and re-reading the original written narratives, coding key utterances, reorganizing the text into themes/consistencies, and collapsing categories after further analysis (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Maxwell's (1996) qualitative

research design handbook provided guidance for the formation of this study. McCance (2001) assessed the usefulness of narrative methodology in exploring the concept of caring in nursing with conclusions that further supported this approach. Lier, Takahashi, Nishimura, Ito & Summers (2004) provided further guidance in the design of this study.

The cutting-edge nature of the Lier et al (2004) approach warrants further explanation. Lier et al (2004) described a cyberspace type of triangulated study design and analysis where data were gathered from participants via e-mail and then analyzed via e-mail by a team of researchers. Interview questions were sent to participants and clarification/elaboration sought in an ongoing process of asynchronous communication that was deemed complete when clarity and understanding were affirmed by both participant and researcher. This method, which yielded rich study results, provided validation for the use of an e-mail interview format in this study.

Study Sites

The sites for this study were the Weber State University Nursing Program in Ogden, Utah (primary site), the University of Northern Colorado Nursing Program in Greeley, Colorado, the University of Colorado School of Nursing in Denver, Colorado, the Northern Arizona State University Nursing Program in Flagstaff, Arizona, and the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming. The study site selection was a convenience sample. Additionally, these specific institutions were selected to participate in this study based on their philosophical and practical commitment to excellence in online nursing education. Please refer to figure below for further information about study sites.

Figure 7
Participating Study Sites

University	Annual BSN Enrollment	Percentage of Classes Offered Online	Summary in relation to commitment to online teaching/ learning
Weber State University	225	100% ADN 100% BSN 100% RN-BSN	The Weber State University Nursing Program provides nursing education to urban and rural populations in both face-to-face and online classroom settings in order to meet the lifelong learning needs of nurses and potential nurses in the state of Utah, regardless of whether the students are able to come to campus or must participate remotely via the Internet due to geographical issues. Outreach in relation to offering full ADN and BSN programs online is a program priority.
University of Northern Colorado	70	100% RN-BSN 100% MSN 100% PhD	The University of Northern Colorado Nursing Program provides nursing education at the undergraduate and graduate levels to urban and rural populations in both face-to-face and online classroom settings in order to meet the lifelong learning needs of nurses and potential nurses in and outside the state of Colorado.
University of Colorado	475	100% RN-BSN	The University of Colorado Nursing Program is committed to lifelong learning with a focus on offering articulated degree programs, flexible and self-directed programs, innovative educational technologies, and professional/institutional collaboration.
Northern Arizona State University	50	100% RN-BSN	The Northern Arizona State University is committed to providing a responsive distance learning network able to deliver RN-BSN programs throughout Arizona. Values related to program mission include excellence in education, student success, educational access, diversity, integrity, and civility.
University of Wyoming	130	100% RN-BSN 100% MSN 25% BSN	The University of Wyoming Nursing Program provides nursing education at the undergraduate and graduate levels to urban and rural populations in both face-to-face and online classroom settings in order to meet the lifelong learning needs of nurses and potential nurses in and outside the state of Wyoming in both urban and rural settings. Overall mission includes a specific focus on outreach educational opportunities.

Student Sample

A convenience sample online of R.N. students, both generic and R.N. to B.S.N., were invited to participate. All of the participants were adults enrolled in programs aimed at educating registered nurses at the Baccalaureate level. Students, both generic and RN-BSN, were sent e-mail requests for participation in the survey. Only Registered Nurse (R.N.) students were invited to participate, in keeping with the sampling method used in the Sitzman & Leners (2006) study that formed the foundation for this study. All BSN students, encompassing RN to BSN and generic BSN students were included in the study

as a combined cohort. Variables including age, gender, work experience, and professional maturity associated with BSN students made comparisons between RN to BSN and generic BSN students too confounding to warrant separating the two groups for independent study. Students were provided with a link to the web address of the site that administered the survey. The invited survey participants were BSN online learners. Participation was entirely optional.

Data Management

The survey responses were/are confidential, with final data sets not being traceable to individual students immediately following data transcription. Respondents were invited to participate in an extended e-mail interview following the completion of the Likert-type survey, with participation being completely optional. The e-mail interview portion of the study was confidential. Only the principle investigator had knowledge of or access to identities of participants for this portion of the study. Responses were/are not traceable to respondents in the study write-up.

Instrumentation

E-mail and/or survey results from a secure website, via the World Wide Web were the primary source of data collection. Word processing was also used during the creation of untraceable records of the original responses. Instrumentation therefore included the use of personal computers connected to the World Wide Web.

Data collection

A request for participation in the Likert-type survey was e-mailed to online nursing students at 5 different educational settings. Six weeks was given for the respondents to e-mail responses back to the researcher. Responses to the Likert-type questions were coded

and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Base 10.0 for Windows. A subset of 15 respondents from the Likert-type survey who indicated willingness to participate in an extended online interview were contacted via e-mail and given interview questions. Clarification/elaboration regarding participant responses was sought in an ongoing process of asynchronous communication that was deemed complete when clarity and understanding were affirmed by both participant and researcher. After completion, the narrative e-mail responses were copied, cut, and pasted into numbered “word” documents, with the identities of the participants and their corresponding numbers being available only to the principle investigator in order to ensure confidentiality for the respondents. The 15 online interview participants’ e-mail addresses and any other personal identifying information were kept confidential with only the Principle Investigator having access to that information.

Data Analysis Procedures

This process was based on guidance found in texts by Dillman (2000) and Salant & Dillman (1994) for the Likert-type question analysis, and on Cheek (2000), McKee, (2003), and Riessman (1993) for the open-ended questions and e-mail interview response analysis. The data reduction/coding approaches that were used in this study supported the processes of survey research methodology and textual and/or narrative analysis. The computer software package that was utilized for the Likert-type question analysis was SPSS Base 10.0. The approach for the open-ended and e-mail interview responses included reading and re-reading the original written narratives, coding key utterances, reorganizing copies of the text into themes and consistencies, and collapsing categories

where needed after further analysis. Coding and analyzing the narrative data was completed by hand.

Likert-type data values were entered into SPSS Base 10.0 for analysis. Categories and attributes associated with the Likert-type items were created using qualitative theme analysis. Factor analysis in relation to the Likert-type items was not completed due to the low number of respondents. For the open-ended question and the e-mail interviews, analysis was based on written narratives and included identification of sentinel themes associated with student perspectives of caring online. Collapsing of categories and identification of attributes was completed using qualitative theme analysis. All of the responses were assessed with the understanding that narratives are influenced and situated within nursing culture, online culture, and the culture of higher education.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

In response to the research questions “What (if any) caring behaviors are more important than the others?” and “What is the degree of importance of each of the individual caring behaviors?”, data associated with Likert-type question responses were rank ordered in relation to respondent perception of extremely important, moderately important, somewhat important, and not important caring instructor behaviors. In answer to the research question “In addition to caring behaviors identified by Sitzman & Leners (2006) and alluded to in the literature, are there other preferred instructor behaviors that support students feeling cared for in the online nursing education setting?”, narrative data with identified attributes and corresponding themes will be presented. Data in relation to level of response, demographics, adequacy of the survey tool, end of survey open-ended question response, and online interview responses will also be presented. Congruence between the Likert-type data and narrative data will also be discussed.

The narrative data were read and re-read repeatedly. Four main attributes of Clarity/Expertise, Timeliness, Empathic Presence, and full Engagement/Accessibility were identified by grouping key utterances into congruent categories. The specific wording of the 4 main attributes came from words and phrases that respondents used in the current study, and in two previous studies (Leners & Sitzman, 2006; Sitzman & Leners, 2006). Because the Likert-type items on the main survey were generated directly

from previous results of Leners & Sitzman (2006) and Sitzman & Leners (2006), 13 of them can be grouped under the 4 main attributes. Table 1 shows these groupings.

Table 1
Likert-type Items Grouped Under Four Main Attributes

Clarity/Expertise	Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding schedules and due dates. Provides students with a detailed class calendar that includes all due dates for postings, papers, and projects. Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable length/quality of required online communications (postings, papers, projects, e-mails etc.) Demonstrates respect for the learning process by exhibiting excellence in creating/presenting online content.
Timeliness	Responds to postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours.
Empathic Presence	Provides supportive/corrective guidance to individual students via personal e-mail or telephone rather than in any public venue i.e. chat or postings. Expresses the belief that students will be successful in the online setting. Verbalizes enthusiasm for learning. Recounts challenges experienced in the online classroom setting and shares remedies that have worked for self and other students. Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable social behavior in the online classroom.
Full Engagement/Accessibility	When responding to student work, refers to specifics so that students know their work has been thoroughly read. Provides scheduled telephone availability so that students know when the instructor will be available to speak to them. Provides (at minimum) weekly praise and encouragement to individuals and/or groups for work that is well done.

