

NEW CAREERS IN NURSING: OPTIMIZING DIVERSITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS FOR THE FUTURE OF NURSING

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In 2008, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation collaborated with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing to create the New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) scholarship program. Two goals of the program were to alleviate the nursing shortage and to increase diversity of the workforce. During this 7-year program (i.e., seven funding cycles), 130 schools of nursing in 41 states and the District of Columbia were selected as grantees, and they awarded 3,517 scholarships to second-degree accelerated nursing students who were members of groups underrepresented in nursing or who were economically disadvantaged. This article describes the demographic characteristics of the NCIN students, degree of satisfaction with their learning environment, perceptions of their mentoring experiences, and self-identified facilitators and barriers to program completion. Data sources for this article resulted from three surveys completed by scholars during their academic programs: the beginning, the midpoint, and within 6 months postgraduate. Results of analysis indicated that NCIN scholars are significantly more diverse compared with the national nurse population, and they reported high levels of satisfaction with their learning environments. Student relationships with peers and faculty improved during the period of program enrollment. Faculty support was the greatest facilitator for program completion, and competing priorities of finances and family responsibilities were the greatest challenges. (Index words: Diversity; Resilience; Student satisfaction; Academic success; Accelerated second-degree programs; Student retention) *J Prof Nurs* 0:1–10, 2016. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

THE ROBERT WOOD Johnson Foundation (RWJF) New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) scholarship program was inaugurated in 2008 as a collaborative initiative by the RWJF and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). The purpose of NCIN was to help alleviate the nursing shortage, increase diversity in the nursing workforce, expand capacity in baccalau-

reate and graduate nursing programs, and enhance the pipeline of potential nurse faculty. Through annual grants to schools of nursing, NCIN provided \$10,000 scholarships to college graduates with degrees in nonnursing disciplines who decided to transition into nursing through an accelerated nursing program. This national scholarship program was designed to recruit and support economically disadvantaged and minority students enrolled in accelerated entry-level professional nursing programs. By focusing on accelerated degree students, schools were able to build on students' prior successes.

This study will report findings from four questions related to goals and outcomes of the NCIN program:

1. What were scholars' self-rated satisfaction with their learning environments?
2. What were scholars' self-rated perceptions of the effectiveness of the Pre-Entry Immersion Program (PIP)?
3. What were scholars' perceptions of mentoring and leadership development?

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4. What did scholars identify as facilitators and barriers to their academic success?

Literature Review

Accelerated nursing students have been described as more mature and focused in their career direction, having completed one degree and often having worked in another discipline (Hamner & Bentley, 2007). Hamner and Bentley reported that the motivation for accelerated baccalaureate students is based on “economic reasons or altruistic interest in entering a helping profession.” In many respects, second-degree students are a hybrid of undergraduate and graduate students. Academically, they are undergraduates—nurses in training—but socially and emotionally, they are more akin to graduate students.

Nursing school has been found to be a stressful experience for all students who may experience frustration, lack of confidence, and fear of failure (Edwards, Burnard, Bennett, & Hebden, 2010; Taylor & Reyes, 2012). Students who possess the characteristics of resilience have been found to be more academically successful (Taylor & Reyes, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

Resilience is the capacity to adapt successfully in the face of threat or disaster and has been found necessary in the academic lives of nursing students (Reyes, Andrusyszyn, Iwasiw, Forchuk, & Babenko-Mould, 2015). Others have defined resilience as the ability to recover from setbacks, adapt well to change, and keep going in the face of adversity (Seligman, 2011). Reyes et al. found in an integrative review of the current state of knowledge of resilience that resilience was important for nursing students because they must cope with challenges on an ongoing basis and that faculty is important in fostering students' resilience through engagement with students. Researchers (Korvick, Wisener, Lofis, & Williamson, 2008) found that accelerated students demonstrated academic maturity throughout their academic programs, which contributed to academic success. Similarly, accelerated students have been described as academically mature and actively engaged in the learning process (Cangelos & Moss, 2010; Seldomridge & DiBartolo, 2007; Yoder, 2001).

In a 2007, study of accelerated students, Seldomridge and DiBartolo (2007) reported rising attrition (23%) among accelerated students and cited multiple nonacademic reasons such as family responsibilities, child care, and long commute times. Rouse and Rooda (2010) also reported high rates of attrition among accelerated students. An earlier study by Villarruel, Canales, and Torres (2001) identified factors such as financial burden, institutional barriers, perceived discrimination, and English as a second language as barriers to success of Hispanic nursing students.

Facilitators and Barriers

In her 2005 study, Gardner identified similar barriers to success for ethnic minority students in nursing programs

(Gardner, 2005). Researchers identified “bridges” to overcome these barriers, including persistence and self-determination (Amaro, Abriam-Yago, & Yoder, 2006), and availability of supportive others including faculty, mentors (Villarruel et al., 2001), and role models. Amaro et al. reported that families can be both a support and a barrier to students simultaneously. While students received emotional support from family, often family demands interfered with studies and created problems when school requirements resulted in missing family events. Villarruel et al. concluded that “participants recognized that their resolve and ability to pursue advanced education developed over time.” The negative experiences they endured while pursuing their education made them “stronger and better prepared to advocate for themselves, and better able to endure adversity” (p. 250).

NCIN Program Design

Review of the literature on accelerated nursing students guided the development and design of three surveys completed by NCIN scholars at three points during their academic programs: the beginning, the midpoint of completion, and within 6 months postgraduate and writing the NCLEX-RN examination. Student responses to these surveys informed the NCIN program design and subsequent adjustments and modifications to enhance student retention.

Schools of nursing submitted a competitive application in response to a call for proposals from the national program office (NPO). Schools of nursing could request from 5 to 30 scholarships; the average amount granted per school was \$270,000 (27 scholarships) over all seven rounds. Schools were then required to recruit and enroll students meeting the eligibility requirements. Neither RWJF nor AACN was involved in making selection or admissions decisions of students during each grant cycle (12 months). Approximately 80% ($n = 2706$) of all scholarships were awarded to Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN) programs and 20% ($n = 800$) to Accelerated Master of Science in Nursing (AMSN) programs.

In addition to scholarship support, grantees were provided a modest technical assistance grant to support implementation of program requirements, including mentoring and leadership development. Toolkits were developed collaboratively with grantees and the NPO to help guide and support grantees in developing their unique approach to meeting these requirements. For example, when NCIN scholars reported in their entry surveys that they needed additional supports, the PIP was developed and introduced to grantees as a program requirement. The accompanying toolkit was designed to help prepare students for the rigors of an accelerated program. The intent was that the PIP would include the core content areas that would be completed (approximately 12–16 hours) prior to students beginning their academic programs. The content focused on successful strategies for time management, test-taking and study skills, critical thinking, and building self-confidence.

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