

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO NURSE FACULTY CAREERS FOR PhD NURSING STUDENTS



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The shortage of doctorally educated nurses pursuing faculty careers is a major concern regarding the development of the nurse faculty workforce. This cross-sectional study aims to identify barriers and facilitators to academic careers for doctoral (PhD) nursing students. A total of 1,500 PhD students were randomly selected from nursing schools across the country to participate in our survey, and a 62.8% response rate was achieved. The study found that 72% of respondents planned to pursue faculty careers after graduating. Students with postgraduation plans for academic careers, nonacademic careers, and undecided careers showed distinct profiles of demographic and academic characteristics. They also perceived facilitators and barriers to faculty careers differently. The most influential facilitators were interest in teaching and an appreciation of the impact of nursing research on patient care, and the most considered barriers were poor financial compensation and a negative perception of academia. Minority students were more likely than White students to have plans for academic careers. Various experiences during doctoral education appeared to have a positive impact on students' decisions to pursue academic careers. (Index words: PhD students; Minority students; Nurse faculty careers; Barriers; Facilitators; Doctoral education; Nursing) *J Prof Nurs* 32:193–201, 2016. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

THE FACULTY SHORTAGE is frequently reported as a major barrier to increasing enrollment capacity of nursing programs. In the 2010 report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommended that nursing schools should double the number of nurses with a doctorate by 2020 to add to the cadre of nurse faculty and researchers, with attention to increasing diversity. To meet these goals, studies are needed to identify factors that influence the recruitment and retention of doctorally-prepared graduates into nurse faculty positions.

Literature Review

Barriers to pursuing nurse faculty careers have been well documented in the literature. Entering into the role of nurse faculty requires a major transition from the practice

arena to the educational sector, and novice nurse educators have reported feeling inadequate and overwhelmed after making the transition (Anderson, 2009; McDonald, 2010). To gain substantial clinical experiences before entering academia, nurses tend to start faculty careers at an older age (Siela, Twibell, & Keller, 2009; Stevenson, 2003; Yordy, 2006). This tendency may hinder nurses who wish to enter academia at young ages. In addition, noncompetitive salary and heavy workload, which cause dissatisfaction and burnout, are considered as major barriers to entering and remaining in the faculty role (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2008; Barlag, 2008; Daley & Dee, 2006; Durham, Merritt, & Sorrell, 2007; Gormley, 2003; Kaufman, 2007; Schenkein & Best, 2001; Swafford & Legg, 2007; Yedidia, Chou, Brownlee, Flynn, & Tanner, 2014).

On the other hand, there are factors that motivate nurses to work as faculty, such as a high level of autonomy and the ability to influence students (Culleiton & Shellenbarger, 2007; Penn, Wilson, & Rosseter, 2008). The ability to shape practice and to give back to the nursing profession is also motivational (Berent & Anderko, 2011; Garbee & Killacky, 2008). In addition, the help of mentors for the orientation to and development of the faculty role after becoming a faculty member,

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a sense of belonging to the academic community, and the enjoyment of research activities are important (Berent & Anderko, 2011; Danna, Schaubhut, & Jones, 2010).

Regarding the impact of graduate education on students' career plans, a study found that students who stayed in their doctoral programs for more than 1 year changed their career goals after entering their doctoral programs. The percentage of students hoping to become faculty in schools of nursing decreased from 50.7 to 35.3% between the time when students enter their doctoral programs and the time the study was conducted, suggesting a negative impact of doctoral education experiences on students' career plans for academic nursing (Zebelman & Olswang, 1989). However, a study in Ireland found the percentage of nursing students who worked as lecturers increased significantly after they completed their master's education, and the students deemed the impact of the master's degree on their career advancement influential (Drennan, 2008). Students with faculty status tended to continue academic careers after graduation since earning a doctoral degree would meet the expectations of their employers for promotion and tenure (Lee, 2009). There were a few studies that found minority faculty were more likely than White faculty to leave academic nursing or to consider leaving academic medicine (Fang & Bednash, 2014; Palepu, Carr, Friedman, Ash, & Moskowitz, 2000). However, it seems there is no study focusing on minority nursing students' interests in academic careers.

Although much research has been done on factors discouraging and motivating faculty to leave or stay in academic roles, limited knowledge exists about barriers and facilitators to faculty careers for doctoral nursing students, especially regarding career decisions of minority doctoral students. The purpose of this article is to report the results of our study on research-focused doctoral students' career decisions (since almost all of research-focused doctoral students are PhD students, they are referred as PhD students subsequently). We had the following research questions in this study:

- a. What are the characteristics of PhD students who plan to pursue a faculty career?
- b. Are minority PhD students less or more likely than White students to have plans for a faculty career?
- c. What are factors that attract PhD students to pursuing a faculty career?
- d. What are factors that dissuade PhD student from pursuing a faculty career?
- e. What is the impact of doctoral education on the likelihood of planning to pursue a faculty career for PhD students?
- f. Are PhD students who plan to pursue academic careers prepared for various academic tasks?

Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was used for this research project. Using the questionnaire from Nettles & Millett's, 2006 study on doctoral degree attainment as a framework, combined with existing literature on career

decision making and input from two focus groups involving students from local doctoral nursing programs, we drafted a survey to identify factors affecting career decisions of doctoral nursing students. We then sent the draft questionnaire to 30 doctoral program directors and doctoral nursing students for their feedback before we finalized the survey instrument. The questionnaire included the following topics related to our research questions: (a) nursing background and current student status; (b) doctoral study experiences; (c) faculty experience; (d) postgraduation plans for academic or nonacademic nursing careers; and (e) demographic information. Variables were measured using a series of multiple choice questions, open-ended questions, and Likert items. After we obtained an institutional review board approval from the American Institute for Research, we conducted a national sample survey of PhD and doctor of nursing practice nursing students in 2013. This article reports the part on PhD students.

The PhD population for our survey consisted of all 5,110 students enrolled in a total of 138 PhD programs¹ in 2012 (AACN, 2012). Of them, we randomly selected 1,500 as survey participants, and directors of PhD programs helped us distribute survey materials to their students. There were 942 students who responded to our survey, resulting in a response rate of 62.8%. A total of 933 respondents who reported career plans were included in this study.

Because 100% of PhD nursing programs in the United States responded to the 2012 AACN Annual Survey, we had data on a few demographic and institutional characteristics of the PhD student population in 2012, which were used to assess nonresponse bias in this study. Because the values of those demographic and institutional characteristics of the student population were known, we considered the differences in percentage distribution between the sample and the population as sampling errors. We found the percentage distributions of the respondents by gender, Academic Health Center status of the institution where a respondent was enrolled, and level of distance education offered by a respondent's doctoral program were within 2 percentage points of those of the general PhD student population, indicating that the respondents represent the student population well with regard to these characteristics, since commonly acceptable sampling errors for large surveys are in the range of 2 to 3 percentage points (Langer, 2008). We also found that White students and full-time students were slightly (4 percentage points) more likely than non-White students and part-time students, respectively, to respond to our survey.

We collapsed the five Likert categories into three groups—*positive*, *neutral*, and *negative*—by assigning a value of 3 to the positive categories (significantly influenced and influenced), a value of 2 to the neutral category (neither influenced nor dissuaded), and a value of 1 to the negative categories

¹Twelve PhD programs were counted as 5 consortium PhD programs in the AACN survey report. However, for the purpose of our study, these programs were considered as separate programs.

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