

Factors Contributing to the Inequity and Access of Diverse Nursing Applicants

Kimberly Dunker and Melissa D. Duprey



Kimberly Dunker DNP, RN, CNE, CNEcl



Melissa D. Duprey EdD, MSN, RN, CNE

The nursing shortage in the United States has reached critical levels, exacerbating challenges in providing quality health care to a rapidly growing and increasingly diverse population. Compounding this issue is the lack of diversity within the nursing workforce, which does not adequately reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of current patient populations. Addressing the nursing shortage and prioritizing workforce diversification is crucial to enhancing health care equity, improving patient outcomes, and fostering a more inclusive health care environment

Diversification of the nursing workforce is a goal for many academic institutions. This begins with the recruitment and marketing process, followed by the admissions and enrollment phase to ensure that the applicant pool for nursing education is diverse. A holistic admission process allows nursing programs to select their applicant pool based on a minimum grade point average requirement and other components beyond traditional test scores. To support students who are diverse or foreign-born, understanding the student's needs, barriers, and the resources to aid in their success is important for higher education administration. Nursing students who are English language learners must learn the dynamic health care environment and overcome communication barriers to safely care for patients. Nursing faculty must collaborate to support students throughout their academic journey, ensuring they develop a comprehensive understanding of the health care system. This is essential for successfully transitioning from the academic setting to professional nursing practice upon graduation. Ultimately, the goal is to diversify the nursing workforce while meeting the global nursing shortage.

Keywords: Nursing enrollment, nursing school admissions, nursing workforce diversity, access to nursing school.

(National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, 2022).

Importance of Diversifying the Nursing Workforce

The registered nurse (RN) workforce's racial composition reported 81% of nurses being white/Caucasian and 7.2% Asian, representing the largest non-white/Caucasian racial group in the nursing workforce. The Black/African American nurse population accounted for only 6.7% of the workforce. The Hispanic/Latino report was 5.6%. Native/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander accounted for 2.1% and 0.5% for American Indian/Alaskan (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis 2019). Diversifying the RN workforce can ensure patients have nurses better equipped to care for their unique needs. Recruiting and educating a richly diverse nursing pool is essen-

tial to populate not only the nation, but also globally with a diverse workforce.

Diverse Student Enrollment

While the research cites the shortage as a global issue, US enrollment statistics confirm that students attempting to access nursing school find it challenging. Nursing school programs generally have a competitive admission process, with 66,262 qualified applicants being denied admission for reasons including limited spots due to a lack of clinical and practicum placements, faculty vacancies, and the inability to support students who do not meet the admission criteria set (AACN 2023b).

Kimberly Dunker DNP, RN, CNE, CNEcl is Dean of Nursing and Health Science, Pacific Union College, Angwin, CA.

Melissa D. Duprey EdD, MSN, RN, CNE is a Clinical Associate Professor, The University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth MA.

The Need for Holistic Admissions

The admissions process plays an important role in selecting diverse students who may not traditionally have the profile to stand out from others in the competitive selection criteria for nursing school. A potential solution to address the lack of diversity in nursing is a shift toward holistic admission, whereby students are assessed based on a broad range of factors beyond academic credentials, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (Rosenberg, 2019). Holistic admission is “a flexible, individualized way of assessing an applicant’s capabilities by which balanced consideration is given to experiences, attributes, and academic standards” (Addams et al., 2010, p. 10). While many universities rely on a metrics-based system, a holistic admission process utilizes an inclusive method of evaluating applicants to recruit, admit, and retain more diverse students (Azul et al., 2022). The importance of recruitment strategies aimed at targeting diverse students must be “driven by the mission of the educational institution” (DeWitty & Byrd, 2021, p.41). The academic dean and marketing team must work together to assess and evaluate the institution’s mission to increase diversity.

Holistic admission criteria allow applicants to be assessed based on their unique qualities, attributes, and traditional metrics, including work history, science scores, grade point average (GPA), and admission testing (Spencer, 2020). The goal is to create a seamless process that reflects fluidity between institutional goals and admission requirements. Assessing students through a broader lens can result in a more diverse cohort (Davis et al., 2020).

Challenges of Nursing Students

Addressing the admission process is necessary for developing a more diverse student cohort. However, these students are often identified as ‘at-risk’, facing many challenges during their nursing program. Students are placed in several categories, one of which is first-generation “students who can be challenged with financial issues, inadequate academic preparation before enrollment into nursing school, lack of support from family, few role models or mentors, and experiences with discrimination” (DeWitty & Byrd, 2021, p.42). Another is low socioeconomic status in which diverse students struggle with the financial burden of higher education. These

students can struggle to stay enrolled in their programs due to funding constraints.

