



FACULTY FORUM

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-Plato-



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Pre-Entry Preparation in a Rural Nursing Partnership Program

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Earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) can prove to be a challenging endeavor, especially for place-bound students who, for a variety of reasons, are not able to travel or move to a university or college of nursing for a program of study. For an individual aspiring to become a Registered Nurse (RN), earning a four-year degree is of prime importance, particularly when BSN-level nurses remain in high demand across today's healthcare environments. The increasing complexities of patient care are accentuated by the compounded requirements for a more broadly prepared and better educated nursing workforce. With a nursing supply/demand imbalance that is expected to remain problematic for at least the next two decades, there are significant challenges for both rural healthcare facilities needing BSN-prepared professionals and for potential students living in these areas seeking programs offering a BSN degree. While it was projected ten years ago that more than one million RNs would be needed by 2020, in 2012 the number of RNs actually peaked at 2.7 million instead of the anticipated 2.2 million—creating some discussion that perhaps the projected shortage of RNs had been overblown. However, the size of the nursing workforce is still likely to be highly sensitive due to the age of those baby-boomer nurses in the workforce who are projected to retire in large numbers over the next 5–15 years. The demand for RNs is projected to be geographically specific, with South Carolina being one of the states anticipated to have an insufficient supply (HRSA 2014).

In an effort to “work forward” toward dynamic ways to address both needs in the crisis—ameliorating rural BSN workforce shortages and establishing a quality BSN program solidly in place to ensure a continued pipeline of BSN-prepared graduates moving into the community—the University of South Carolina College of Nursing (USC CON) and the University of South Carolina Salkehatchie (USC Salkehatchie) collaborated to create a one-of-a-kind Rural Nursing Partnership Program. Established in 2006 with funding from USC, The Duke Endowment, and the South Carolina Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation, the USC Salkehatchie Rural Nursing Initiative serves as a model partnership program. Its purpose is to "grow our own nurses" by offering place-bound students from the rural Salkehatchie region an opportunity to earn a BSN degree locally. Since its first graduating class in 2010, the nursing partnership program has successfully graduated and provided health care organizations in the Salkehatchie region with a pool of more than 75 highly qualified BSN-level nurses, with over half currently serving the Salkehatchie region (Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Colleton, and Hampton Counties).

Health Resources and Services Administration Grant Program

In 2010, USC CON received a three-year Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant for implementation at USC Salkehatchie to improve the preparation, recruitment, retention, and graduation of BSN-prepared nurses from underrepresented minority populations and economically or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. To accomplish this goal and manage program activities, a Nursing Success Manager (NSM) was hired. The NSM provided student support by working closely with pre-nursing and Upper Division nursing students throughout each academic year to create and implement a plan for individual student success. The NSM met with each student twice per semester for mentoring, advising, academic assistance and referrals, counseling assistance and referrals, success plan development, and to assist with and monitor academic progress. The NSM was also responsible for creating and implementing two Summer Bridge (SB) programs. The SB I program was designed to assist with preparing incoming freshman for college life, and the SB II program was intended to prepare rising junior nursing students for the rigors of the Upper Division portion of the nursing program. The HRSA grant opportunity also provided student scholarships. Recipients were selected based on financial need from a pool of qualified participants enrolled in Upper Division coursework.

Nursing faculty from both the Columbia and Salkehatchie campuses taught the students utilizing traditional classrooms, high fidelity simulation labs/models, and online technology.

Summer Bridge I

SB I was a six-week program provided during the summers of 2011, 2012, and 2013. The program was designed for educationally or economically disadvantaged students entering the freshman year of college as pre-nursing majors. During the first week of the program, the Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS) was administered to assess their level of academic preparation and areas in which they needed additional assistance. Creation of SB I activities was partially based on TEAS test scores to ensure the feedback provided addressed the needs of the group as a whole.

