

Advising 101: Lessons in advising for nursing student success



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Abstract

Faculty teaching associate degree nursing students should use advising approaches that will provide support for students, facilitate success, and enhance retention. This manuscript discusses issues advisors encounter, approaches to advising, and strategies for faculty, students, and administrators to use to help students.

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Employment prospects in nursing have fueled the demand for nursing education and have led to nursing program growth. With nursing job opportunities available, a diverse group of students are entering nursing programs. However, these students bring differing backgrounds, knowledge, abilities, and skills that may impact their success in higher education programs. Nursing faculty face many teaching challenges when working with such diverse students. Despite these challenges, faculty want students to succeed, enter the nursing workforce, and help meet the demand for qualified health care providers.

Since 2003, community college enrollments have grown by 21%, representing over 45% of all undergraduate enrollments in the United States ([American Association of Community Colleges, 2013](#)). Community colleges enroll large numbers of older students, first generation students, working students, students with family demands and responsibilities, those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, or who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of

these students may have poor academic preparation or have characteristics that threaten persistence and graduation ([American Association of Community Colleges, 2015](#); [Education Advisory Board, 2014](#); [Gordon, Habley, Grites, et al., 2008](#); [United States Department of Education, 2011](#)). They present a unique challenge for nurse educators. These students may need special attention and support to ensure that they receive the necessary educational guidance and services. This manuscript will discuss some of the challenges that nursing students face, review advising models, and then make suggestions for best practices for advisors, students, and administration that may facilitate a successful nursing education experience.

Many nursing schools are making efforts to expand student capacity within their programs. These expansions are because of the high demands of the nursing job market and projected nursing shortage. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics \(2013\)](#), the Registered Nurse workforce is expected to grow from 2.71 million in 2012 to 3.24 million in 2022, an increase of 526,800 or 19%. This growth will bring the total number of job openings for nurses because of growth and replacements to 1.05 million by 2022. Health care faces an anticipated shortage that will significantly impact the ability for facilities to provide safe, quality patient care to the community. Having an inadequate number of nurses to care for patients will increase the patient to nurse

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ratio and significantly hinder patient safety and satisfaction. Medication errors, increased infection rates, increased readmission rates, and/or increased patient mortality may be impacted. According to a study conducted by Blegen, Goode, Spetz, Vaughn, and Park (2011) on nurse staffing effects on patient outcomes, better nurse staffing levels were associated with fewer deaths, lower failure-to-rescue incidents, lower rates of infection, and shorter hospital stays. Increased workloads in health care settings can also adversely affect nurses. Demanding patient assignments are stressful and can lead to negative physical and psychological effects on the nurse. Ultimately, these nurses may burn out and leave the workforce, further impacting the nursing shortage.

While recruitment and having adequate openings for nursing students remains critical, it is also imperative that strategies for ensuring program progression and success are implemented so that current students are retained within nursing programs. When students are not retained, there is a significant financial impact on taxpayers. The American Institutes for Research (2011) reports that nearly 4 billion dollars was spent by federal, state, and local governments on students who dropped out of community colleges after their first year. Not only are the financial implications a serious economic issue but, given the demographics of community college students, this also represents a loss of a diverse nursing workforce.

Faculty need to consider how to stop this financial and human resource drain associated with student attrition. Drake (2011) reported that three elements aid in student persistence within a program: connecting students early in the program through learning support systems (e.g., tutoring, supplemental instruction), first-year programming, and academic advising. Faculty advisors serve a pivotal role in ensuring ongoing student progression in nursing programs. Academic advising may be the only opportunity for students to develop a personal, consistent relationship within the institution with someone who cares about them and their success (Drake, 2011). Strong professional integration increases student commitment, persistence, and retention within nursing programs. Factors that increase professional integration of the student include faculty helpfulness and advisement (Jeffreys, 2015). Good academic advising not only aids in persistence and retention of students but it also assists students to value the learning process, develop decision-making skills, and to set priorities (Drake, 2011). These attributes are essential for those embarking into the nursing profession.

Student Concerns

There are a variety of issues that nursing students face that may impact their progression. Many students do not have the essential knowledge of basic skills, such as math, writing, or reading comprehension, making them inadequately prepared for the rigors of the nursing education curricula. Others encounter

financial constraints and do not have the resources to commit to exclusive enrollment in a nursing program but must work while taking classes. Approximately three out of five students work while attending a community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). Of those employed, 62% are working full time while enrolled in school. These working students must balance the competing time demands of school and employment. In addition, students may also have family obligations which place additional demands on their time. Some students have children that require childcare or have aging parents with health problems. Almost one third of community college students are parents and of those 53% are single parents (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014b). These parents juggle family responsibilities, face additional expenses associated with childcare, and confront the stress of added family responsibilities. These multiple demands impact students and their academic performance. Approximately 30% of college students report stress. Over 21% report anxiety and sleep difficulties during the last 12 months (American College Health Association, 2014). Clearly, students contend with multiple life stressors and must make difficult choices that impact their lives. Advising by knowledgeable and caring faculty and staff may help these students with decision making, shape the learning experience, and ultimately enhance student retention and graduation rates.

Advising Models

There are various approaches to advising. The National Academic Advising Association outlines different advising models found at 2-year institutions. The National Academic Advising Association suggests that the shared split model and the self-contained model of advising are used most frequently. The shared split model involves a division of advising responsibilities between nursing faculty members and other campus advisors. Typically, this model involves a central advising office with trained advisors providing admission and general program advising. The advisors provide guidance and support that help to promote general academic success. Once students have met specified milestones, such as completing specific courses, then a nursing advisor is assigned. The nursing advisor then assumes advising responsibilities and assists students with discipline-specific guidance focusing on professional and career opportunities. This shared advising model is the most popular advising model used in higher education (Gordon et al., 2008).

The self-contained model, or centralized approach, is the second most frequently occurring approach. This advising model has all advising occurring in an advising center (Miller, 2012). Advisors in a self-contained model represent a variety of staff including counselors, staff, peers, and other campus support personnel. Those working in this advising model provide a full array of services from remediation and counseling, to career planning. A third approach to advising involves a decentralized model. This method of advising is popular in

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