

Associate to Bachelors (ATB): Positioning More Baccalaureate Nurses at the Bedside

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Background and Scope: Frostburg State University has a long-standing history of successful online courses and online programs. In particular, the Department of Nursing has been successful in the development, implementation, and Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) accreditation of an RN-BSN and MSN (administration and education concentrations) program. In an effort to decrease time to degree, current Frostburg State nursing students have been pursuing dual enrollment between the community college and university. Faculty at Frostburg advise this type of student regularly to help facilitate the completion of their two-year nursing degree and then shortly thereafter the completion of their BSN degree. The addition of the associate to bachelor (ATB) model provides a more structured progression, financial aid benefits, and reduces overall tuition costs for students. The ATB model is the collaboration of two programs, which eliminates curriculum duplication and decreases the amount of time for associate degree nursing students to achieve their bachelors of science in nursing (BSN). This option allows for seamless progression between the two programs at two separate institutions of higher learning also meeting the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) (2010) recommendation to increase the number of nurses prepared at the BSN level to 80%. While this model is anticipated to accomplish all of the aforementioned goals, it is not without challenges and barriers. These challenges and barriers pose various obstacles such as model administration, transfer of credits, and future sustainability.

Purpose: Share the challenges and barriers encountered with the implementation of an ATB model. Methods to create this model, a five-year implementation grant was requested and funded by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) Nurse Support Program II (NSP II). The funding has been used to hire individuals to implement project goals. Sharing the challenges and successes is part of the grant initiatives.

Results: The anticipated outcomes/results over the project period are to identify and share challenges and barriers as well as potential solutions to aide other institutions in the implementation of the ATB model.

Conclusion/recommendations: In general, the administration of the model, transfer of credits, and future sustainability are the major challenges and barriers. However, these may be overcome by way of way of collaboration and innovation through clear delineation of staff and faculty to oversee the model, implementing processes and procedures such as individualized plans of study and progression plans, new student orientation, policy manuals, and credit hour conversions. Sustainability in the future remains to be determined by the success or failure of current processes and procedures. There will be a continuation of project initiatives over the next three years. The challenges and successes of this project will continue to be shared and used to make adjustments and improvements in the model as they are identified moving forward.