Items discussed during the SB I program included information about the nursing profession, requirements for acceptance to the USC CON, financial aid and cost of college, test-taking strategies, organizational skills, medical terminology, basic college math, English, and introduction to the major sciences (microbiology, chemistry, and anatomy and physiology). Nurses from multiple specialties were invited to speak to provide participants with a broad overview of the possibilities within the nursing profession. Junior- and senior-level nursing students also volunteered to participate by teaching SB I participants to assess vital signs. As an additional incentive to attend and complete the program, students received three college credit hours through USC Salkehatchie's UNIV 101 course. Participants who successfully met the attendance and course requirements earned an "A" in the course, which provided them not only information necessary for success in college, but also an advantageous head start on their college transcript.

Summer Bridge II

SB II was also a six-week program offered during the summers of 2011, 2012, and 2013. This program was planned for the 16 Salkehatchie-based students accepted each year into the Upper Division portion of the USC CON program, and was primarily aimed at successfully transitioning students from the two years of pre-requisite education into the rigorous core nursing coursework. Topics covered included financial aid and Upper Division progression information, study and time management skills development, critical thinking, stress management, orientation to the nursing profession and its possibilities, an expanded nursing math component, and a

biophysical pathology refresher. Students were provided with Basic Life Support certification (a required component for progression), and were provided with transportation to the USC CON for an orientation to the Columbia campus and CON state-of-the-art simulation lab.

Scholarships

The final component of the HRSA grant provided substantial scholarships to be awarded to qualifying students with identified financial need. Grant funds in the amount of \$40,000 per year were budgeted for student scholarships. Scholarships up to a maximum of \$7,000 per student per year (set by HRSA) were given based on remaining financial need after application of other financial aid. The number of students awarded varied from year to year through a HRSA-approved application process. Students were required to submit an application annually with award decisions centered on student rankings based on specific criteria including financial need, grade point average (GPA), letters of reference, and an essay written by the student explaining his or her need for the scholarship funds. A scholarship committee made recommendations to the Dean of the USC CON for final scholarship approvals.

Project Results and Conclusion

The economic burden that higher education places on an already struggling individual and/or family in the rural setting is a significant barrier to recruitment and retention in a rigorous, academically challenging nursing program. With HRSA grant funding to assist in getting this program up and running, many students who may not have otherwise had the opportunity were provided with resources to successfully matriculate through the BSN program. Throughout the life of this grant, the collaborative served 60 pre-nursing students during SB I, 48 Upper Division nursing students during SB II, and awarded 111 scholarships, totalling \$120,000. These programs, academic resources, and scholarship funds provided students with the tools and financial means to pursue their lifelong goal of becoming an RN. Implementation of this grant allowed the USC Salkehatchie Rural Nursing Initiative further to advance its overall mission of “growing our own nurses” and allowed the USC CON to work with USC Salkehatchie to develop this BSN program as an ongoing pipeline of professional nurses. Advancing this mission further promotes our graduates to live and work within the Salkehatchie region, helping to combat the rural nursing shortage—both short and long term—and therefore contributing to the health and well-being of those living within the region.

April Cone, who holds a Master of Science in Nursing with a specialization in education, has been a Registered Nurse for over 14 years. She is currently enrolled in the Doctor of Nursing Practice – Nurse Executive Leadership program at the University of South Carolina College of Nursing. For five years Cone served as an RN in a small, rural hospital, where she gained experience in multiple specialty areas. From 2005–2010, she served as district lead nurse, school health nurse, and teen pregnancy prevention program coordinator at a rural middle and high school. She moved into undergraduate education at USC Salkehatchie in 2010, where she remains as the Nursing Academic Program Manager.

Dr. Peggy O’Neill Hewlett is Dean Emerita and Distinguished Professor Emerita with the University of South Carolina College of Nursing. She received both the Bachelor of Science and Master’s of Science in Nursing from the Medical College of Georgia, and she received the Ph.D. from the University of Mississippi. She served as Dean of the College from 2005 until January of 2013, and Director of the South Carolina Center for Nursing Leadership until her retirement in 2014. Dr. Hewlett has spent much of her career championing issues and policies that help guarantee the public an educated and adequate nursing workforce.



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