Response Rate, Demographics, & Adequacy of the Tool

Level of Response

Seven hundred and fifty requests for participation were sent to BSN students at 5 different educational institutions: University of Northern Colorado n=50, Weber State University n=50, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center n=470, Northern Arizona State University n=50, and University of Wyoming n=130. The requests were sent twice, once during the third, fourth, or fifth week of the semester, and then two weeks after the original request date. The total number of 750 represents the number of

requests sent, but does not reflect the number of requests returned to sender due to defunct e-mail addresses or system error. The participating institutions that sent the requests were unable to provide “returned mail” information. Additionally, there was no way to truly assess how many prospective respondents actually received the request to participate because forwarding and/or sharing of e-mail addresses/computers between prospective respondents and others might have caused confusion.

The total number of respondents for this Likert-type survey was n=122. A traditionally calculated response rate (a simple percentage of respondents in relation to number of requests sent out) equals 16.27%. This percentage falls within the range of expected response rates for a study of this nature: 6.0%-34.5% (Moss & Hendry, 2002; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003). Calculating a traditional response rate in relation to this survey does not substantively clarify the generalizability of results due to the difficulty of controlling access and monitoring distribution in the online setting (Dillman, Tortora & Bowker, 1999; Sax et al, 2003; Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). Level of response in relation to the strength of the trends and themes that emerged in the Likert-type and narrative data effectively clarified student perceptions of instructor caring online in this respondent pool.

Demographics

Of the 122 respondents, 87.5% (n=112) were female and 12.5% (n=16) were male. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) reported that in 2004, 5.7% of all registered nurses were male; thus the survey respondent pool for this study contained a slightly higher than average number of males.

The mean age for survey respondents was 33.27 (SD=9.84). Respondents ranged in age from 20 years to 56 years of age. The USDHHS reported that in 2004, the age at graduation for recent BSN graduates was 26.2; thus, the survey respondents for this study were slightly older than the most recently recorded national average.

Adequacy of the Survey Tool

Adequacy of the survey tool, in relation to how well the items on the survey reflected online caring as demonstrated by nursing instructors, was assessed based on narrative comments provided by 23 respondents, and by assessing Cronbach's alpha. The results of these two assessments are discussed below.

One open-ended question following the Likert-type questions asked "In addition to the behaviors listed above, are there any other things an instructor might do in an online teaching situation that would convey caring to you?" In response to this question, 23 of the respondents indicated that the survey tool adequately assessed online caring with comments such as "I think you have covered the most important aspects of online learning," "I can't think of anything else. It would appear to me that all subjects and situations were addressed in the above questions," and "That pretty much sums it up." In addition to consideration of respondent comments, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency- the degree to which the items of a tool or instrument all measure the same attribute; in this case caring online. It is a "coefficient measure of reliability that compares each item in a Likert scale with each other simultaneously" (Gillis & Jackson, 2002, p. 436). The reliability analysis- Cronbach's alpha- was performed in SPSS Base 10, with the resultant value of

alpha=0.8313. An alpha of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable in most situations (SPSS, 1999), so the survey tool used for this research study met the criteria for acceptable reliability in measuring the concept in question. There is one factor however, that emerged from the open-ended question narrative results that indicated revision of the tool might better address student concerns, so despite an acceptable Cronbach's alpha rating, modification of the tool is still needed if it is to be used in future studies. This factor will be discussed in the "End of Survey Open-ended Question Responses" section later in this document.

The Likert-type Data

Introduction

There were 24 Likert-type questions on the survey. Respondents read a statement describing a potential online instructor behavior, and then were asked to decide if the behavior was "Extremely Important," "Moderately Important," "Somewhat Important," or "Not Important." All 122 respondents answered all of the Likert-type questions.

"Extremely Important" Instructor Behaviors

The vast majority of respondents judged three behaviors "Extremely Important" and a notable majority judged a fourth behavior extremely important. These results are summarized below.

"Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding schedules and due dates" was judged "Extremely Important" by 96.7% (n=118) of the respondents. "Provides students with a detailed class calendar that includes all due dates for postings, papers, and projects" was judged "Extremely Important" by 91.0% (n=111) of the respondents. "Responds to postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours" was judged "Extremely

Important” by 82.0% (n=100) of the respondents. A fourth item, “Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding length/quality of required online communications...” was judged “Extremely Important” by 73.6% (n=89) of the respondents. Table 2 shows the rank order of survey items in relation to percentage and number of respondents who ranked each behavior “Extremely Important.”

Table 2
Ranking of "Extremely Important" Survey Items

Rank	Survey Item	%	N=
1	Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding schedules and due dates.	96.7	118
2	Provides students with a detailed class calendar that includes all due dates for postings, papers, and projects.	91.0	111
3	Responds to Postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours.	82.0	100
4	Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable length/quality of required online communications...	73.6	89
5	Demonstrates respect for the learning process by exhibiting excellence in creating/presenting online content.	63.6	77
6	Provides supportive/corrective guidance to individual students via personal e-mail or telephone rather than any public venue...	56.6	69
7	Expresses the belief that students will be successful in the online setting, and Verbalizes enthusiasm for learning.	54.1	66
8	When responding to student work, refers to specifics, so that students know their work has been thoroughly read.	53.3	65
9	Provides scheduled phone availability so the students know when the instructor will be available to speak to them.	42.6	52
10	Recounts challenges experienced in the online classroom setting and shares remedies that have worked for self and others.	41.0	50
11	Provides students with a discussion board thread dedicated to student questions and concerns only.	32.2	39
12	Mindfully addresses student challenges as soon as they become evident...	31.1	38
13	Provides (at minimum) weekly praise and encouragement to individuals and/or groups for work that is well done.	29.8	36
14	Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable social behavior in the online classroom.	28.3	34
15	Responds to postings and e-mails on weekends.	27.9	34
16	Provides students with the opportunity for face-to-face meetings at the beginning of the semester if possible, and Posts a casual (conversational) personal introduction...	20.5	25
17	Provides an e-mail address outside the course homepage.	19.7	24
18	Discusses past scholarly work and professional experiences.	16.4	20
19	Provides virtual office hours with scheduled chats.	13.9	17
20	If face-to-face meetings are not possible, arranges for a web camera exchange between individual students and instructor....	8.2	10
21	Shares informal glimpses of self by posting fun/personal photographs.	2.5	3
22	Discusses hobbies or extracurricular interests.	1.6	2

In relation to the “Extremely Important” responses, four of the top ranking 5 behaviors could be grouped under the instructor attribute of *Clarity/Expertise* because they were all associated with the teacher’s ability to expertly convey academic content and expectations clearly so that students were able to understand at the outset what they needed to do and when they needed to do it in order to successfully complete the course. These top ranking behaviors included posting clear instructions regarding schedules/due dates, providing a detailed class calendar, posting clear instructions regarding acceptable length and quality of student postings, and demonstrating excellence in creating/presenting online content. The strength of the rankings, ranging from 63.6%(n=77) up to 96.7% (n=118), indicated that, above all other concerns, most students preferred an instructor who could manage online process and content/material so that students easily and fully understood what was needed for successful learning and assessment activities.

The third ranked “Extremely Important” item at 82.0% (n=100) was “Responds to postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours.” This behavior applies to the attribute of *Timeliness*. The strength of the ranking for this specific behavior supports the assertion that timeliness is of foremost concern to the majority of students.

The sixth, seventh, and tenth ranked behaviors related to the instructor attribute of *Empathic Presence*. Empathic presence is demonstrated by offering support, insight, and compassion to students. The behaviors associated with Empathic Presence included providing supportive/corrective guidance to individual students via personal e-mail or telephone rather than any public venue, expressing the belief that students will be

successful in the online setting, verbalizing enthusiasm for learning, and recounting challenges experienced in the online classroom setting.

The eighth and ninth ranked items related to the attribute of *Full Engagement/Accessibility*, defined as being fully accessible and consistently/visibly during the online teaching/learning process. The behaviors associated with Full Engagement/Accessibility included referring to specifics when giving feedback on student work so that the student knows their work has been thoroughly read, and providing scheduled phone availability so students are able to dependably reach the instructor via telephone.