It is not uncommon for diverse students to come from low-income households that have a higher poverty rate as compared to their white/Caucasian counterparts. The financial burden of the student is an added pressure to the student’s success because many have received financial support from their family to come to the United States to pursue a higher education. Further compounding the issue are those students from immigrant families who are unable to work due to their VISA status, resulting in difficulty meeting their financial needs during the program.

Language, Culture, and Communication Issues

Communication and language barriers, including written and oral expression and comprehension, are often cited in the nursing literature. Assessing this issue is a dual challenge, whereby the student must learn foundational nursing concepts and do so in another language. In nursing school, there are many nuances, acronyms, culturally biased phrases and words, and cultural concepts that students who have not grown up in the United States may not understand, much less align with their life experiences. The student encounters a major learning curve, including a new language and culture of the nursing profession and ways to communicate effectively in an unfamiliar language and culture.

Learning medical terminology within the health care context and the nurse’s role in patient care can be challenging for English Language Learners (ELL) students to understand. It is important that students understand the nursing knowledge and skills necessary to care for the needs of patients. Communication concerns arise from effectively working with the patients in clinical settings so that they can provide safe, competent care and accurately report assessment findings of their patients. If English is not the student’s native language, additional resources are needed to ensure they provide care safely.

Adaptation of English Language Learners

English Language Learners (ELL) students may not be able to advance in their college courses or their preferred nursing major. As a result, community colleges have developed curricula for students pur-

suing higher education through language literacy acquisition. This is much more than just learning to speak English; it also includes grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, and reading. Instructional records identified by researchers Bunch and Kibler (2015) noted that the integration of ELL learning interventions in the context of the student’s preferred discipline of study (such as nursing, business, or health) improved the students’ knowledge acquisition and skill development. The advantage of adding ELL intervention strategies is that they create a smoother transition as they work through the competitive process of nursing school admission. Providing support strategies such as transfer and articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions allows students to begin at a community college while continuing to work on meeting admission criteria through remedial coursework for English proficiency (DeWitty & Byrd, 2021).

Benefits of Diverse Nursing Education Environment

Diverse nursing students can obtain scholarships, grants, and financial aid tailored to their unique population. Although these students often pay for school without governmental assistance, there are loan forgiveness programs for the nursing major to relieve the financial burden of school loans and debt (DeWitty & Byrd, 2021).

Recruitment of ELL students can aid in the diversification of nursing school applicants. Advocates for diversity contend that higher educational institutions must prioritize diversity to produce health care professionals who can effectively serve a diverse patient population; this approach is a strategy for achieving favorable patient outcomes nationwide (Spencer, 2020).

Future Implications for Administrators

Implementing *Culturally Responsive Education* helps foster a safe environment for students from diverse backgrounds. This curricular shift increases inclusivity in the classroom and school environments. One suggestion includes translating materials into the foreign-born student’s language. If this is not possible, encouraging the students to learn in their native language outside the classroom and studying is necessary (Manspile et al., 2021). This strategy takes more time, but it can be effective in learning material.

Because clinical training is an integral part of nursing education, providing nurse educators with teaching strategies to support ELL students is imperative. Students should be provided resources in clinical practice to overcome language barriers and enculturation in the health care environment. Providing additional time for preparing care plans and reading the patient's health history are methods to help students translate medical terminology and jargon into their native language. Training nursing faculty and clinical educators on strategies to support diverse learners is important for both the student learning experience and the safety of care given during clinical rotations.

Financial support, including tuition aid, money for resource materials and books, uniforms, housing, and transportation to clinical sites, is another area that can relieve stress for ELL students. Funding through grant programs to support diverse students through academic tutoring and mentoring can increase student success. Additionally, funds can be used to provide professional development and curricular materials to further support educators in teaching ELL students (Manspile et al., 2021).

Conclusion

As the nursing shortage continues, it is imperative that schools of nursing ensure all students are fairly evaluated regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Although it can be challenging, a holistic admissions process can ensure an equitable opportunity to gain access to nursing school. Deans and Directors are positioned to support the ELL applicant, creating a diversified nursing workforce. **DN**

References

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2023a). *2022-2023 Enrollment and graduations in baccalaureate and graduate programs in nursing*. https://www.aacnursing.org/store/product-info/productcd/idsr_23_enrollbacc
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2023b). *New data show enrollment declines in schools of nursing, raising concerns about the nation's nursing workforce*. <https://www.aacnursing.org/newsdata/all-news/new-data-show-enrollment-declines-in-schools-of-nursing-raising-concerns-about-the-nations-nursing-workforce>
- Addams, A.N., Bletzinger, R.B., Sondheimer, H.M., White, S.E., & Johnson, L.M. (2010). Roadmap to diversity: Integrating holistic reviewing practices into medical school admission processes. *American Association of Medical Colleges*. <https://www.ohsu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-12/AAMC%20Roadmap%20to%20Diversity%3B%20Admissions%20Process.pdf>
- Azul, K., Curry, K., & Johnson-Mallard, V. (2022). Outcomes of a holistic admissions process in a baccalaureate nursing program. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*, 17(4), 350-356.

