Innovative Strategies to Increase Racially Diverse Nursing Student Retention & Graduation Rates

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PROBLEM

The academic success of racially and ethnically diverse nursing students is critical to improving healthcare equity by decreasing health disparity for diverse consumers of healthcare (Cordon, V., et.al., 2013). When diverse consumers of healthcare receive care from nurses and healthcare providers of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, the consumer perceives their healthcare experience to be more culturally sensitive, patient-centered and of higher quality (Leighton, K., 2022). This phenomenon, also called *ethnic concordance*, asserts that when a patient and their healthcare provider share the same race or ethnicity there is an increase in trust, communication and patient involvement in their own care (Leighton, K., 2022).

Further evidence to support the need for more racially and ethnically diverse nurses can be found when comparing diversity rates from the United States (U.S.) Census to the diversity rates of Registered Nurses (RNs) in the U.S. workforce.

- U.S. population in 2022: 59.3% White/Caucasian, 18.9% Hispanic/Latino, 13.6% Black/African Americans, and 6.1% Asian (United States Census, 2023).
- U.S. RN workforce rates in 2022: 80% White/Caucasian, 6.9% Hispanic/Latino, 6.3% Black/African American, 7.4% Asian, and 3.3% Native American/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and those who identify as being a member of more than one race (AACN, updated 2024).

These findings highlight the realization that "*diversity in the nursing workforce originates in schools of nursing* (Justin Fontenot and Patrick McMurray, 2020).

BACKGROUND

Belmont University is a private, medium-sized, for-profit, predominantly white, Christian university located in Nashville, TN "that is committed to fostering an environment of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging" (Belmont University, Office of Hope, Unity & Belonging, 2024).

To address both the university and nursing workforce diversification goals, Belmont College of Nursing (BCON) is challenged to maintain its' diverse student retention and graduation rates at **70% or more**, as mandated by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

Belmont College of Nursing (BCON) 4-Year Retention and Graduation Rates

Race/Ethnicity	Admission Rates (2014- 2017)	2nd Year Retention Rate (2014-2017)	4-Year- Graduation Rates (2014-2017)	6-Year Gradaution Rates (2014-2017)
Asian	16	75%	69%	69%
Black/African American	8	100%	75%	88%
Hispanic/Latino	18	88.89%	72.22%	83.33%
White	311	84.24%	69.13%	76%
Two or More Races	17	94%	82%	88%

PURPOSE

Using the *Academic Success and Retention Model for Disadvantaged and Ethically Diverse Baccalaureate Nursing Students*, originally developed by Veneta Condon, et al. in 2013, this AACN Diverse Leader Institute Capstone Project aims to **support BCON in its efforts to maintain and/or increase its' diverse student retention and graduation rates by:**

- Researching evidence-based, peer-reviewed, literature to learn of innovative strategies other nursing programs have initiated to retain diverse nursing students.
- Comparing those strategies to the strategies BCON currently has in place.
- Making recommendations to BCON on additional strategies to consider adding to their current Student Support Services

The Academic Success & Retention Model for Disadvantaged & Ethically Diverse Baccalaureate Nursing Students
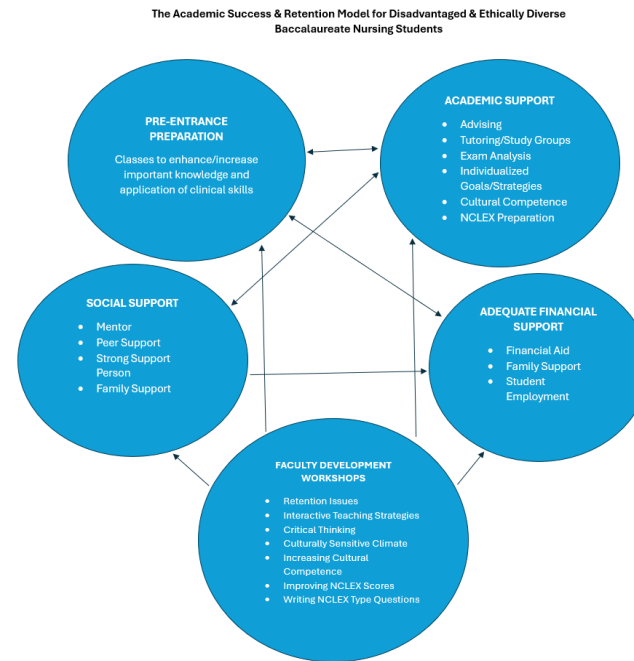
Condon, V., Morgan, C.J., Miller, E.W., Mamier, I., Zimmerman, G.J., and Mazer, W. (2013).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Using the *Academic Success & Retention Model for Disadvantaged & Ethically Diverse Baccalaureate Nursing Students*, evidence-based, peer reviewed literature was reviewed, evaluated and organized into one or more of the five categories identified in the model.

