

Developing Retention Strategies for LPN, ADN, BSN, RN-BSN, and Masters (+) Nursing Students from Diverse Backgrounds

DISCUSSION

A number of our academic partners have secured grant funding and implemented special projects and programs to evaluate and remediate factors that lead to low enrollment, low retention and low graduation rates of students from diverse backgrounds. As a result of implementing these programs, our academic partners have identified two common causes for low retention and graduation rates:

(1) The inadequate preparation of high school graduates for the rigors of the nursing curriculum directly contributes to high drop-out rates within the first semester of the students' college education. Disadvantaged youth are three times less likely than their peers to complete a post-secondary degree (18 percent vs. 52 percent) in Massachusetts.¹ In many cases, students were unable to adjust to the coursework and the rapid pace of the nursing program. In response to this observed detriment, the 2-year and 4-year academic institutions created pre-college exposure programs and workshops to immerse students into the college environment and give them information on preparing for the nursing program, as well as how and where to find resources to improve their academic success.

Administrators within the nursing programs believe that communicating relevant information to parents, students and guidance counselors prior to entry into the program is necessary preparation for students. Important and relevant information that students need to receive, include the learning about the benefits of participating in extra-curricular activities while in high school. This type of experience promotes their ability to coordinate and manage multiple activities in their schedules.

Additionally, the WMNC hosts informational and networking programs for high school

guidance counselors. These programs give college deans and faculty opportunities to network with and share information on academic and college preparation for students. The colleges exchange a wide range of information to guidance counselors through various means, which include: college information tables, presentation from enrollment and admission counselors as well as round table discussions.

(2) After students are enrolled in nursing programs and begin their coursework, they are faced with multiple competing priorities coupled with the need to improve their time management skills. These challenges ranges from gaps in academic preparation and lack of awareness and access to information to make complex and highly consequential decisions around college, to employment, housing, transportation, and other obstacles related to financial stability.¹ Struggles with social concerns, such as food insecurity, family responsibilities and the overall need to provide for themselves and their households prevent students from diverse backgrounds from focusing solely on academics. These factors create a huge barrier for students to fully engage in the academic program and utilize services that are designed to promote academic success. These concerns are ongoing and difficult to solve. The WMNC is working to identify scholarships, monetary funds and other programs that addresses these non-academic needs.

Nursing Collaborative

Advancing Nursing  Addressing Critical Needs

The WMNC identified that even when programs are funded for special populations, due to time constraints and other competing factors, students weren't always able to take advantage of resources such as tutors, mentorship and extra lab time. Most often, specialized programs generally remain in place for as long as grant funding is available; but there are generally no funds to sustain these programs after the funding ends.

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

The WMNC has taken an inventory of resources that are available to all students on a consistent basis. Using these resources and services, the WMNC is working to identify different means to effectively communicate and provide programs that are relevant and accessible to students from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the WMNC is evaluating the resources to identify existing gaps that would require intentional redesign to meet the needs of minority students. The WMNC sees the minority chapter organizations as key and lead advisors to identify and tailor existing resources as well as create sustainable programs to support minority students in their education.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

- I. **Programs provide timely direct feedback to students**
 1. Students are assigned a nursing faculty advisor.
 2. Students have access to faculty through e-mail with a 24-48 hour turn around response.

- II. **Programs implement a performance improvement plan/program**
 1. Develop nursing success plans with students to promote, support and establish a plan for improvement.
 2. Implement an early alert system to inform program staff within the first 3 weeks, if students are at risk (not attending class, etc.)

Academic Partners

- American International College
- Bay Path University
- Elms College
- Greenfield Community College
- Holyoke Community College
- Springfield Technical Community College
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- Westfield State University

Local Chapter Associations

- Western MA Chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses
- Western Massachusetts National Black Nurses Association

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I. **Programs provide academic supports, i.e.: test taking skills, study skills, tutoring, coaching, mentoring, cohort based study groups, etc.**

1. Exam reviews
2. 1:1 faculty to student support in test taking skills
3. Open labs
4. Simulation practice
5. Nursing resource coordinator with ELL (*Some schools have provided a nursing resource coordinator with ELL to support English language learners who are participating in their programs. This resource has not been sustained due to the inability of the program to find qualified candidates*). *It is also important to note that some of the schools see this resource as an initial need, but after two years within the nursing program, students are expected to be able to complete courses without additional language supports. Because students are expected to sit for the NCLEX following the successful completion of the nursing program and the NCLEX does not allow for this type of special accommodation.
6. Coaching
7. Mentoring and study groups
 - a. 2nd year students formally serve as 1st year mentors
8. Free professional and peer nursing tutors
9. College math and writing tutors

EXAMPLES OF INTENTIONAL INTERVENTIONS

- Faculty to student mentorship, a voluntary program for students and faculty to address real life challenges (academic and personal) that students have communicated to faculty. Faculty help students to connect with resources on campus. This is the first year of program. Eight students were involved, all eight students have matriculated to the next year. **(Springfield Technical Community College)**
- The program hires tutors from the same ethnic background or speaks the same language are compensated to tutor nursing students). **(Greenfield Community College)**

IV. **(A) Utilize Western MA Chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses (NAHN-Western Mass) and Western Massachusetts National Black Nurses Association (WMBNA) for mentorship (B) Invite members to speak directly to students and include professional organizations on the college's website**

1. Invite professional organizations to special events/opening day of class to promote exposure not only to the group but more importantly to the members, who they can more easily relate to and get a greater opportunity for mentorship, even if it is informal. Beginning relationships with other nurses who are at different levels of their careers paths can boost motivation and encourage student nurses in a unique way. As described by the

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nurses who are willing to engage new students, these connections can be informal and students can reach out as needed, even by text messaging to send or receive a word of encouragement.

2. Some of the academic partners have made commitments to refer individual students the chapter organizations, and encourage them to attend a meeting or connect with one of the members.
3. The WMNC have purchased tickets for minority students to attend the New England Minority Leadership Conference and will continue to provide this type of support.

OTHER INTENTIONAL REGIONAL PROGRAMS

1. The **New England Minority Leadership Conference** (a collaboration of multiple minority nursing chapter organizations) kicked off a mentorship program last year. They are currently in the process of wrapping up the one year program and evaluating outcomes. Based on the information gathered from the participants in the program. The group will decide if this program will be implemented again.
2. **Springfield Technical Community College** is reinstating a nursing club that is open to all nursing students, within the nursing club the expectation is that there will be a number of subgroups based on common interests. These sub-groups are self-selected.
3. **Elms College** has joined the American Association for Men in Nursing. This group will be meeting on the college campus, in addition to NAHN-Western Massachusetts.
4. **Western MA Chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses (NAHN-Western Mass)** developed a student ambassador program for nursing students.
5. **Holyoke Community College** in partnership with MassHire Holyoke and the Welcome Back Center of Bunker Hill Community College received grant funding through the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education to provide a program to dislocated nurses from Puerto Rico. This is a 7 month program, geared towards helping foreign educated nurses prepare for the International English Language Testing System. Following the successful completion of the IELTS, each student will submit his/her credentials to the nursing board, the nursing board then review the documents and determine if the student is eligible to sit for the NCLEX or if they will need to complete some additional coursework. Once they've successfully completed NLCEX, they'll become registered nurses in Massachusetts. Current funding is set to expire in June 2019. No additional funding is currently available to sustain the program but HCC and its partners see great value in this program as a necessary resource for foreign educated nurses as well as employers in Western Massachusetts. They are exploring multiple opportunities for funding.

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Reference

1. “Investing in Early College: Our Most Promising Pathway”. June 2019
MassINC.