In summary, the top 10 “Extremely Important” instructor behaviors involved attributes of Clarity/Expertise, Timeliness, Empathic Presence, and Full Engagement/Accessibility. All of these attributes were important to respondents, as evidenced by the strong ranking percentages, however Clarity/Expertise was clearly the foremost concern, with Timeliness following in second position. Empathic presence was the third most important attribute, and Full Engagement/Accessibility assumed the fourth position.

“Moderately Important” Instructor Behaviors

At least 45% of respondents judged three behaviors “Moderately Important.” These results are summarized below.

“Recounts challenges experienced in the online classroom setting and shares remedies that have worked for self and others” was judged “Moderately Important” by 46.7% (n=57) of the respondents. Provides (at minimum) weekly praise and encouragement to individuals and/or groups for work that is well-done” was judged “Moderately Important” by 45.5% (n=55) of the respondents. Writes out and posts clear instructions

regarding acceptable social behavior in the online classroom” was judged “Moderately Important” by 45% (n=54) of the respondents. Table 3 shows the rank order of survey items in relation to percentage and number of respondents who ranked each behavior “Moderately Important.”

Table 3
Ranking of “Moderately Important” Survey Items

Rank	Survey Item	%	N=
1	Recounts challenges experienced in the online classroom setting and shares remedies that have worked for self and others.	46.7	57
2	Provides (at minimum) weekly praise and encouragement to individuals and/or groups for work that is well done.	45.5	55
3	Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable social behavior in the online classroom.	45.0	54
4	Discusses past scholarly work and professional experiences.	41.0	50
5	Posts a casual (conversational) personal introduction via the online posting forum in the first week or two of class.	40.2	49
6	Responds to postings and e-mails on weekends.	38.5	47
7	Provides students with a discussion board thread dedicated to student questions and concerns only.	38.0	46
8	Provides scheduled phone availability so the students know when the instructor will be available to speak to them.	36.1	44
9	Mindfully addresses student challenges as soon as they become evident... and Provides virtual office hours with scheduled chats, and Verbalizes enthusiasm for learning.	35.2	43
10	Provides students with the opportunity for face-to-face meetings at the beginning of the semester if possible.	34.4	42
11	When responding to student work, refers to specifics, so that students know their work has been thoroughly read.	33.6	41
12	Demonstrates respect for the learning process by exhibiting excellence in creating/presenting online content.	32.2	39
13	Expresses the belief that students will be successful in the online setting.	28.7	35
14	Provides supportive/corrective guidance to individual students via personal e-mail or telephone rather than any public venue...	27.9	34
15	Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable length/quality of required online communications...	24.0	29
16	Provides an e-mail address outside the course homepage.	23.8	29
17	Shares informal glimpses of self by posting fun/personal photographs.	21.3	26
18	If face-to-face meetings are not possible, arranges for a web camera exchange between individual students and instructor.	18.0	22
19	Responds to Postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours.	16.4	20
20	Discusses hobbies or extracurricular interests.	14.8	18
21	Provides students with a detailed class calendar that includes all due dates for postings, papers, and projects.	4.9	6
22	Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding schedules and due dates.	2.5	3

In relation to the “Moderately Important” responses, the first, second, fourth, and fifth ranking behaviors included recounting challenges and remedies in relation to online learning, providing weekly praise to individuals and/or groups, discussing past scholarly work and professional experiences, and posting a casual personal introduction via the online posting forum in the first week or two of class. All of these responses are related to the attribute of Empathic Presence. Providing clear instructions regarding acceptable online social behavior was third ranked and is related to the attribute of Clarity/Expertise. These five “Moderately Important” behaviors, with 4 describing the attribute of Empathic Presence, and one describing the attribute of Clarity/Expertise, strengthen the assertion that these should be primary considerations after Clarity/Expertise and Timeliness in relation to creating caring online classroom environments. Please refer to Table 2 for other “Moderately Important” items.

“Somewhat Important” Instructor Behaviors

The top three “Somewhat Important” behaviors did not exceed 40.0% and included the following; “Discusses hobbies or extracurricular interests” was judged “Somewhat Important” by 37.7% (n=46) of the respondents. “Discusses past scholarly work and professional experiences” was judged “Somewhat Important” by 37.7% (n=46) of the respondents. “Provides virtual office hours with scheduled chats ” was judged “Somewhat Important” by 33.6% (n=41) of the respondents. Table 4 shows the rank order of survey items in relation to percentage and number of respondents who ranked each behavior “Somewhat Important.” Items that scored below 10% were not included in the table.

Table 4
 Ranking of “Somewhat Important” Survey Items

Rank	Survey Item	%	N=
1	Discusses hobbies or extracurricular interests, and Discusses past scholarly work and professional experiences.	37.7	46
2	Provides virtual office hours with scheduled chats.	33.6	41
3	Posts a casual (conversational) personal introduction via the online posting forum in the first week or two of class.	32.0	39
4	Provides an e-mail address outside the course homepage.	31.1	38
5	If face-to-face meetings are not possible, arranges for a web camera exchange between individual students and instructor.	29.5	36
6	Provides the students with a discussion board thread dedicated to student questions and concerns.	27.3	33
7	Provides students with the opportunity for face-to-face meetings at the beginning of the semester if possible, and Shares glimpses of self by posting fun/personal photographs.	26.2	32
8	Responds to postings and e-mails on weekends.	25.4	31
9	Mindfully addresses student challenges as soon as they become evident...	24.6	30
10	Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable social behavior in the online classroom.	24.2	29
11	Provides (at minimum) weekly praise and encouragement to individuals and/or groups...	20.7	25
12	Provides scheduled phone availability...	16.4	20
13	Expresses the belief that students will be successful in the online setting.	15.6	19
14	Provides supportive/corrective guidance via personal e-mail or telephone rather than any public venue...	13.9	17
15	Recounts challenges experienced in the online classroom and shared remedies...	10.7	13

In relation to the “Somewhat Important” responses, the top two ranking behaviors involved discussing hobbies/extracurricular interests, and discussing past scholarly work/professional experiences. Both are related to the attribute of Empathic Presence. The third and fifth ranking behaviors, providing virtual office hours with scheduled chats and providing an e-mail address outside the course homepage are both related to the attribute of Full Engagement/Accessibility. Posting a casual personal introduction via the online posting forum in the first week or two of class was the fourth ranking behavior and

is related to the attribute of Empathic Presence. These five survey items all described behaviors associated with the third and fourth ranking attributes described initially in the top 10 “Extremely Important” behaviors analysis. Smaller percentages coupled with the “Somewhat Important” categorization associated with this data strengthened the findings in the “Extremely Important” and “Moderately Important” categories that indicated Empathic Presence and Full Engagement/Accessibility should be considered third and fourth priority in relation to creating a caring online environment behind Clarity/Expertise and Timeliness. Please refer to Table 3 for other “Somewhat Important” items.

“Not Important” Instructor Behaviors

The top three “Not Important” behaviors scored between 44.0% and 50.0% and included the following; “Shares informal glimpses of self by posting fun/personal photographs” was judged “Not Important” by 50.0% (n=61) of the respondents. “Discusses hobbies or extracurricular interests” was judged “Not Important” by 45.9% (n=56) of the respondents. “If face-to-face meetings are not possible, arranges for a web camera exchange...” was judged “Not Important” by 44.3% (n=54) of the respondents. Table 5 shows the rank order of survey items in relation to percentage and number of respondents who ranked each behavior “Not Important.” Items that scored below 10.0% were not included in the table.

Table 5
Ranking of “Not Important” Survey Items

Rank	Item	%	N=
1	Shares informal glimpses of self by posting fun/personal photographs.	50.0	61
2	Discusses hobbies or extracurricular interests.	45.9	56
3	If face-to-face meetings are not possible, arranges for a web camera exchange between individual students and instructor....	44.3	54
4	Provides an e-mail address outside the course homepage.	25.4	31
5	Provides students with the opportunity for face-to-face meetings at the beginning of the semester if possible.	18.9	23
6	Provides virtual office hours with scheduled chats.	17.2	21

In relation to the “Not Important” responses, the 3 top ranking behaviors were associated with the instructor sharing informal glimpses of self, discussing hobbies/extracurricular interests, and providing for Web-camera meetings if face-to-face meetings were not possible. These three behaviors ranged from 44.3% (n=54) to 50.0% (n=61) and were all associated with personal exchanges between instructor and students. These results indicated that personal exchanges offered by the instructor were important to some students, but likely not indispensable to most students in relation to creating caring online teaching/learning environments. Please refer to Table 4 for other “Not Important” rankings.