- Each article described nursing programs that incorporated some form of *academic support* as a strategy for diverse student retention, such as advising, tutoring, study groups, exam preparation & exam analysis.
- One program incorporated additional lab hours to *enhance clinical skills.*
- Three programs *supported students socially* and emotionally by assigning individual, faculty, peer and/or practicing nurses in the community to serve as role models and confidants to their diverse students.
- Three programs created *pre-nursing or early intervention courses* aimed at increasing or enhancing knowledge in core college subjects for incoming diverse students; such as math, English, reading, writing and study skills.
- Two programs collaborated with HRSA and the DHHS' workforce development program to *financially support* diverse students with tuition assistance, book allowances, cost of uniforms and transportation to clinical sites.
- Two programs incorporated *faculty/staff development* into their student success programs that focused on issues relevant to diverse student retention, such as retention rates, graduation rates, cultural competence, cultural sensitivity and leadership development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement early interventions, such as pre-nursing courses that aid entering students in knowledge necessary for success in nursing courses. (**Academic Support**)
- Provide additional clinical rotations for students deemed as not at the desired competency level. (**Clinical Support**)
- Consider collaborations to aid in funding need-based scholarships to students with financial insecurities. (**Financial Support**)
- Develop and train faculty, staff, and peer support groups for racially diverse students to promote socialization. (**Social Support**)
- Mandate faculty and staff development on topics pertinent to diverse student retention and success, such as retention issues, interactive teaching models, cultural sensitivity, cultural competency and welcoming climates, to include diverse leadership training. (**Faculty Development**)
- Develop opportunities for diverse student families to become involved/engaged with the student's academic/clinical requirements. (**Social Support**)

References

https://belmont2edu-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/tiffinie_zellars_belmont_edu/EfaIqTQR40NEuUIsY5ONAr8BkPKqYqOYkdVWMT8oBJ0RKg

Innovative Strategies for Increasing Diverse Student Retention and Graduation Rates in Baccalaureate Nursing Programs

Tiffinie Zellars, DNP, MSPH, MSN, RN

Biography

Tiffinie Zellars is an Assistant Professor of Nursing at Belmont University in Nashville, TN. Prior to Belmont, she served as Director of Patient Centered Medical Home Initiatives and Nurse Educator at Meharry Medical College where her focus is on healthcare informatics and patient-centered care systems improvement with a focus on electronic health records (EHR) data analysis and management to improve client health outcomes. Since joining Belmont University College of Nursing, she has committed herself and her research interests to issues related to improving diverse nursing student success.

A former Belmont Faculty Fellow in academic year 2019-2020, she was recently designated an American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Diverse Leadership Institute (DLI) Fellow (2024 Cohort). Currently, she serves as Co-Chair of Belmont's College of Nursing (ICON) Hope, Unity and Belonging (HUB) Committee and a Belmont Data Collaborative Fellow for academic year 2023-2024.

Dr. Zellars received both her DNP (2018) and MSN (2017, specialty - Nursing Informatics) from Vanderbilt University School of Nursing; her MSPH (1996, concentration - Health Administration) from Meharry Medical College and her BSN (1992) from The Tennessee State University, Nashville, TN.

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