

# The Dedicated Education Unit: A Clinical Partnership Solution for Preparing Prelicensure Nursing Students for Practice

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## Background

The Dedicated Education Unit (DEU) is an immersive clinical model and academic/practice partnership that has demonstrated outcomes for preparing nursing students for the rigor of clinical practice and creating an employment pipeline for healthcare agencies (Moscato, et al., 2006). In the DEU model the staff nurse serves as the clinical instructor (CI) to the student. The DEU extends the precepted model by creating a care "village" (Moscato, et al., 2006) that supports both the student and preceptor and has been used across settings including specialty and skilled nursing facilities.

The lack of clinical sites, preceptors, and faculty (Melillo, et al., 2014) create a challenge for nursing schools as they work to meet the increasing demand for nurses. Dedicated education units were developed to help improve the clinical learning experiences of nursing students while providing support for staff nurses and the patient care environment in general. The DEU promotes student readiness by providing an opportunity to build critical skills and confidence in preparation for practice (Kidd, et al., 2020).

## Objectives

The objectives of this poster are:

- Objective I:** Describe the Dedicated Education Unit (DEU) Clinical Model
- Objective II:** Identify the benefits and challenges of using the DEU model
- Objective III:** Discuss DEU student and preceptor outcomes

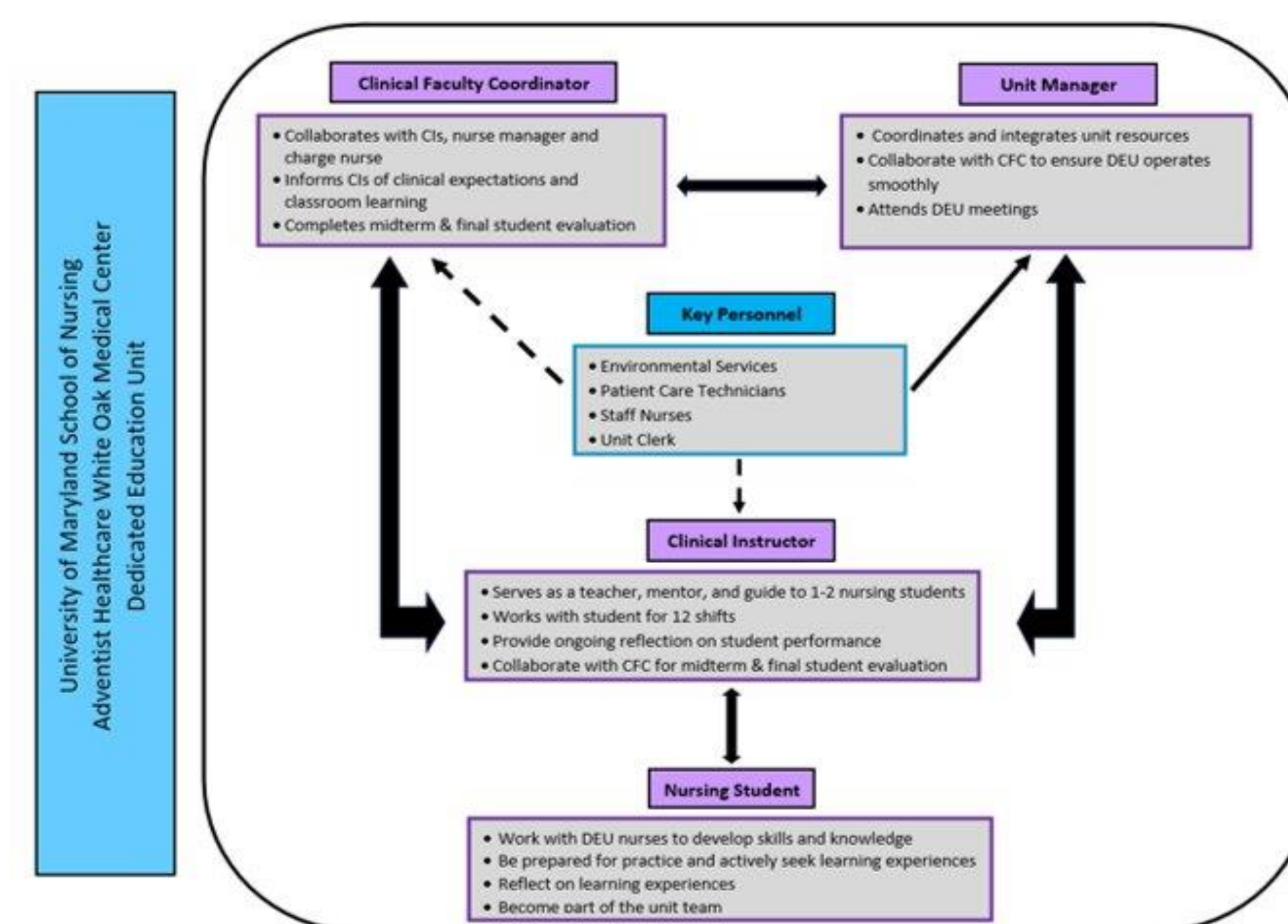
## Development

The Maryland Nursing Workforce Center partnered with the University of Maryland School of Nursing, Shady Grove Campus, and the Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center to establish a DEU. Faculty, hospital administrators, nurse-clinicians, and university clinical faculty collaborated to create a learning environment that supports the translation of didactic learning to clinical practice.

