Abstract
The Murray State University School of Nursing implemented HESI in the fall of 2015 in an attempt to prepare students for the NCLEX-RN so that pass rates could improve. Students in semesters two through five take a standardized HESI exam towards the end of each nursing course. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not students perceive a need to change the way HESI is used within the program and identify possible improvements that could be made. A mixed methods approach was used. Participants (n=180) completed an eight-item survey. Common suggestions for improvement included decreasing or eliminating the impact of HESI exam scores on course grades and increasing the use of HESI throughout the program. Additional recommendations included giving a HESI exam at the beginning of the semester that does not count as part of the course grade and adding an in-person review to the remediation plan.

Discussion
The results of this study show that students experience a significant amount of stress related to HESI. Robinson and Tagher (2015) noted that stress was a common finding among nursing students preparing for the HESI Exit Exam and that this stress caused students to perceive the exam as a threat rather than a challenge. This suggests that reducing the stress level might improve student perceptions and perhaps performance. Reducing or eliminating the impact of HESI exam scores on course grades was a common suggestion. However, Ethington (2008) found that students whose HESI exam scores did impact their grade actually scored higher. In addition, none of the students in the study failed a course as a result of HESI exam scores (Ethington, 2008). It is also important to note that 77.6 percent of respondents to this survey marked that they would in fact take HESI exams seriously even if it had no impact on course grades.

The current remediation plan requires that students who score below a 990 on any HESI exam answer a predetermined number of questions in their low content area. The results of this study show that more than half (55.6%) of respondents who had completed remediation felt that it had no impact on their understanding of the material. This suggests the need for a new remediation plan. More research is needed in order to determine the best way to improve the remediation process for students.

Conclusion
Overall, the results of this study indicate that there are improvements to be made in the use of HESI in the Murray State School of Nursing. Possible topics of further discussion include the impact of HESI exam scores on course grades, improving the remediation process, and exploring other ways to reduce students’ stress related to HESI. Additional research is needed in order to identify the opinions of nursing students from other schools and to determine whether or not including HESI exam scores in overall course grades actually improves performance. More research is also needed to determine how students’ stress levels regarding HESI can be reduced and how the remediation process can be improved.

References