



MARYLAND ACTION COALITION

Creating a Healthier Maryland

FUTURE OF NURSING™ CAMPAIGN FOR ACTION

RN Phorward: Growing the Pipeline of PhD-Prepared Nurses in Maryland

Kirsten Corazzini, PhD, FGSA; Maeve Howett, PhD, APRN, CPNP-PC, CNE; Bimbola Akintade, PhD, MBA, MHA, ACNP-BC, NEA-BC, FAANP; Marcella Leath, BSN, RN

Abstract

Problem

Maryland statewide initiatives are making significant inroads in addressing the shortage of registered nurses (RNs) and nurse educators. Much of the faculty growth has been at the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) level, however, rather than at the PhD level. National statistics reflect our state-level trends: DNP enrollments are growing at almost twice the rate of PhD enrollments, with almost nine times the number of annual DNP graduates to PhD graduates. Thus, new approaches are needed at the state level to recruit, mentor, and graduate nurses from PhD programs to address this shortage.

Purpose

Consistent with Maryland Action Coalition Objective #1, “To examine strategies taken to advance the educational preparation of nurses”, the purpose of this NSP II-funded project was to increase the number of PhD-prepared RNs in the state of Maryland. The purpose was achieved through four project objectives: 1) increase the enrollment in the University of Maryland School of Nursing’s PhD in nursing program, as well as other PhD programs in Maryland; 2) identify and engage underrepresented minorities in nursing so that 35% or more of recruited students are from underrepresented populations; 3) provide academic and financial support for successful matriculation and progression; and 4) continue to engage Master of Science in Nursing-prepared nursing faculty to explore doctoral education opportunities in Maryland.

Methods

Four main approaches were utilized: 1) conducting outreach in person and virtually to current nursing students who are eligible upon completion of their program to matriculate into a PhD program, including Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Clinical Nurse Leader, Master of Science in Nursing, and DNP students; 2) arranging research experiences with nurse scientists as curricular and cocurricular opportunities; 3) supporting nurses in applying and matriculating into PhD programs; and 4) providing outreach activities through individual and statewide meetings to support the doctoral education needs of nursing faculty.

Results

Over 300 students were reached via in-person and online education sessions; re-usable learning resources were created to ensure sustainability of the outreach efforts beyond the end of the program, with a particular emphasis on online/virtual learning resources developed during the 2020-2021 pandemic. Multiple connections were made between institutions across the state with doctoral programs to enhance support for applicants to understand how to assess applicant-program fit, develop competitive application materials, and successfully enroll in PhD programs in Maryland. Within the University of Maryland Baltimore alone, seven nurses matriculated into PhD studies following participation in our programming, with three in progress for a fall 2022 start date. Further, our entering cohorts during the project have exceeded the 35% benchmark for underrepresented students, and all students were eligible for financial support. Additionally, a research elective has been added to our curriculum for our pre-licensure students, ensuring ongoing mentoring to deepen nursing students' knowledge of and interest in a research-focused pathway in graduate nursing studies.

Conclusion

Our multipronged effort to enhance recruitment and retention in PhD programs in Maryland has resulted in sustainable and scalable approaches to grow the pipeline for nurses to pursue and complete PhD studies.