



NEW CAREERS IN NURSING

Accelerated Nursing Degree Programs: Insights Into Teaching and Learning Experiences

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

The New Careers in Nursing (NCIN) program is a scholarship program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) that supports college graduates with degrees in non-nursing fields enrolled in accelerated bachelor of science in nursing (ABSN) or accelerated master's of science in nursing (AMSN) degree programs. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) serves as the national program office for the program. The overarching goal of NCIN is to diversify the nursing workforce. For the past seven years, NCIN has made systematic investments in the form of grants to schools of nursing that offer ABSN and/or AMSN degree programs. Selected schools of nursing receive funds to award \$10,000 scholarships for students who are members of groups underrepresented in nursing or from economically disadvantaged backgrounds,¹ as well as modest programmatic operating support. As of August 2014, 3,517 scholarships totaling \$35,170,000 have been awarded to 130 schools of nursing in 41 states and the District of Columbia.

In recent years, schools of nursing have experienced shifts in the values, student demographics, and structure of nursing education. This raises interest in how nurse educators are adapting their teaching and learning for the “new” nursing students — especially those who are coming from other disciplines. The New Careers in Nursing Study of Teaching and Learning in Accelerated Nursing Degree Programs aimed to explore these questions from a variety of perspectives, including the structure of programs, roles and attitudes of faculty, strengths of and challenges faced by students, and instructional practices in learning environments. Seven questions guided the study development:

1. Are there particular program configurations and faculty roles that are likely to promote quality of education in accelerated second-degree programs?
2. Are particular curriculum design features incorporated when developing teaching and learning experiences for accelerated second-degree students?
3. Are nursing schools blending traditional and accelerated students in their degree programs? If blending is occurring, what are the circumstances that dictate when to blend students?
4. Do current faculty members teaching in these programs differ from faculty teaching in more traditional programs? If so, are there implications that deserve attention?
5. How does the field of the first degree appear to affect the student's experience in the nursing program and career plans?
6. In what ways do differences between second-degree and traditional students warrant distinctive teaching strategies? Do second-degree students have unique needs that are not effectively met by traditional didactic strategies?
7. Are academic faculty members generally prepared to adopt these strategies in teaching second-degree students?

¹ The eligibility requirements for the NCIN program include membership in a group that is underrepresented in nursing or a disadvantaged background (e.g., economically disadvantaged), U.S. citizenship or permanent residency, a baccalaureate degree in a non-nursing discipline, and acceptance into an entry-level accelerated nursing degree program for non-nursing college graduates.



The New Careers in Nursing Survey of Teaching and Learning in Accelerated Nursing Programs (referred to as the Teaching and Learning Survey) consisted of a web-based survey administered in fall 2012 to 117 NCIN program liaisons at current and former grantee schools of nursing who responded on behalf of their school of nursing. A response rate of 84% ($n=98$) was achieved.

Our research led to three major conclusions:

1. *Faculty at NCIN schools of nursing may prefer teaching accelerated, second-degree students.* While the literature on faculty perceptions of accelerated nursing students has identified negative as well as positive views of this student population, faculty at NCIN schools may fall into the latter camp. Most liaisons of ABSN programs specifically reported that faculty who teach primarily in the accelerated program prefer that classroom dynamic. The vast majority of program liaisons also believed that accelerated students improve the overall intellectual environment and thrive on challenging work and high expectations.
2. *Non-cognitive attributes such as motivation and commitment to the nursing profession fuel the success of accelerated, second-degree nursing students.* Program liaisons did not set much stock in prior experiences or degrees to predict accelerated student success (i.e., graduation and licensure). In fact, a first-degree major in biology or health sciences was the student characteristic least likely to be rated a very important or essential contributor to student success. Liaisons were much more likely to associate attitudinal and social characteristics — such as motivation, values, and maturity — with successful outcomes.
3. *Students — traditional as well as accelerated — have unique learning needs that warrant distinctive teaching strategies.* Our results suggest that the pedagogical variation within nursing programs (e.g., nursing program A that offers traditional and accelerated programs at the undergraduate and graduate level) may be greater than the differences between nursing programs (e.g., nursing program A vs. nursing program B). Instructional strategies vary based on course type, instructor style, and individual student differences in accelerated and traditionally paced programs. The prevalence of blended courses and cross-program teaching appointments for nursing faculty reinforces the need to adjust teaching for the specific classroom context rather than pursuing a standard, one-size-fits-accelerated approach.

The Study of Teaching and Learning in Accelerated Nursing Programs is among the first to provide an overview of the activities and practices involved in this educational endeavor. In particular, the Teaching and Learning Survey is the largest national, cross-institutional survey of accelerated nursing degree programs to date, representing the program structures, curriculum designs, instructional practices and technologies, clinical models, student characteristics, faculty activities, and professional development offerings at 98 schools of nursing in 38 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. The study produced several findings that inform recommendations for schools of nursing on potential ways to further improve their programs:



Recommendation #1: Schools of nursing should review their faculty orientation and professional development programs with the aim of equipping faculty to meet the needs of accelerated students.

Faculty may need support to adjust to the compressed time frame of accelerated programs in order to be successful in their roles. They may need assistance planning for how to cover the same amount of course material in less time and how to most effectively use technology in the classroom.

Recommendation #2: Schools of nursing should review their admissions process — both the materials requested from applicants and the decision-making process itself — with an aim toward using new information and processes to better predict student success.

It may be possible to improve the selection process to identify students most likely to be successful by focusing on non-academic attributes in addition to reviewing evidence of prior learning, such as grades. Admissions office personnel may want to explore whether there are assessments available (or assessments that could be created) that could be used in measuring these attributes to strengthen rankings of prospective students.

Recommendation #3: Additional research is needed to help schools of nursing learn more about what fosters student success.

Building on the findings from the Teaching and Learning Survey on the frequency of a variety of instructional approaches, future research should explore whether specific teaching techniques predict student success, and if one set of approaches is better suited for particular groups of students.

These efforts would benefit not only individual nursing students, but also schools of nursing and the nursing field, particularly if lessons learned from these efforts are shared broadly through professional nursing organizations and publications.