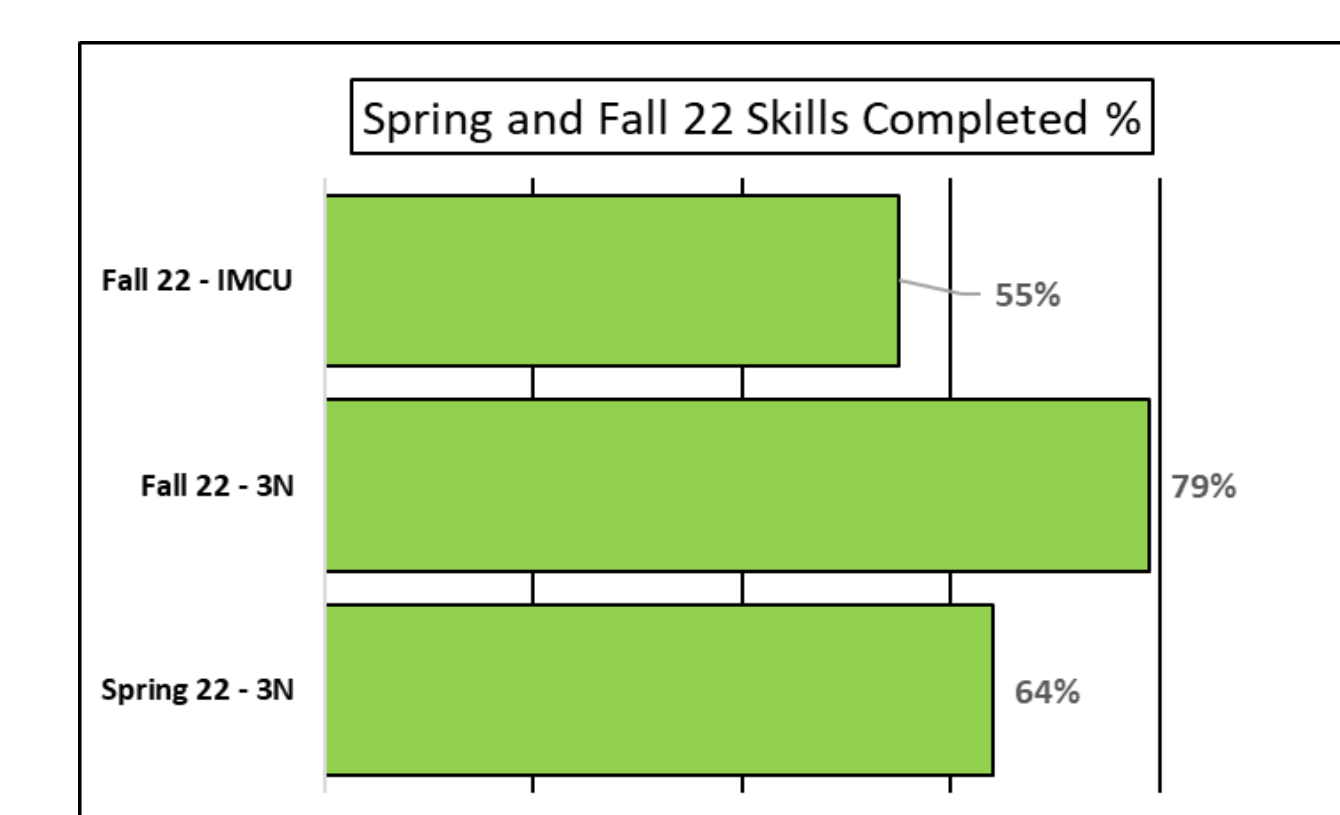
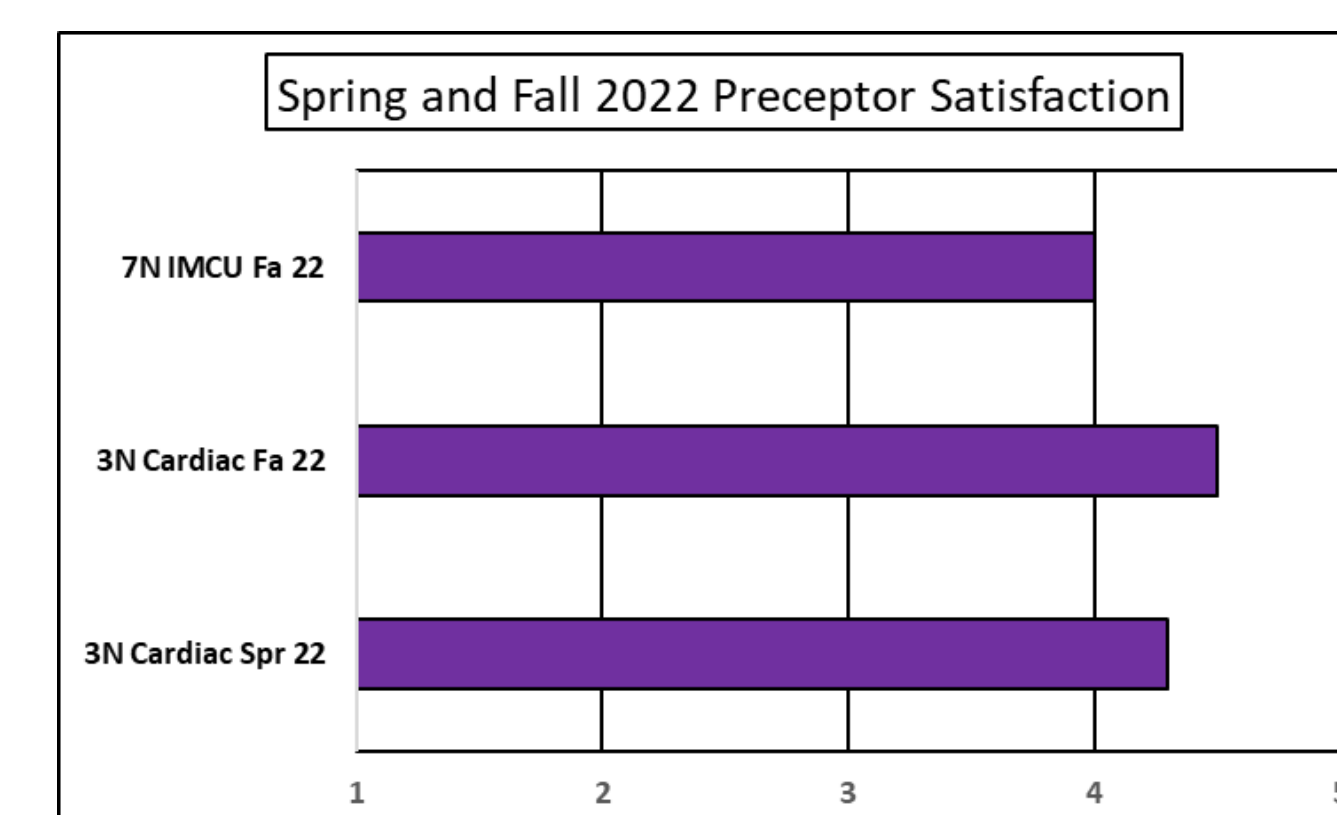
