

Student Burnout and Curriculum Design: Implications for Health Profession Education

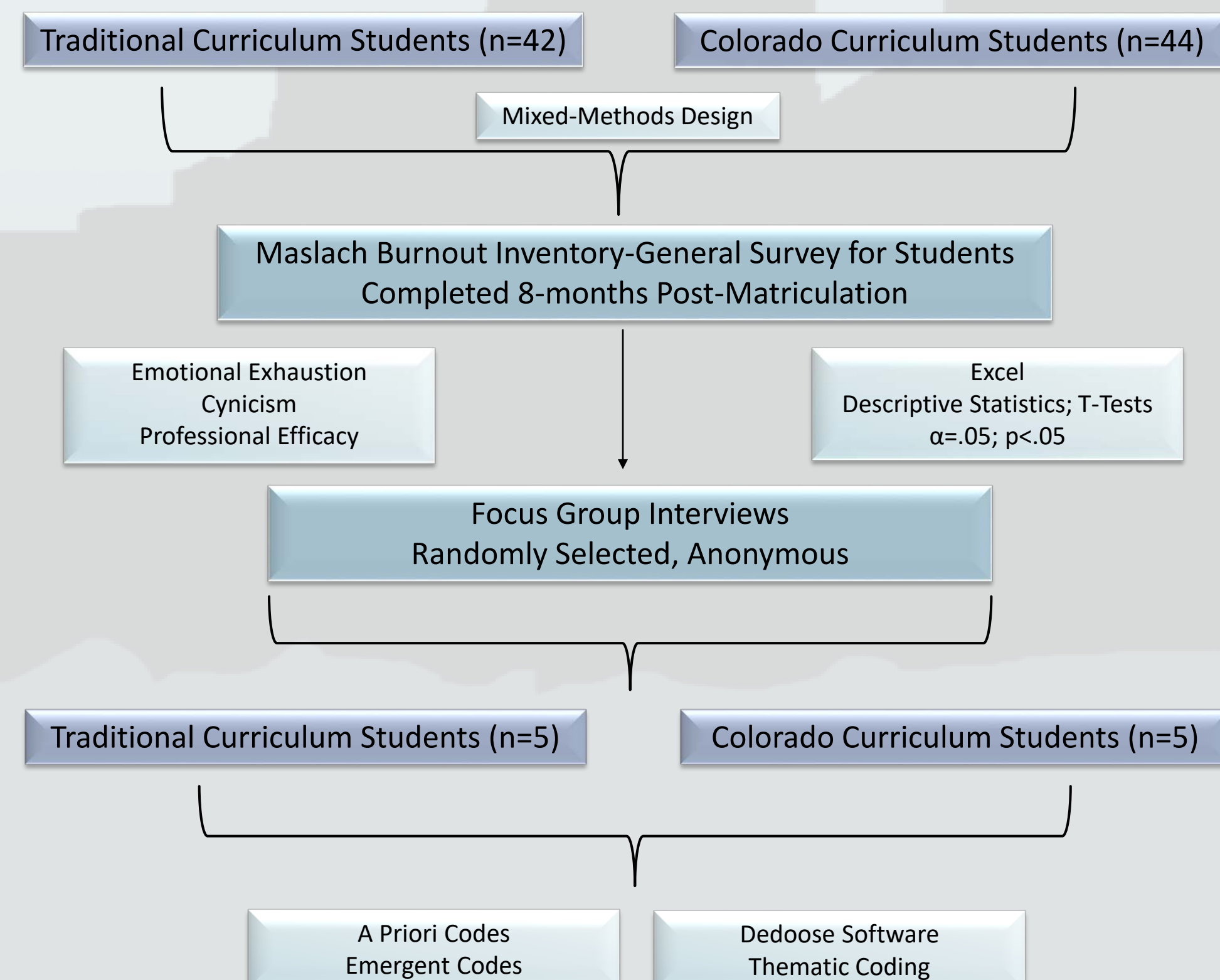


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PURPOSE

- Physician burnout has gained increased attention with similar trends seen in Physician Assistants (PA); however little information exists on PA student burnout.¹
- Concerned about personal and professional implications of burnout, the University of Colorado PA Program created a new curriculum using four modifiable factors (learning environment, grading/grades, assessment/exams, and faculty support) to decrease student burnout.²⁻⁴
- The purpose of this study was to determine if a difference exists in the three subconstructs of burnout between cohorts of students in two curricula, and the contributions of the four modifiable factors to their perceived burnout.

METHODS



RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Source	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Class of 2020	18.62	4.11	42	0.22	13	26
Class of 2021	19.05	6.16	44	-0.66	3	30

Source	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Class of 2020	10.60	5.93	42	0.56	0	27
Class of 2021	11.32	6.26	44	0.37	2	24

Source	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Class of 2020	27.81	3.56	42	-0.05	19	36
Class of 2021	27.14	4.90	44	-0.58	15	35

Qualitative Findings

Modifiable Factors	Thematic Evaluation Results
Learning Environment	More faculty presence decreased burn out (C)
Grading/Grades	Competition with traditional grades yet aided with reassurance, benchmarks, and confidence in their learning and progression (T)
Assessments/Exams	Frequency and structure of exams with infrequent midterms/finals causing burn out (T) Frequent and formative exams help mitigate burn out (C)
Faculty Support	Inconsistencies with faculty willing to answer exam questions, and expectations of students around self-directed learning caused burn out (C)

Emergent Code	Thematic Evaluation Results
Motivation	Related to traditional grades vs. P/F grading (T)
Well-Being	Related to professional efficacy and self-care (T and C)
Time in Class	Increased emotional exhaustion with increased time in class (T)
Demands from Specific Courses	Inconsistencies among course directors lead to burn out (T) IPE and timing of courses lead to burn out (C)
Unclear Expectations	Lack of consistency with grading/grades, assessments/exams, course and student expectations lead to burnout (T and C) Less burn out with reassurance from faculty that expectation for students were met (T and C)

T = Traditional Curriculum; C = Colorado Curriculum

DISCUSSION

- There was 100% response rate
- No significant statistical difference in emotional exhaustion (p=0.35), cynicism (p=0.29) and professional efficacy (p=0.23) scores between the two student cohorts (P<.05).
- The exact terms for the three subconstructs of burnout were rarely used by the students when discussing the four modifiable factors within their respective curriculum.
- Five emergent codes were identified: motivation, well-being, time-in-class, demands from specific courses, and unclear expectations.

CONCLUSION

- The results were surprising to the researchers with the data pointing to additional factors outside the curriculum that may exacerbate or mitigate student burnout beyond modified curricular components.
- The qualitative findings demonstrate that student lived-experiences of burnout differ from the conceptual framework used in this study and existing tools.
- This study proposes that future research needs to:
 - Assess student burnout across a continuum
 - Use mixed methodologies including focus groups
 - Seek greater clarity on the five emergent codes
- Additional studies should examine:
 - External factors affecting students that cause burnout
 - External resources utilized by students to prevent burnout
 - Student attributes that may predispose to burnout
 - The context experienced by students during data collection

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