The Narrative Data

Introduction

The narrative data were comprised of two components. The first component consisted of answers to the open-ended questions that immediately followed the Likert-type questions on the main survey. The second component consisted of online interview responses from a subset of 15 respondents from the main survey pool who agreed to answer an additional set of questions. Verbatim, untraceable transcripts were made of all

responses from both narrative data components. Transcripts were read multiple times, key passages were coded, text was reorganized into attributes and themes that were collapsed and clarified as needed. Attributes and themes that emerged from the narrative data are discussed below.

*First Component: The End of Survey
Open-ended Question Responses*

Of the 122 respondents, 85 answered the open-ended question following the Likert-type questions (69.67%). The question was, “In addition to the behaviors listed above, are there any other things an instructor might do in an online teaching situation that would convey caring to you?” Five Attributes emerged from this data: Empathic Presence, Clarity/Expertise, Timeliness, Full Engagement, and Flexibility/Openness. Themes associated with each attribute also emerged. The attributes and their corresponding themes are discussed below.

Empathic Presence

Empathic Presence means that students want to trust/know that the instructor will be there with compassion, support, and insight when needed by the student. Thirty of the 85 respondents mentioned the importance of empathic presence in supporting a caring online learning atmosphere. Representative quotes clarifying themes associated with this attribute are shown in Table 6:

Table 6
Quotes from End of Survey Question Responses Illustrating Themes
Associated with Empathic Presence

Themes	Illustrative Quotes
Caring is communicated by demonstrating empathy through mindfully considering the students' frame of reference during interactions.	<p>"Some of us are NOT online learners. Knowing the instructor is aware and tries to compensate for that helps."</p> <p>"...and if we call, don't make us feel bad for calling. I have had both types of instructors. One who was more than willing to answer questions and was very available, and others who made us feel bad if we needed to call or ask more of there [sic] time. I preferred [sic] the first, and that instructor made me feel like my success was important, and that they really cared about me."</p>
Caring is conveyed by ensuring multiple, reliable, and consistent instructor availability opportunities to meet individual student needs.	<p>"The main aspect is to be able to reach an online class instructor via either e- mail, phone or chat and receive an adequate answer/ feedback/ suggestion. This is the crucial part in establishing student- instructor relationship that will give a basis to the success in terms of motivation and satisfaction for both student and instructor."</p> <p>"Be available on campus at certain times for those students who should want to come to campus."</p> <p>"I feel that when instructors respond on a consistant [sic] basis to students post it helps the student to find their way through the course and learn more valuable information. I know that in the past when instructors have offered consistant [sic] encouragement throughout the course it has made a huge difference."</p> <p>"Availability, availability, availability."</p>
Caring is demonstrated through mindful, attentive, and active listening/responding/interacting in ways that are meaningful to individual students.	<p>"When they do send an email it would be great to make sure they respond to all the concerns in the email, and to write more than a one line answer. Using emoticons or some other way to ensure a personal communication would be really great too. When a question is asked, don't simply quote the syllabus and send it back."</p> <p>"... personal emails showing that the instructor is concerned for about [sic] the success of the student. A class can go from the least important to the most important in the mind of the student if he/she knows the instructor actually cares about his/her progress."</p> <p>"Listen to the students!"</p>

Clarity/Expertise

Clarity/Expertise means that the instructor has the ability to manage and convey online process and content/material so that students easily/fully understand what is needed for successful learning. Nineteen of the 85 respondents mentioned the importance

of Clarity/Expertise in supporting a caring online learning atmosphere. Representative quotes clarifying themes associated with this attribute are shown in Table 7:

Table 7
Quotes from End of Survey Question Responses Illustrating Themes Associated with Clarity/Expertise

Themes	Illustrative Quotes
Caring is manifested through expert attention to detail, organization, and clarity for the purpose of supporting student confidence and success.	<p>“I think it's particularly important to communicate in a clear and organized manner in an online class.”</p> <p>“I can't emphasize enough the value of having a good detailed assignment schedule so there is no confusion.”</p> <p>“...it is important to have class schedules, requirements, postings, etc. easily accessible and understandable so it isn't a nightmare trying to figure out what you need to do and how to turn in your work.”</p> <p>“When a teacher has taken the time to make sure links work and articles are available [sic] that are used for the assignments that is very important and shows the caring that is needed for a teacher whom expects [sic] the student to succeed.”</p> <p>“Online high level of attention to detail/organization makes an instructor appear caring.”</p>
Caring is exhibited when an instructor shows expertise with online methods and technology.	<p>“An online instructor should themselves be familiar with the online education environment. Even though we all learn everyday, the instructor can't help the student if he or she does not have a clue how to operate in the online environment. That depth of knowledge alone will convey caring; how better to demonstrate that you as the instructor care about your students than to show that you are at least familiar with the learning environment in which they are expected to perform.”</p>

Timeliness

Timeliness means that the students want the instructor to respond to e-mails and postings in a timely manner. Twelve of the 85 respondents mentioned the importance of Timeliness in supporting a caring online learning atmosphere. Representative quotes clarifying the theme associated with this attribute are shown in Table 8:

Table 8
Quotes from End of Survey Question Responses Illustrating the Theme Associated with Timeliness

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Caring means valuing the fact that students wait in anticipation for instructors to respond to attempts at communication, and that instructor response within a 48-72 hour window demonstrates significant caring.	<p>“The most important things are timely responses to e-mails.”</p> <p>“Posting grades of assignments in a timely manner so you may learn during that area of study what you can do better.”</p> <p>“...responses and response time is very important.”</p> <p>“The biggest problem that I have had with online classes is getting the professors to respond in a timely manner.”</p> <p>“Responding to emails and postings within a timely manner tells the student they care about the success of their students and goes along way when evaluations come out.”</p> <p>“...if they know they won’t be able to provide timely feedback, let the students know.”</p>

Full Engagement/Accessibility

Full engagement/accessibility means that the students want the instructor to be fully accessible, and to consistently engage in all aspects of the online teaching/learning process. Nine of the 85 respondents mentioned the importance of Full Engagement/Accessibility in supporting a caring online learning atmosphere.

Representative quotes clarifying the themes associated with this attribute are shown in

Table 9:

Table 9
Quotes from End of Survey Question Responses Illustrating Themes Associated with Full Engagement/Accessibility

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Instructors demonstrate caring by fully listening to and participating in the online classroom discussions.	<p>“The instructors I have felt cared the most in online classes fully participated in classroom discussion with frequent comments. Those that I felt didn’t let the students conduct the conversation without their participation.”</p> <p>“... making sure that students know that the instructor is available and cares about what is being posted.”</p>
Caring is based on mindful and ongoing knowledge of what is happening with each student’s work and is conveyed through individual attention.	<p>“The best online instructors I have had respond personally to every post to him/her.”</p> <p>“Just make sure to check up with the students individually to see how they are doing.”</p> <p>“I would like to reinforce specific feedback. That is something I would have liked to have had during my online experience. The feedback provided was general and everyone received the same praise.”</p>

Flexibility/Openness

Flexibility/Openness means that the instructor is willing to collaborate and compromise in relation to the learning and assessment process. Eight of the 85 respondents mentioned the importance of Flexibility in supporting a caring online learning atmosphere. Representative quotes clarifying the themes associated with this attribute are shown in Table 10:

Table 10
 Quotes from End of Survey Question Responses Illustrating the Themes Associated with Flexibility/Openness

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Caring is exemplified by willingness to change in response to meaningful, substantive interaction with students.	"...caring instructors actively sought feedback re: graded evaluations eg confusing exam questions, written homework and may change grading if appropriate."
Caring means offering forgiveness for honest confusion.	"... forgiveness for confusion at the beginning since it is hard to make sure all the expectations are met when there are multiple sites to completing assignments."
Caring is conveyed through openness to the unexpected in relation to the teaching/learning process.	"Try to understand and respect the learning that is taking place on the students part even if it is not in a way that the instructor might have intended."
Caring is demonstrated by flexibility in relation to life concerns that may conflict with rigid schedules.	"Offer one late assignment. This would convey that the online teacher understands occasional personal issues that could cause a missed or late assignment." "Flexible due dates."