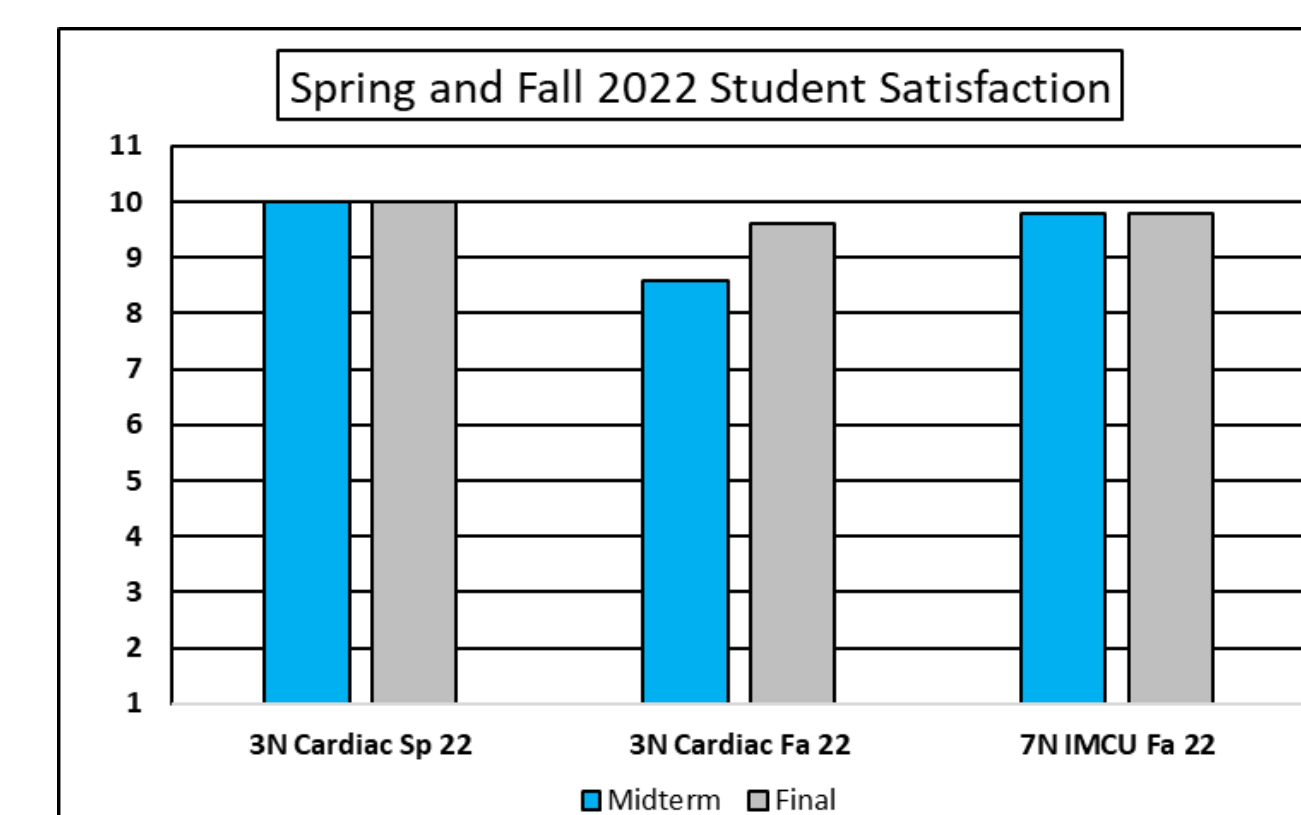
## Methods

