MARYLAND ACTION
C O A L I T I O N
Creating a Healthier Maryland
FUTURE OF NURSING™ CAMPAIGN FOR ACTION

Pre-Licensure Students' Perception of a Program to Ease Transition to the Master of Science in Nursing Clinical Nurse Leader Option

Gail Schoen Lemaire, PhD, PMHCNS, BC, CNL; Lynn Chen, PhD; Christine King, EdD; Vanessa Fahie, PhD

Abstract

Background

To better reflect the distribution of minorities in the U.S. nursing workforce, nursing education continues to work toward educating increasing numbers of nurses from underrepresented groups. Historically, the University of Maryland School of Nursing (UMSON) has been fortunate to recruit and enroll a high percentage of minority students. The UMSON pre-licensure, second-degree Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) option admitted its first students in 2005. CNL students from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups often face greater academic challenges than their peers. To address this disparity, UMSON has provided academic support services to students as they proceed through the program. From 2008 through 2014, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Careers in Nursing Program provided 63 scholarships and academic support, including peer mentoring, tutoring, workshops, and writing assistance. Despite services, compared to their peers, students from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds continued to be at increased risk for academic difficulties. To support students from these groups, UMSON received a Health Resources and Services Administration–funded Nursing Workforce Diversity grant, "Increasing Diversity in the Clinical Nurse Leader Option." To date, this project has supported 59 students from groups underrepresented in the nursing workforce.

Methods

Unfamiliarity with nursing and nursing education and related uncertainty as students transition from work or undergraduate education in a different field to graduate nursing education increases student anxiety. SMARTStart, a component of the pre-entry immersion program, was developed to assist CNL students to transition to nursing education by providing essential information to reduce anxiety and hasten adjustment to graduate school. To assure that SMARTStart was useful for students, we regularly surveyed them via Qualtrics, using a seven-item, four-point Likert scale.

Results

Response rates for the spring 2019, fall 2019, and spring 2020 semester SMARTStart surveys were 67%, 68%, and 70%, respectively. Results indicated that students perceived SMARTStart as an effective way to inform them about first-semester courses and learning strategies, and they rated highly meeting first-semester course instructors and other students. Based on this feedback, SMARTStart was revised for the fall 2019 term to include all first-semester faculty. In fall 2019, students reported that they would prefer more detailed information about first-semester course expectations and testing formats. Based on this feedback, SMARTStart was again revised for the spring 2020 term. Spring 2020 survey results demonstrated that students found it useful to get to know first-semester instructors and receive a course and syllabus overview and information about faculty expectations. Further, 93% of students reported that SMARTStart was very useful (65%) or useful (33%) in preparing them to begin the CNL option. Regardless of racial or ethnic background, most students (97%) reported that attending SMARTStart was somewhat useful (32%), useful (35%) or very useful (30%) in decreasing their anxiety about beginning the CNL option.

Conclusions

All students reported that SMARTStart helped reduce their anxiety and prepare them to begin nursing school. Students shared their perceptions of SMARTStart, made suggestions for revision, and thereby contributed to program improvement.