

Problem & PURPOSE

Problem: Transition into nursing school often causes academic, emotional, and social challenges that increase anxiety, leading some first-quarter students to leave early.

Purpose:: This project aimed to create a peer mentor panel for the Spring 2026 Practical Nurse orientation at a community college, intended to reduce anxiety, boost confidence, and lower attrition.

Available Knowledge & Rationale

- Peer mentoring boosts motivation, self-efficacy, inclusion, self-confidence, growth, and reduces burnout and stress, aligning with nursing education priorities.
- Peer mentoring boosts academic, emotional, and professional success for nursing students by lessening mental health issues (Bentley, 2018). Nickerson (2025) notes that people learn through observation and imitation.

Methods

Context: Conducted at a Midwestern community college; 48% White, 18% Latino, 9% Black, 3% Asian, 5% two or more races, 16% unknown (NCES, 2024).

Intervention: During Spring 2026 orientation in the college's large conference room, experienced nursing students and recent graduates shared insights, study habits, and strategies for managing responsibilities through guided discussions. Facilitated by two faculty members, surveys were taken before, immediately after, and 3 weeks into the first quarter.

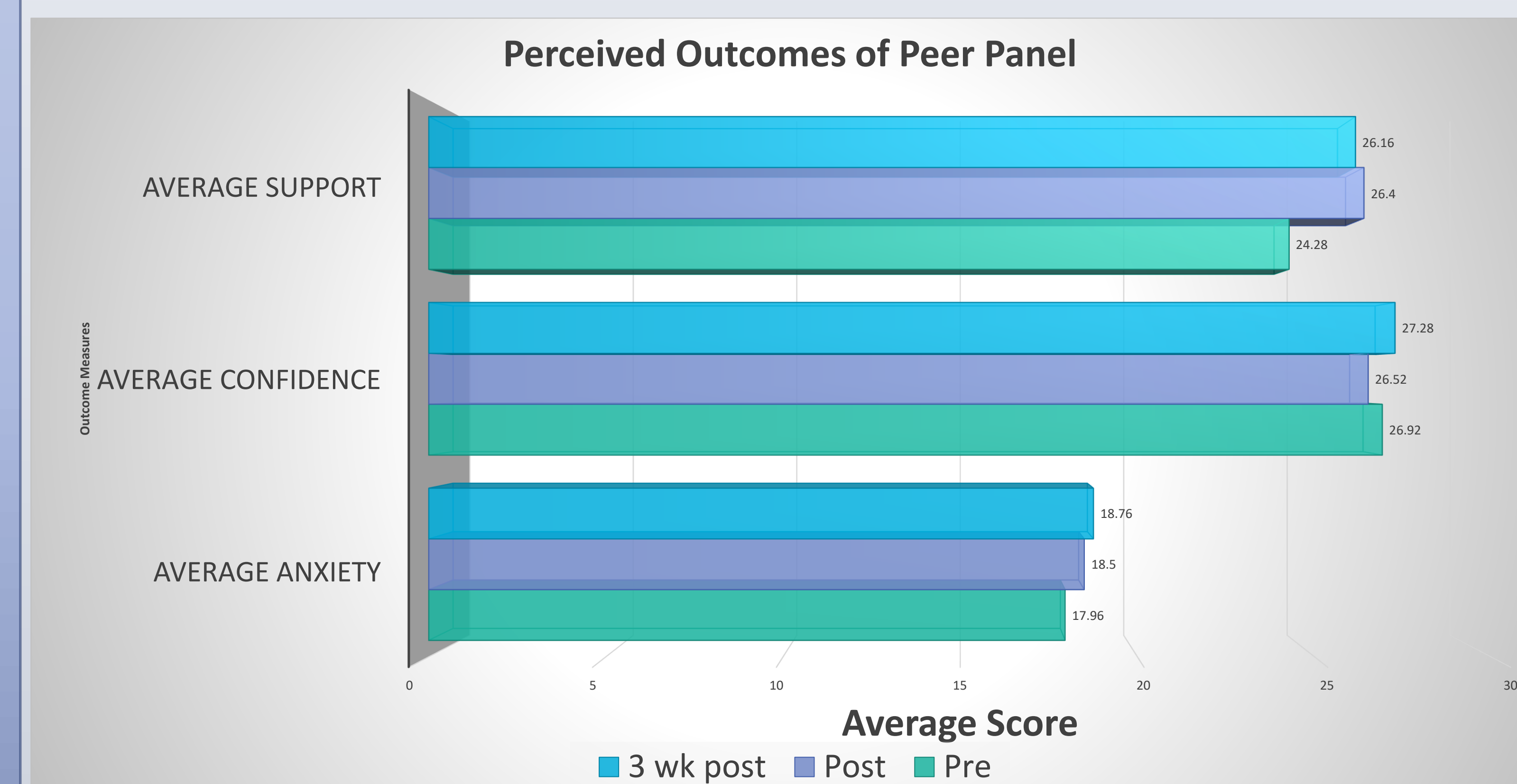
Study of Intervention: To track responses while maintaining confidentiality, the PI told students to create a non-identifiable code with: (a) the first letter of their mother's first name, (b) the last two digits of their birth year, and (c) the first letter of their favorite color. Participation did not affect grades or progress. Non-participants stayed in the room for reflection or dismissal prep.