- Students complete 120 clinical hours on either a medical/surgical stepdown or intermediate care unit with students imbedded into the clinical setting as team members with a defined role in patient care.
- CI and students provide care for 3-5 patients in a 1:1 or 1:2 preceptorship. Students practice previously learned skills under the direction and supervision of the CI.
- The clinical faculty coordinator (CFC) is employed by UMSON and the clinical agency.
- The CFC supports student learning through coaching, mentorship of the CI, conducting pre- and post-clinical conferences, student grading and clinical evaluation along with promotion of an engaging academic practice partnership.

## Figures and Charts



University of Maryland/ White Oak Medical Center  
DEU Model (Adapted from Moscato, et al., 2006)



## Results

There are currently 2 DEUs at WOMC with a total of thirty current and past student participants. Surveys were administered to students, preceptors, and clinical instructors about their experiences participating in the DEU. Students, preceptors, and clinical instructors were satisfied participating in the DEU. Early challenges for students were related to becoming familiar with the unit and staff. In Spring 2022, preceptors reported that dealing with unmotivated students was a challenge for them. Students in the DEU consistently complete more than 50% of skills contained on a 53- item skills inventory used to record skill completion during the semester. Students on average complete 35/53 (66%) of the items.

## Conclusions

- Participation in the DEU narrows the academia-practice gap by affording schools and hospitals the ability to provide intensive clinical experiences for students at a critical point in their education.
- Students practice and sharpen clinical skills and clinical judgement within the realistic context of care delivery.
- The presence of DEU students expands the care capacity of the unit and is a satisfier for direct care team members and leadership as they navigate staffing challenges.
- The DEU creates a recruitment pipeline for the clinical agency as students are incentivized to return as new hires post-graduation.

## Next Steps

- Expansion of the DEU within and outside of the current facility
- Securing access to ancillary clinical experiences
- Identifying strategies for increasing clinical faculty development
- Establishing a peer mentorship component of the DEU

## Bibliography

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## Acknowledgments

This project was made possible by a grant funded by the Maryland Higher Education Commission – Nurse Support Program II