*Themes Associated with the Second Component:
 The Online Interview Responses*

Of the 122 respondents, 58 initially expressed willingness to participate in the online interview portion of the study (47.54%). The questions were sent to all 58 since it was unknown which respondents would follow through with the interview process. Exactly 15 of the original 58 (25.86%) who expressed willingness to participate actually participated. Results of the online interview portion of the study will be discussed in relation to specific responses to the online interview questions.

The first online interview question was "Please discuss what factors influenced your choices in relation to "Extremely Important" caring instructor behaviors...I am interested in knowing why that behavior was important to you in relation to feeling cared for and supported in the online classroom setting." The four attributes that emerged from the answers to this question mirrored the attributes that emerged from the end of survey open-ended question responses: Empathic Presence, Timeliness, and Clarity/Expertise, and Full Engagement/Accessibility.

Empathic Presence

Empathic Presence means that students want to know that the instructor will be there with compassion, support, and insight when needed by the student. Eleven of the 15 respondents mentioned the importance of empathic presence in supporting a caring online learning atmosphere. Representative quotes clarifying the themes associated with this attribute are shown in Table 11:

Table 11
Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating Themes Associated with Empathic Presence

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Caring is communicated by demonstrating empathy through mindfully considering the students' frame of reference during interactions.	"It is extremely important to me that the instructor believes that I can be successful. This is important to me because I think that It is always important for you to feel that the teacher thinks you can succeed even if you are struggling, it is important in online, [and] is also important on campus."
Caring is conveyed by ensuring multiple, reliable, and consistent instructor availability opportunities to meet individual student needs.	"I like meeting with the professor at least once on a face-to-face basis just so I feel like there really is a person and not just a computer that I am dealing with."
Caring is demonstrated through mindful, attentive, and active listening/responding/interacting in ways that are meaningful to individual students.	"Many times in online classes I have felt like a "number" and did not feel that even if I was struggling that my instructor would have cared or made and [sic] effort to help me. For me it is also intimidating to approach a person with such a problem through electronic means. I'm a much more personal communicator. Thus by being approached first [by the instructor], a door is opened, and knowing my needs matter to the instructor I am more likely to open up and allow myself to be helped." "Encouragement is vital to the struggling student, and it may be the one or two words of earnest and sincere support that keeps a person from dropping a class."

Timeliness

Ten of the 15 respondents mentioned the importance of Timeliness in supporting a caring online learning atmosphere. Representative quotes clarifying the themes associated with this attribute are shown in Table 12:

Table 12
 Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating the Theme Associated with
 Timeliness

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Caring means valuing the fact that students wait in anticipation for instructors to respond to attempts at communication, and that having to wait longer than 48-72 hours for acknowledgement demonstrates non-caring and non-support to the majority of students.	<p>“If an e-mail is sent to the instructor the response should be timely. Frequently these communications are in relation to a specific problem, or issue, and may have bearing on completion of specific assignments.”</p> <p>“First of all I definitely chose that responds to postings and email within forty-eight to seventy-two hours as vitally important. First of all it decreases anxiety as to whether the message was received [sic] and understood. Next often you are e-mailing or posting for clarification that prevents you from completing assignment until the before mentioned information is received. Finally if your teacher does not answer your question quickly anxiety is provoked by you wondering "uh-oh should I e-mail them again, did they not get it, will I be annoying if I e-mail them again," It is anxiety provoking to feel uncertain and a student quickly loses confidence.”</p>

Clarity/Expertise

Clarity/Expertise means that the instructor has the ability to manage and convey online process and content/material so that students easily/fully understand what is needed for successful learning. Seven of the 15 respondents mentioned the importance of Clarity/Expertise in supporting a caring online learning atmosphere. Representative quotes clarifying one of the themes associated with this attribute are shown in Table 13:

Table 13
 Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating One Theme Associated with
 Clarity/Expertise

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Caring is manifested through expert attention to detail, organization, and clarity for the purpose of supporting student confidence and success.	<p>“... clarity of expectations, both when things were due, and how they should be submitted. I think the reason for that is self-evident... I can't succeed in this, or any educational environment, if I don't know what's expected, and the clearer the communication about it is, the better.”</p> <p>“We need to know what the teacher wants in order to get a good grade. We are not here to fail.”</p> <p>“A clear time line of assignments and due dates is a must for any class. I worked ahead per syllabus in one class only to find out the instructor deleted a portion of the unit's posting due. Grrrr. I was mad... clear instructions, length and number of postings- I find it very important. I am in an online class now where no such recommendations were given.”</p>

Full Engagement/Accessibility

Five of the 15 respondents mentioned the importance of Full Engagement/Accessibility in supporting a caring online learning environment. Representative quotes clarifying one of the themes associated with this attribute are shown in Table 14:

Table 14
Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating Themes Associated with Full Engagement/Accessibility

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Instructors demonstrate caring by fully listening to and participating in the online classroom discussions.	"...show that they, the instructors, are there and interested in interaction with the students. For the most part completion of assignments is not dependent on instructor input, but it is helpful and often provides insight on the topic of discussion..."
Caring is conveyed through individual attention based on mindful and ongoing knowledge of what is happening with each student's work.	"...if I do not believe that my work was given a thorough review and appropriate attention, why would I ever feel like trying to expand my horizons and push my boundaries and abilities?" "It's important to know the instructor cares enough to read everything you have spent your valuable time on."

Positive & Negative Aspects of Online Education

The second online interview question was the following: "Please compare and contrast your online versus face-to-face learning experiences. List both positive and negative aspects related to online and face-to-face learning environments."

Positive Aspects

Twelve of the respondents had positive comments about the online classroom setting. Two attributes emerged: Adaptability and Opportunity for Enhanced Self Expression.

Adaptability refers to the student being able to tailor/adapt course activities and requirements to personally unique scheduling, pacing, and learning needs. Representative quotes clarifying themes associated with this attribute are shown in Table 15:

Table 15
Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating Themes Associated with Adaptability

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Online classes afford flexibility for busy students with multiple demands on time and energy.	<p>“Benefits to online courses allows flexibility with those students with busy schedules (family, work etc.)”</p> <p>“Online classes were slightly more convenient in that they could get done when you had time to.”</p>
Online classes allow students to engage in self-pacing.	<p>“Online experience has been good. I can work at my own pace and do not have to travel for the class.”</p> <p>“I am able to go to class when I am free, undistracted, and not exhausted I am not thinking about what else I could be doing. I struggle with attention and with online I can pace myself without attending five straight hours of lecture in the same room (yes I have a day at campus where this happens and I take nothing away with me).”</p>

Opportunity for Enhanced Self Expression refers to the opportunity for students to improve self-expression in the online setting. Representative quotes clarifying the theme associated with this attribute are shown in Table 16:

Table 16
Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating the Theme Associated with Opportunity for Enhanced Self-Expression

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Online classes provide opportunities for students to enhance self expression.	<p>“...getting good at expressing yourself in writing.”</p> <p>“You quickly learn how important it is to write clearly and explain well. In many ways I think it improves writing skills better than any other class. I think you tend to be more open and honest since you know you are not in front of a class and subject to embarrassment.”</p>

Negative Aspects of Online Education in Relation to Face-to-face Classrooms

All fifteen respondents had negative comments in relation to the online classroom setting in general. Two attributes emerged: Desire for Face-to-Face Interactions and Procrastination.

Desire for Face-to-Face Interactions refers to students expressing a desire to have more face-to-face interaction and guidance in relation to teaching/learning activities.

