



# Increasing the Need for Diversity in Nursing through Collaborative Mentoring



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## Opinion

In 2010, the Institute of Medicine made a recommendation in The Future of Nursing Report to diversify the student population of the health care professions in order to provide increasing nursing minority providers to meet the culturally competent needs of the growing multicultural populations of the United States [1]. Despite this mandate from the Institute of Medicine, the number of diverse graduates from the nursing programs in the United States continues to be low, as compared with the number of Caucasian graduates [2]. Current statistics report that considering racial/ethnic backgrounds, the registered nurse population is composed of 83% White/Caucasian, 6% African American, 6%Asian, 3% Hispanic, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1% other nurses [3].

These statistics pale when compared with the increasing minority population that is multiplying within America. Recent statistics show that within the United States, the Census Bureau [4] released estimates on the U.S. population's finding that racial and ethnic minorities for the first time made up more than half of all children born in the country, totaling 50.4%. These high number of minority children that are being born in the United States are not being admitted to colleges and universities.

In order to increase the number of diverse students that are entering nursing programs throughout the country, there are a total of 33 pipeline programs that aim to promote successful nursing graduates from minority and rural backgrounds [5]. One of these pivotal programs is the Nursing Network and Careers and Technology Mentoring Program (NN-CAT) that was established by the School of Nursing at Western Carolina University in 2013 by faculty that were concerned with the low number of diverse students enrolled in the programs, as well as the number of those practicing in the western region of North Carolina. This program is funded through a generous grant by the nursing division of the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA).

The NN-CAT Program provides a nursing mentor to underrepresented ethnic minority and educationally disadvantaged students and a significant scholarship and stipend for tuition and monthly living expenses. The nursing mentoring program was established to provide individualized nursing mentors to promote academic success towards being accepted to nursing school. The nursing mentor is a registered nurse who is practicing in the region and can devote 20 hours a month to tutoring the student.

Students are selected from the WCU pre-nursing track or at the local community college in which a collaborative two-plus-two nursing program exists with the associate degree program and the baccalaureate program at WCU. Selection criteria for the NN-CAT program for students includes the following:

- A. The student must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
- B. The student must have a minimum grade point average of 2.8 or above for undergraduate studies and provide a copy of college transcripts.
- C. The student must be nominated by a faculty member of the university or the community college.
- D. The student must be a member of an ethnic or no ethnic minority group which is underrepresented in the nursing profession (African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, or Asian Pacific Islander) or have been raised in the western remote counties surrounding the university and community college.
- E. The student must be enrolled in the pre-nursing program or in the first year of the two-plus-two program.
- F. The student should be in good academic standing.

In addition to intense academic mentoring of students, the NN-CAT program provides personalized and group tutoring

for entrance examinations for the nursing program (Scholastic Aptitude Test-SAT/Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS). Student applications are accepted in the fall of each academic year and are notified in the spring of their acceptance. There are nine mentors who are baccalaureate or higher-prepared nurses that are trained to provide mentoring to help students improve both study skills as well academic test-taking ability. Mentor meetings are held monthly with the Program Director and student successes and challenges are discussed in an activity called, Round Robin. This activity allows the mentors to discuss what challenging issues each student has in the program with personal life issues, studying, as well as with test-taking skills.

Throughout the first 2 years of the NN-CAT Nursing Mentoring Program, there have been a total of 22 students (21 female and one male) that have comprised the student population of the program. Students have been admitted from a diverse and ethnically multi cultural background and have included African American students (nine), Native American (three), Hispanic American (five), and rural Caucasian students from the rural counties of Western North Carolina (five). Nine of the students have been successfully admitted to the baccalaureate and two-plus-two program. The nine students who have been successfully admitted to the Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN) or two-plus-two program are currently progressing in the program, and none have graduated as yet. Three are slated to graduate in December of 2017 after spending 2 years in the NN-CAT Nursing Mentoring Program. This has been a high achievement for both the students and the mentors that are involved with the NN-CAT program.

Challenges to the program have been through attrition that have included the loss of one male student (Hispanic/Latino) that dropped out of the university during his sophomore year of college because of inability to be successful in his science studies, despite the unwavering support of his mentor. An additional loss was for two African American students and one Native American student, which was because of their receiving low testing scores for the TEAS test. These tests are used to serve as entrance examinations to admit the entire student body to both the baccalaureate and the two-plus-two program. Personal issues for these students included that one of them had a 3-year-old son that was cared for by her disabled parents in a city 2 hours east of the university, and the other student had been raised by her aunt and grandmother because her parents were incarcerated in jail for drug distribution. Another loss for the program was for one of the rural Appalachian students

that left the program because of fear of taking the TEAS and SAT examinations for entrance into the nursing program. This student had strong familial support but was unable to take the entrance tests because of extreme fear of failing the tests.

One final loss for the program was for the other Native American student to leave the two-plus-two program because of becoming pregnant and having a baby during the second year of the associate degree program. Despite having a husband and grandmother for familial support, this student chose to stay home to raise her daughter.

Therefore, there have been a total of 22 students admitted to the NN-CAT Nursing Mentoring Program, with a total of 9 students that have been admitted to the baccalaureate and two-plus-two program, seven students that are pre-nursing students, and a total of six that left the program for the above reasons.

Ethnically diverse and rural students have lifelong familial and geographical educational barriers that prevent them from succeeding. There are a plethora of major environmental and familial factors that need to be addressed by society for these students to be successful. These factors include improvement of county schools by financial support, improving the home environment through social supportive services, and implementing improved parent-child bonding with nurse family partnerships. Nursing faculty must embrace new approaches for increasing the number of ethnically diverse nursing providers through novel admission criteria and collaborative cohort peer-mentoring programs. The NN-CAT Mentoring Program at Western Carolina University is one of the programs that has been established and is proving to be successful through the tireless efforts of community nursing mentors and university tutors.

### References

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