Measure: To assess anxiety and confidence among PN students, the PI adapted two validated tools: the GAD-7 and SCLS. The GAD-7, by Spitzer et al. (2006), measures anxiety, while the SCLS, from the NLN, assesses nursing students' perceived confidence (Alharbi & Alharbi, 2022; Kramer, 2024; White & Karr, 2025).

Data Analysis

- A dependent-samples t-test assessed significant changes in participants' anxiety, confidence, and support scores before and after the peer panel intervention.
- 25 of 40 new students were included; participation was voluntary, but 11 were excluded for missing responses.

Results



Anxiety

- Results showed no significant improvements ($p > 0.05$). Anxiety scores slightly decreased from pre-panel ($M = 17.96$) to post-panel ($M = 18.50$) and three weeks later ($M = 18.76$).

Confidence

- Perceived confidence demonstrated a positive upward trend, though not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), decreasing from pre-panel ($M = 26.92$) to post-panel ($M = 26.52$) and further at three weeks ($M = 27.28$).

Support

- Results show differences. Significant improvements occur from pre-intervention to immediately after ($p = .001$) and at 3 weeks ($p = .023$). No significant difference between immediate post-intervention and 3-week follow-up ($p = .741$).

Discussion

- Although anxiety and confidence changed differently, both showed promising trends despite weak data. These support Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory by emphasizing observational learning, social modeling, and environment's role in self-efficacy and behavior. The rise in perceived support indicates the peer panel enhanced social and environmental learning, even if anxiety changes were not immediately clear.
- The cost-effective intervention was integrated into orientation, improving practicality and sustainability. Peer role models added authenticity, while the three-point measurement (pre, post, follow-up) increased rigor by assessing long-term results. Findings align with research showing peer mentoring enhances retention, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being, though effects differ in size and timing (Park & Hong, 2021; Tomlinson & Cameron, 2025). The rise in perceived support highlights social integration as a foundation for benefits like reduced anxiety and increased persistence.

Conclusions

- Peer mentorship bridges academic and real-world nursing, offering support where experienced peers act as positive role models and encouragement (Bumby, 2020; Dao et al., 2025; DeJoseph et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2021; Koutroubas and Galanakis, 2022; Jeanmougin et al., 2024; Joseph & Kuperminc, 2022; Panzik et al., 2025; Sherman et al., 2023; Skrovanek et al., 2024; Yarbrough & Phillips, 2023).
- Peer mentorship boosts novice students' confidence, encouraging participation in discussions, clinical activities, and skills development. This approach enhances the educational experience, well-being, and smooths their transition into professional nursing roles.

Acknowledgements

Research Advisor: Dr. Sarah Dunsmore, Ph.D.

Collaborators: MCC and the Nursing Faculty, as well as the Student Participants