Representative quotes clarifying the theme associated with this attribute are shown in

Table 17:

Table 17
Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating Themes Associated with Desire for Face-to-Face Interactions

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Online learning feels like self-education for some students.	<p>"I despise online learning environments. I don't believe that they are effective in imparting knowledge, and I feel as if I'm mostly self-educating."</p> <p>"Bad in that sometimes it is harder to understand a concept through books or online notes..."</p>
Online learning sometimes does not support the need for immediate clarification.	<p>"I prefer face-to-face interaction with the instructor... This allows me to ask as many questions as I need and get on the spot answers, allows the instructor to emphasize important ideas or points, you get to know the instructor visa/versa as opposed to just a name on the roll..."</p> <p>"I prefer to take classes face-to-face, if the instructor is interesting to listen to and brings things into classes that are a little different than what I just read. When the instructor is good it is easier for me to clarify things in person than to, [sic] try and ask for clarification on-line."</p> <p>"...you are never out of the classroom theoretically, discussions can go on and on and on getting longer and longer, saying the same thing over and over and no one says OK! Lets move on! (this is where clear instructions in postings is important)."</p>
Online classroom environments sometimes make it difficult to experience and read the emotions and intentions of others.	<p>"I didn't like that online learning was self paced... It was much more fun to see faces and have real human interactions. Plus, through typing, it is hard to convey emotions, or read the emotions of others."</p> <p>"...no instant clarification, no body language to guide you in understanding instructor or peers,</p>

Procrastination refers to students expressing concern over the opportunity to procrastinate in the online classroom setting. Representative quotes clarifying the theme associated with this attribute are shown in Table 18:

Table 18
Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating the Theme Associated with Procrastination

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Online learning is sometimes conducive to students falling behind in a course due to lack of familiar face-to-face prompts found in traditional brick and mortar classrooms.	<p>“The bad thing is, most students put assignments off and cram at the end.”</p> <p>“...putting things off and regretting it later.”</p> <p>“Very easy to not do it.”</p> <p>“Online learning can make a person lazier where they don't turn things in until the absolute deadline at the absolute hour.”</p>

Peer-to-Peer Interactions

The third question was in relation to peer-to-peer interactions in the online environment, and included “Is peer interaction in the online setting important in establishing a caring classroom environment? Do you think any of the instructor behaviors listed on the survey should also apply to peer interactions in the online environment? Why or why not? Please list peer-to-peer caring online behaviors that you feel are important in establishing and maintaining a caring online classroom environment.” There were mixed responses to this question and no firm attribute or themes emerged from the data, indicating that respondents were possibly unclear regarding the purpose/utility of peer-to-peer online interactions. A sampling of quotes is provided below.

Peer Interactions are Important in Online Classrooms

Seven out of the 15 respondents indicated that peer-to-peer interactions are important in creating/sustaining a caring online classroom environment. Table 19 provides exemplars:

Table 19
Quotes from Online Interview Responses Discussing the Importance of Peer Interactions Online

Quotes Discussing the Importance of Peer Interactions Online
"Yes, peer-to-peer caring behaviors / interaction are very important to the success of an online course. It allows the students to get different perspectives or ideas on certain subjects. Allows for clarification. Many times students can work together on assignments with each student bringing their share to the table, whether it be good or bad."
"The online "class chat boards" are a good way for students to find out what other students are doing and gain some understanding as to what is being discussed in the class."
"I believe there is a need for peer interaction to make us feel like we are indeed in a class and not just one person. The feeling of belonging to the group is important whether in the classroom or online."
"... YES peer interaction is very important for a caring online classroom. Many times other students have taught me something I either missed or did not understand in the assignments."

Peer Interactions are Not Important in Online Classrooms

Three out of the 15 respondents indicated that peer-to-peer interactions are not important in creating/sustaining a caring online classroom environment. Table 20 provides exemplars:

Table 20
Quotes from Online Interview Responses Discussing the Unimportance of Peer Interactions Online

Quotes Discussing the Unimportance of Peer Interactions Online
"Peer interaction in the online setting is meaningless, valueless fluff. I am not there to make friends, I am there to learn."
"Peer interactions and group assignments are the biggest waste of time on web based courses. I also don't care for them in classroom settings either. Having worked on a number of these my take on this arrangement is that I walk away without the whole picture. Yes, the assnmts [sic] take less time overall but I do my piece, move on the next assnmt [sic] and never have a complete pix of the subject matter."

*Unsure Whether Peer Interactions are
Important or Not in Online Classrooms*

Four out of the 15 respondents seemed unsure whether peer-to-peer interactions are important in creating/sustaining a caring online classroom environment. Table 21 provides exemplars:

Table 21
Quotes from Online Interview Respondents Who Seemed Unsure About the Importance of Peer-to-Peer Online Interactions

Quotes from Respondents Who Seemed Unsure About the Importance of Peer-to-Peer Online Interactions
"Honestly, I never thought about peer-to-peer interactions in the online setting. I never genuinely looked at the chat boards and really had no clue as to who the other students were in my class."
"Peer interaction is an interesting phenomenon. We are adult learners, with work, family and other obligations that compete for our time. One week I may be able to initiate the discussion, the next I may not be able to add to it until the very last."
"...any sort of "peer chatting" things online would be weird to me."

Peer-to-Peer Caring Behaviors

Eight out of the 15 respondents discussed peer-to-peer etiquette in the online setting. The attribute of Respect/Consideration emerged. Respect/Consideration refers to style of interaction in relation to peer-to-peer exchanges in the online setting. Representative quotes clarifying the theme associated with this attribute are shown in Table 22:

Table 22
 Quotes from Online Interview Responses Illustrating Themes Associated with
 Respect/Consideration

Theme	Illustrative Quotes
Students in the online setting prefer to engage in familiar, generally accepted courteous and polite social behaviors.	<p>“Qualities of my peers that would be important to me in such an instance would be honesty, sincerity and a lack of belittling other students ideas and comments. Being accepted by peers after all is a great asset in the classroom and in life in general.”</p> <p>“Peer- to peer online behaviors that are important in establishing and maintaining a caring online classroom includes proper etiquette, tactful discussions, and participation on everyone’s part, not just some or a few.”</p>
Instructors in the online setting should demonstrate familiar, generally accepted courteous and polite social behaviors.	<p>“Courteous, time-effective communication is best for everybody [students and teachers alike].”</p> <p>“I think that the instructor behaviors mentioned should also apply to the students. We should all be caring and non-judgemental [sic] in our responses to each other just as we would be in the class. This helps to create a caring and safe atmosphere.”</p> <p>“I think that holding instructors and peers to similar standards of net-etiquette is appropriate.”</p>

Conclusions Related to Both Sets of Narrative Data

Five attributes emerged from the narrative data. Four of the attributes that emerged from both components were identical: Clarity/Expertise, Timeliness, Empathic Presence, and Full Engagement/Accessibility. This occurrence validated the importance of these types of instructor behaviors in relation to conveying/sustaining caring in online nursing classrooms. The fact that 85 out 122 (69.67%) survey respondents took the time to type out specific remarks in relation to these issues in such great numbers, after having already responded to questions with similar focus during the Likert-type question portion of the survey, emphasized the perceived importance of these themes for the respondents. The 15 online interview participants echoed these sentiments and did not add new dimensions to this portion of the discussion. The rich responses obtained from all data sets helped to illustrate the attributes and themes clearly.

The new theme of Flexibility/Openness that emerged from the end-of-survey open-ended question responses seemed to be an extension, a unique dimension, of Empathic Presence, yet distinct enough to remain an individual attribute with corresponding themes. It seems that respondents had a desire for structure, as evidenced by the attributes of Clarity/Expertise and Timeliness, while at the same time, desired compassionate respite from the structure (or even simply the promise of respite if needed) for unavoidable individual concerns.

Trust

One word that applies to all five of the themes discussed above is “trust.” Trust in the instructor’s teaching abilities, attentiveness, caring intentions, availability and accessibility. All of these attributes define an instructor who mindfully attends to the minutia of presenting a cohesive, well-organized, clearly conceived and executed course, while at the same time, fully attending to the needs of individual students. This approach requires special knowledge in relation to online teaching/learning, careful planning, and cognizance of the significant impact of mindfully/compassionately paying attention to the students in the moment, on an ongoing basis, from the beginning through to the end of the course.

Other Themes from the Online Interview Data

Other themes emerged from the online interview data in relation to perceived positive and negative aspects of online education, and caring peer-to-peer behaviors in the online setting. Perceptions of the value of peer interactions in the online setting were mixed and indicated that there was no real consensus in this respondent pool regarding the

purpose/utility of peer-to-peer interactions in the online classroom setting. The findings related to this portion of the online interview are discussed below.

Perceived Positive & Negative Aspects of Online Education

The overall message from the online interviews in relation to the pros and cons of online education seems to be that while online classes provide the opportunity for personal development and lifestyle convenience, it can also be somewhat socially/educationally isolating and unsatisfying. Although three respondents expressed strong preferences against online education, it is unclear from the results of this initial exploration whether the bulk of the respondents perceived that the positives outweighed the negatives or vice versa.

A Theme in relation to Caring Peer-to-Peer Behaviors

One attribute emerged in relation to caring online peer-to-peer behaviors: Respect/Consideration. The attribute and related themes reflected generally accepted rules for positive/caring in-person interactions, indicating that respondents applied the same values to online classroom environments as one would desire/expect for in-person interactions.