- Bunch, G.C., & Kibler, A. K. (2015). Integrating language, literacy, and academic development: Alternatives to traditional English as a second language and remedial English for language minority students in community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39(1), 20-33.
- Davis, R. K., Grobbel, C., Mallette, C., & Poly-Droulard, L. (2020). Social justice as an expression of caring through holistic admissions in a nursing program: A proposed conceptual model. *Nursing Forum*, 55(4), 723-729.
- DeWitty, V.P., & Byrd, D.A. (2021). Recruiting underrepresented students for nursing schools. *Creative Nursing*, 27(1), 40-45. <https://doi.org/10.1891/CRNR-D-20-00069>
- National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. (2022). *HRSA nurse work development projection 2020-2035* <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/Nursing-Workforce-Projections-Factsheet.pdf>
- Manspile, E., Atwell, M.N., & Bridgeland, J.M. (2021). Immigrant students and English learners: Challenges faced in high school and postsecondary education. *Civic*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614148.pdf>
- Rosenberg, L. (2019). A practical guide for implementing a holistic admissions review. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 58(11), 669-673. <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20191021-11>
- Spencer, T.D. (2020). Improving diversity of the nursing workforce through evidence-based strategies. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 59(7), 363-364. <https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20200617-01>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. (2019). *2018 National sample survey of registered nurses brief summary of results. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/data-research/nssrn-summary-report.pdf>

START A CHAPTER!

Is your school interested in starting a chapter? Fill out the **NSNA Start-a-Chapter form** or check out **Start A Chapter Program** for more information about starting a chapter.



Your school becomes an NSNA chapter with a minimum of 10 NSNA members at your school by February 12, 2025. Students can easily **join NSNA online** or download a **NSNA membership application**.



National Student Nurses' Association

TOTAL SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP PLAN

Over 130 nursing schools participate in the Total School Membership Plan (TSMP). These nursing schools incorporate NSNA membership dues into student activity or tuition fees. Would this work at your school? All schools may participate in TSMP. As an added incentive, the **NSNA dues for both new and renewing members will be \$22.00 for national dues plus state dues. Note that individual students**



renewing NSNA membership pay \$30.00 plus state dues. State dues will not be affected. If you are interested, NSNA can send you complete information for your school, including the dues. For more information: **Total School Membership Plan**.

Volume 46, No. 2 • November 2024

Editor

Kenya D. Williams, EdD, MBA, MSN, RN, RP, CAE, FNAYM

President, NSNA

Ethan Slocum

Executive Director

Kenya D. Williams, EdD, MBA, MSN, RN, RP, CAE, FNAYM

Senior Director, Creative Design & Production

Jack Bryant

Senior Director, Editorial Services

Managing Editor

Carol M. Ford

Associate Managing Editor

Aynsley Meshanic

Layout and Design Specialist

Darin Peters

Publisher

Anthony J. Jannetti, Inc.

Advisory Board

Brandi Borden, BSN, RN

Hershaw Davis, DNP, MBA, RN

Florence L. Huey, MS, FNP

Jenna Shock, MSN ED., APRN, PMHNP-BC

Steven Jackson, BSN, RN

DEAN's Notes is indexed in Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature.

DEAN's Notes is published five times a year by Anthony J. Jannetti Inc., Box 56, Pitman, New Jersey 08071-0056. Telephone 856.256.2300. FAX 856.589.7463. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the express written permission of the publisher. Address changes should include mailing label and be forwarded to the publisher.

Anthony J. Jannetti, Inc.
Box 56
Pitman, NJ 08071-0056

CHANGE SERVICE
REQUESTED

PRSR STD
US Postage
PAID
Deptford, NJ
Permit #142



www.facebook.com/NSNAinc

© Anthony J. Jannetti, Inc., 20XX

The image is a promotional graphic for the 73rd Annual Convention of the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA). It features a stylized illustration of five healthcare professionals (nurses and a doctor) in various colored scrubs, standing in a line against a background of colorful, radiating lines. On the left, the iconic Space Needle is depicted. The NSNA logo is centered below the illustration. The text 'Nursing's Brightest Beacons' is in green, 'Ignite Innovate Lead' is in large white letters, and '73rd Annual Convention' is in white. The dates and location 'April 9-13, 2025 Seattle Convention Center | Arch Seattle, WA' are at the bottom right. A QR code is in the top right corner.