

# THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A FULL-TIME NURSING FACULTY MEMBER IN A BACCALAUREATE NURSING EDUCATION PROGRAM

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The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the experience of being a full-time nursing faculty member in a baccalaureate nursing program. Eight female informants, with an average of 6.1 years of experience in a full-time faculty position, shared their experiences through in-depth personal interviews and a follow-up telephone interview. Field notes and a demographic questionnaire also served as data sources. Data were analyzed using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach based on the Urecht School of phenomenology. Five themes were uncovered through data analysis, including (a) making a difference in the student, profession, and the world; (b) being a gatekeeper to the profession; (c) trying ways to balance multiple roles; (d) support is vital: can't do it alone; and (e) workplace relationships: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Findings have implications for the development of research-based faculty recruitment and retention strategies. Implications for the practice of nursing education focus on current nursing faculty, administrators in nursing education, and those responsible for developing higher education policies. Future research is recommended for exploring the rewards of making a difference, the rationale for incivility in the workplace, and the level of faculty mentoring occurring in nursing education. (Index words: Nursing faculty; Nursing faculty shortage; Baccalaureate nursing faculty; Faculty recruitment and retention; Faculty experience; Phenomenology) *J Prof Nurs* 25:218–226, 2009. © 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

THE UNITED STATES is experiencing a general nursing shortage. In 2007, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projected long-term statistics regarding the supply of nurses. The projections included the creation of 587,000 new jobs for registered nurses by the year 2016. This represents a 23% increase in the number of nurses needed nationwide for the period of 2006–2016 compared with a 14.8% increase for all occupations (Dohm & Shniper, 2007).

Various strategies have been implemented with the goal of attracting additional individuals to a career in nursing (American Nurses Association [ANA], 2002;

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations [JCAHO], 2002). These approaches have the potential to increase the number of nursing school graduates and subsequently assist in alleviating the general nursing shortage. However, to educate additional nurses, there must be an adequate number of nursing schools and a sufficient supply of qualified nursing faculty members. The later is problematic because nursing education programs currently are experiencing a shortage in nursing faculty members (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2007; Kovner, Fairchild, & Jacobson, 2006).

The nursing faculty shortage has received the attention of professional nursing organizations, nurse leaders, and health care organizations. Many have suggested strategies for recruiting additional nurses to faculty positions and retaining those already teaching (AACN, 2003; Brendtro & Hegge, 2000; De Young & Bliss, 1995; JCAHO, 2002; Tri-Council for Nursing, 2002; Trossman, 2002). Of concern is that many of the strategies have been inferred

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rather than empiric. One logical starting point for the development of knowledge in this area is to understand the faculty experience, including the roles and responsibilities associated with faculty work. However, the literature reflects a lack of understanding about the roles and responsibilities of higher education faculty in general.

The purpose of the current study was to understand how full-time nursing faculty members in a baccalaureate nursing programs interpret their lives and make meaning of their experiences. Understanding the experiences of nursing faculty members provides insight for education administrators, nurse educators, nursing students, and nurse clinicians into what it is like to be a nursing faculty member. Discovering the lived experiences of nursing faculty within the context of the current environment in higher education has the potential to aid in the development of research-based recruitment and retention strategies leading to an increased supply of qualified nursing faculty members.

## Background

Although the literature on the topic of recruitment and retention and faculty roles and responsibilities is quite sparse, there have been a few studies in these areas. [Brendtro and Hegge \(2000\)](#) conducted a qualitative study aimed at identifying research-based strategies for recruiting more nurses to faculty positions. Participants identified (a) closer proximity to work, (b) improved compensation, (c) more realistic professional expectations, and (d) increased opportunity to continue clinical practice while teaching as the incentive to entice practicing nurses into faculty positions (p. 101). Four themes emerged as suggestions for increasing the pool of qualified applicants including (a) grounding educators in clinical practice, (b) providing scholarships for those pursuing advanced degrees, (c) increasing access to master's and doctoral education, and (d) improving faculty salaries and benefits (p. 101).

[Seldomridge \(2004\)](#) studied the effectiveness of a faculty recruitment strategy. The study focused on 54 undergraduate nursing students enrolled in a leadership course to determine their perceptions of the faculty role. The goal was to increase interest in the nursing professorate as a career choice. Role attributes that attracted participants to the faculty role included the desire to contribute to the nursing profession and to share their love of learning with others. Complexity of the role, level of responsibility, liability, patience required to do the job, and the belief that the job was never finished were identified as deterrents to considering the professorate as a career option.

Aside from the recruitment and retention issues, the literature reflects a deeper understanding of the impact of role expectations on job satisfaction, faculty well-being, and preparation. However, actual facets of the current faculty role remain unclear. [Gormley \(2003\)](#) completed a meta-analysis examining the factors that influence job satisfaction of nursing faculty. Role conflict and role ambiguity were identified as variables that predicted the

job satisfaction of nursing faculty. As role conflict and role ambiguity increased, job satisfaction decreased. These findings suggest that clear identification and communication of faculty roles and responsibilities could potentially improve satisfaction of nursing faculty. This is important at a time when recruitment and retention of nursing faculty are paramount.

Unclear role expectations were identified in a study of nursing faculty from associate degree nursing (ADN) and baccalaureate degree nursing programs in the Midwestern portion of the United States ([Oermann, 1998](#)). The study focused on work-related stress of clinical nursing faculty. Results indicated that difficulty coping with job expectations, feeling physically and emotionally drained at the end of a clinical day, and having demands of their roles interfere with other activities of personal importance were just a few of the job-related stressors. A need for further understanding of the faculty role was identified.

The need for improved preparation of nursing faculty also has been studied ([Riner & Billings, 1999](#)). Findings indicated that faculty preparation and ongoing professional development programs must incorporate the changing roles and responsibilities of nursing faculty. Similarly, [Siler and Kleiner \(2001\)](#) sought to uncover the meaning of the new faculty experience. Findings revealed that new nursing faculty members experience feelings of isolation because of inadequate preparation for the faculty role.

Collectively, these findings seem to indicate that perceived role complexity, feelings of role ambiguity and isolation, and experiencing work-related stress may result from a lack of understanding of the faculty experience. When considering the role of higher education faculty in general, it is apparent that the traditional faculty role has changed since inception. Increased availability and use of instructional technology; increased employment of adjunct, part-time, temporary, and nontenure faculty; changes in attributes and needs of the student population including increased work and family responsibilities and a greater need for remediation; and the onset of new approaches to education such as the movement from teacher-centered to learner-centered instructional approaches have influenced the faculty role in recent years ([Zahorski, Cognard, & Gilliard, 1999](#)). However, important issues such as tenure and evaluation of faculty have not kept pace with these recent trends ([Kezar, 2000](#)).

The current literature involving the faculty role indicates that current trends impacting higher education are impacting the faculty experience. However, the actual roles and responsibilities associated with faculty work remain unclear. It is necessary to understand this experience to prepare and retain qualified nursing faculty.

## Methodology

### Design

Hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology was based on the philosophical underpinnings of Dutch phenomenology of the Urecht School, which combines

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