Perceptions in Relation to the Value of Peer Interactions in the Online Setting

Clear themes or trends did not emerge from the responses to the question of whether or not peer interactions were valuable in online classrooms. Slightly fewer than half of the respondents did indicate that peer interactions were important for varying reasons, but there was no real consensus in relation to *why*. Three respondents indicated that peer interactions were not important (again for varying reasons), and 4 respondents seemed unsure of the importance of peer interactions. This mixed result may indicate that there is

uncertainty among students in relation to the purpose of peer-to-peer interactions in the online classroom setting.

Synthesizing Best Practice Guidelines

Many respondents in this study specifically indicated that the Likert-type questions adequately addressed caring online, which is likely why only one new theme of Flexibility/Openness emerged. The second and third questions asked in the online interview portion of the study in relation to pros/cons of online education and peer-to-peer interactions in the online setting were exploratory in nature, were not alluded to on the main survey, and congruence with the Likert-type responses was not in evidence in relation to this aspect of the study.

The Likert-type results and narrative themes, particularly in relation to the themes of Clarity/Expertise, Timeliness, Empathic Presence, and Full Engagement/Accessibility were congruent. The Likert-type data clarified level of importance in relation to specific instructor behaviors that applied to each narrative theme. The large number of responses to the end-of-survey open-ended questions emphasized and restated what was evident from the Likert-type results. Table 23, entitled “Proposed Best Caring Practices for Online Nurse Educators” represents a blending of the Likert-type data with the narrative data into a proposed set of best caring practices for online nurse educators. The behaviors listed in the table are arranged hierarchically within previously defined attributes. The attributes are listed in order of importance based on rankings associated with the Likert-type data and also the strength of the supporting narrative data. All behaviors listed in the table are considered essential in conveying and sustaining caring in online nursing classrooms. As knowledge development continues, this essential list of best caring

practices will likely be enhanced, clarified, and enlarged. Other caring instructor behaviors, while not necessarily essential, were identified by many respondents as *Beneficial Attributes* in terms of creating caring online classroom environments. These attributes are included at the bottom of the table.

Table 23
Best Caring Practices for Online Nurse Educators

Behavioral Attributes	Best Caring Practices
<i>Clarity/Expertise</i>	<p>The instructor will write out and post clear instructions regarding schedules and due dates.</p> <p>A detailed class calendar will be provided that includes all due dates for postings, papers, and projects.</p> <p>The instructor will write out and post clear instructions regarding length/quality of required online assignments.</p> <p>The instructor will exhibit excellence in creating/presenting online content.</p>
<i>Timeliness</i>	<p>The instructor will respond to postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours.</p>
<i>Empathic Presence</i>	<p>The instructor will provide supportive/corrective guidance to individual students via personal e-mail or telephone rather than any public venue.</p> <p>The instructor will express enthusiasm for online learning and convey the belief that students will be successful in the online setting.</p> <p>The instructor will recount challenges and solutions experienced in the online classroom setting.</p> <p>The instructor will write out and post clear instructions regarding acceptable social behavior (online etiquette) in the online classroom.</p>
<i>Full Engagement/Accessibility</i>	<p>When responding to student work, the instructor will refer to specifics so that students know their work has been thoroughly read.</p> <p>The instructor will provide scheduled phone availability.</p> <p>The instructor will provide (at minimum) weekly praise and encouragement to individuals and/or groups for work that is well done.</p>
<i>Other Beneficial Attributes</i>	<p>The instructor will mindfully address student challenges as soon as they become evident by personally contacting the student via telephone or e-mail and offering assistance/guidance.</p> <p>A discussion board thread will be provided that is dedicated to student questions and concerns only.</p> <p>The instructor will discuss past scholarly work and professional experiences where applicable in the course content.</p> <p>The instructor will post a casual personal introduction in the first week or two of class.</p> <p>The instructor will respond to e-mails on weekends.</p> <p>The instructor will provide students with the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting at the beginning of the semester if possible.</p>

The attributes and Best Caring Practices in Table 23 are helpful in clarifying specific *behaviors* that instructors may engage in to support caring in online nursing classrooms. The themes that emerged from the main study clearly correlated with 6 of Watson's Caritas (1985, 1988, 1999, n.d.) and elucidate specific *attitudes and intentions* that form the underpinnings of caring online teaching behaviors. Table 24 exhibits the attributes and corresponding themes associated with the main study, along with their kindred Watson Caritas.

Table 24
Main Attributes, Themes, and Watson's Caritas (Watson, 1985, 1988, 1999, n.d.)

Attribute	Themes	Watson Caritas
Empathic Presence	<p>Caring is communicated by demonstrating empathy through mindfully considering the students' frame of reference during interactions.</p> <p>Caring is conveyed by ensuring multiple, reliable, and consistent instructor availability opportunities to meet individual student needs.</p> <p>Caring is demonstrated through mindful, attentive, and active listening/responding/interacting in ways that are meaningful to individual students.</p>	<p>Intentional practice of loving-kindness within caring consciousness.</p> <p>Full presence in the moment, and acknowledgment of personally held beliefs and subjective perspective of self and other.</p> <p>Developing and sustaining helping-trusting, authentic caring relationships.</p> <p>Engaging in genuine teaching-learning experiences that arise from an understanding of interconnectedness, while at the same time recognizing the importance of staying within the other's frame of reference.</p>
Clarity/Expertise	<p>Caring is manifested through expert attention to detail, organization, and clarity for the purpose of supporting student confidence and success.</p> <p>Caring is exhibited when an instructor shows expertise with online methods and technology.</p>	<p>Creatively using all ways of being, knowing, and caring as integral parts of the nursing process</p>
Timeliness	<p>Caring means valuing the fact that students wait in anticipation for instructors to respond to attempts at communication, and that instructor response within a 48-72 hour window demonstrates significant caring.</p>	<p>Full presence in the moment, and acknowledgment of personally held beliefs and subjective perspective of self and other.</p> <p>Developing and sustaining helping-trusting, authentic caring relationships.</p>
Full Engagement/Accessibility	<p>Instructors demonstrate caring by fully listening to and participating in the online classroom discussions.</p> <p>Caring is based on mindful and ongoing knowledge of what is happening with each student's work and is conveyed through individual attention.</p>	<p>Full presence in the moment, and acknowledgment of personally held beliefs and subjective perspective of self and other.</p> <p>Developing and sustaining helping-trusting, authentic caring relationships.</p>
Flexibility/Openness	<p>Caring is exemplified by willingness to change in response to meaningful, substantive interaction with students.</p> <p>Caring means offering forgiveness for honest confusion.</p> <p>Caring is conveyed through openness to the unexpected in relation to the teaching/learning process.</p> <p>Caring is demonstrated by flexibility in relation to life concerns that may conflict with rigid schedules.</p>	<p>Engaging in genuine teaching-learning experiences that arise from an understanding of interconnectedness, while at the same time recognizing the importance of staying within the other's frame of reference.</p> <p>Developing and sustaining helping-trusting, authentic caring relationships.</p> <p>Being present to and supportive of the expression of positive and negative feelings arising in self and others.</p>

CHAPTER 5
IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS,
& CONCLUSIONS

Limitations

Although data obtained online were valuable in clarifying respondent perceptions in relation to the study questions, face-to-face interviewing in future studies, where investigators could create immediate opportunities for informal sharing and clarification, would be helpful in discerning concerns and feelings not conveyed in the online format.

There was no way to truly assess how many prospective respondents might have seen the request to participate or the survey link due to possible confusion associated with forwarding and/or sharing of e-mail addresses/computers among prospective respondents and others so a dependable response rate was not calculable.

The convenience sampling method of R.N. students and the institutions that participated in the study, could have introduced bias due to lack of randomization. The higher than average age of the respondents may have skewed the results. The fact that a higher percentage of males participated in this study than was found in BSN student pools nationally also might have skewed results.

Although the reliability analysis-Cronbach's alpha- was performed in SPSS Base 10, with the resultant value of $\alpha=0.8313$, there is one factor that emerged from the open-ended question narrative results (the attribute of Flexibility/Openness) that indicated revision of the tool might better address student concerns, so despite an acceptable

Cronbach's alpha rating, modification of the tool is still needed if it is to be used in future studies.

It was not possible to complete a factor analysis to validate the collapse of categories on the Likert-type survey tool because of the low number of respondents. It would be helpful to distribute the survey to a higher number of respondents, obtain a higher response rate, and then complete a factor analysis to validate the appropriateness of the four main attributes.

Implications & Recommendations

The results of this study in relation to the pros and cons associated with online education validate results from a previous study (Ryan et al 2004) and strengthen understanding of student concerns related to online education. Recent trends in creating hybrid delivery, in which courses are offered with a mix of online and face-to-face components may help to address identified concerns by preserving positive aspects of face-to-face delivery (El Mansour & Mupinga, 2007; Lorenzetti, 2004; Tabor, 2007; Young, 2002). Because hybrid delivery is still in the developmental stages and there are relatively few studies in relation to the effectiveness of this method (Reasons, 2004), further study is needed.

The results of this study in relation to peer-to-peer caring behaviors mirrored norms associated with any positive peer-to-peer interaction, whether online or face-to-face. Understanding precisely *how* to convey and apprehend these commonly accepted and valued behaviors in online settings must still be clarified through further study.

The results of this study in relation to perceived value of peer-to-peer interactions in the online setting were mixed. For those respondents that valued peer-to-peer

interactions, there was no consensus regarding *why* such interactions were important. Responses from participants who did not value peer-to-peer interactions offered no indications regarding factors that could enhance the value of peer interactions in the online setting. There was also a third group of respondents who seemed unsure what to say about peer-to-peer interactions. It was apparent that there was confusion in relation to the utility of peer-to-peer interactions in the online classroom setting. It may be helpful for online instructors to clearly outline why students are required to engage in peer-to-peer interactions in the online classroom setting in the first few weeks of class. Further study of student perceptions of peer-to-peer interactions in the online setting is also needed.

The most meaningful findings associated with this study were in relation to clarifying what caring online instructor behaviors were most important to students. Respondents who participated in this study expressed definite preferences associated with instructor activities perceived to support caring in online nursing classrooms. Moreover, distinct prioritization of preferred behaviors as demonstrated through rank ordering of data generated from the Likert-type survey items, indicated that different types of instructor behaviors occupied different levels of perceived importance. This finding was particularly striking in relation to those behaviors (survey items) that occupied the top ranking positions. The list of Best Caring Practices for Online Nurse Educators (see Table 22) that is based on the results of this study could prove to be a helpful resource for those teaching nursing students in the online setting who wish to learn about and engage in specific *behaviors* shown to support student perceptions of caring online classrooms. The themes associated with the main survey attributes clearly correlate with Watson's

Caritas (1985, 1988, 1999, n.d.) and clarify *attitudes and intentions* that form the underpinnings of caring online teaching behaviors.

Conclusion

Online nursing education continues to grow in response to the need for educating more nurses and the need to reach nursing students in outlying areas that do not have educational institutions geographically available that teach nursing. In order to maintain caring as a core value in nursing, nurse educators need to build a caring online teaching pedagogy based on focused knowledge development in the area of *caring* as it relates to the online teaching/learning environment. In addition to producing data that resulted in the creation of a list of best practices to support caring in online nursing classrooms and a list of suggested practices to support caring in online nursing classrooms, results of this study provided exploratory information in relation to three areas of interest-pros/cons of online nursing education, perceptions of peer-to-peer caring behaviors, and perceptions of peer-to-peer interactions - where further knowledge development would clarify additional actions that might support online caring.

Nursing education continues to move towards an increasingly high tech Web-based future. Productively moving forward with online delivery of nursing education while honoring, preserving, and modeling core caring values requires mindful and deliberate intention on the part of nursing instructors to convey and sustain caring in online nursing classrooms. Knowledge development in relation to student perceptions of caring online in relation to the study presented above has clarified how instructors may begin to effectively accomplish this important task. Further study will serve to deepen understanding and ensure continuity of caring pedagogy in relation to nursing education.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent for Participation in Research

Weber State University and University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: Student Perspectives of Caring in Online Nursing Classrooms

Researcher: Kathleen Sitzman, MS, RN, Weber State University and University of Northern Colorado School of Nursing (801)626-7032

Dear BSN Nursing Student,

The concept of caring is foundational in nursing practice and education. Although the phenomenon of caring has been explored in face-to-face classroom settings, there is little information regarding how caring might be taught and conveyed in online classrooms. A pilot study completed by Sitzman & Leners (2006) offered a glimpse of what students feel are caring behaviors on the part of online nursing instructors. The following survey, conducted through the University of Northern Colorado School of Nursing and the Weber State University, Department of Nursing, is based on results of this study, and will further clarify what students need to feel cared-for in Baccalaureate level online nursing courses. The information generated from this study will be used to provide guidance for nursing instructors who teach online. Results will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed nursing education journal.

By completing the survey, you have indicated your willingness to participate in this research. Completion and submission of the survey indicates your consent to participate in the study. Please read the following statement and proceed if you agree with the terms.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please print a copy of this form for future reference.

Your responses will be cut and pasted into a randomly numbered “word” document, and any identifiers in your response will be deleted. Surveymonkey.com uses state-of-the-art technology to protect responses, and I as a researcher will also endeavor to protect the anonymity of all responses. If you choose to participate in an additional online interview, your contact information will be kept confidential with only the Principle Investigator having access to your name or e-mail address. You may omit any question and/or any portion of the survey/interview that you do not wish to answer. You may also decline to participate at all without any negative consequences. It is estimated that it will take 10-20 minutes to complete the initial survey. If you choose to participate in the additional online interview portion of the study, it is estimated that it will take 30-45 minutes to complete the interview. Benefits that might result from the results of this study include provision of information regarding caring practices in online nursing classroom settings, and may help clarify for instructors how best to convey and teach caring in online nursing classroom settings.

The Weber State University Institutional Review Board and the University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board have both approved this project. Should you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact Kathleen Sitzman at the Weber State University Nursing Department, ksitzman@weber.edu or (801) 626-7032. You may also contact the University of Northern Colorado Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639: (970) 351-1907.

Thank-you so much for your participation!

Kathleen Sitzman, MS, RN

BSN Student Perspectives of Caring Online Survey

Please place a check mark in the box on the right that best describes the level of importance of each instructor behavior listed on the left.

NI=Not important, SI = Somewhat important, MI = Moderately important, EI=Extremely important.

Instructor Behavior	NI	SI	MI	EI
Responds to postings and e-mails within 48-72 hours.				
Responds to postings and e-mails on weekends.				
Mindfully addresses student challenges as soon as they become evident, for example if a student has not been online for a week, calls to find out why and offers support help the student get back on track.				
Recounts challenges experienced in the online classroom setting and shares remedies that have worked for self and other students.				
Expresses the belief that students will be successful in the online setting.				
Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding schedules and due dates.				
Provides students with a detailed class calendar that includes all due dates for postings, papers, and projects.				
Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable social behavior in the online classroom.				
Writes out and posts clear instructions regarding acceptable length/quality of required online communications (postings, papers, projects, e-mails etc.)				
Provides students with the opportunity for face-to-face meetings at the beginning of the semester if possible.				
If face-to-face meetings are not possible, arranges for a web camera exchange between individual students and instructor so that each student has a chance to "see" and interact with the instructor in real time.				
Provides scheduled telephone availability so that students know when the instructor will be available to speak to them.				

Provides an e-mail address outside the course homepage.				
Provides students with a discussion board thread dedicated to student questions and concerns only.				
Provides virtual office hours with scheduled chats.				
Posts a casual (conversational) personal introduction via the online posting forum in the first week or two of class.				
Shares informal glimpses of self by posting fun/personal photographs.				
Discusses hobbies or extracurricular interests.				
Discusses past scholarly work and professional experiences.				
Provides (at minimum) weekly praise and encouragement to individuals and/or groups for work that is well done.				
Provides supportive/corrective guidance to individual students via personal e-mail or telephone rather than in any public venue i.e. chat or postings.				
When responding to student work, refers to specifics so that students know their work has been thoroughly read.				
Verbalizes enthusiasm for learning.				
Demonstrates respect for the learning process by exhibiting excellence in creating/presenting online content.				
<p>In the space provided below, please respond to the following question: In addition to the behaviors listed above, are there any other things an instructor might do in an online teaching situation that would convey caring to you?</p>				

A subset of respondents will be asked to participate in an e-mail interview. If you are willing to participate in the e-mail interview portion of this study, will you please provide your contact information below, including your name and email address?