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The Nurse Educator Doctoral Grant (NEDG) Program: Promoting Doctoral Degree Completion in Maryland

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Purpose:
One third of current faculty will retire by 2025, 44% of whom hold research-focused doctorates (Fang & Kesten, 2017). Most vacant positions within nursing schools require or prefer faculty with a doctoral degree (AACN, 2019) yet the limited pool of doctorally-prepared faculty was identified by 68.2% of programs as an issue (Oermann, Lynn, & Agger, 2016).

Choosing an academic career that requires a doctoral degree may be negatively influenced by financial circumstances as the decision to return to school is influenced by prior college debt (Jones-Schenk et al, 2017) and the number of students graduating in debt is mounting (AACN, 2017a; AACN, 2017b).

To address these concerns in Maryland, the Nurse Educator Doctoral Grants for Practice and Dissertation Research (NEDG) program was launched in 2012. This research examined outcomes from 2013-2019 including awardee sociodemographic profiles, degree type, and retention in faculty role among others.

Methods:
Secondary data and a 20-item online survey were used to gather information about NEDG recipients including gender, ethnicity, birth generation, nursing experience, employment status, employer type and region, years expected to work as faculty, and type of doctoral degree sought/completed. Additional questions explored the personal impact of the NEDG grant, areas for which funding was used, and student debt load when NEDG was received.

Results:
From 2013-2019, over $2.82 million was awarded to 114 nurse faculty from 77% of Maryland's nursing programs (13 universities and 10 community colleges) to support doctoral degree completion. The DNP degree was most popular, followed by PhD in Nursing or Nursing Education. Retention of NEDG recipients was high with 89% remaining in educator positions in the state.

The majority of NEDG recipients were female (92.2%), with some racial/ethnic diversity-67% Caucasian, 19% Black, 11% Asian, and 5% Latino. Awardees were mainly from Generation X with 68% (born between 1961 and 1981), followed by 24% Baby Boomers (1943-1960), and 8% Millennials (1982-2000).

Recipients reported sizable student debt when they received their awards with 32% owing up to $49,999, 35% owing $50,000-99,999, and 14% owing more than $100,000. When asked about the importance of the NEDG award in doctoral degree completion degree, 85.17% rated it as "extremely important" and stated that they "would not have pursued the doctorate if not for the NEDG".

Conclusion:

The NEDG program has increased the number of doctorally-prepared faculty in Maryland and retained them in teaching positions. Nonetheless, further study is needed to understand the selection of a DNP degree over a PhD in Nursing particularly in light of reports that PhD-prepared faculty are preferred over DNP-prepared faculty ((Dreifuerst et al., 2016). Additionally, educators from under-represented and younger age groups are needed to teach an increasingly diverse student population and support future enrollment growth (Daw, Seldomridge, Battistoni, & Belcher, 2018).

Finally, given the debt load of the majority of NEDG recipients at the time of their award and rising concerns about the garnishment of Social Security and revocation of professional and driver's licenses for student loan default, a larger conversation is needed (Silver-Greenberg, Cowley, & Kitroeff, 2017).

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Keywords:
doctoral degree completion, nurse faculty educational advancement and nurse faculty shortage

Abstract Summary:
This research evaluates outcomes of the Maryland Nurse Educator Doctoral Grants for Practice and Dissertation Research (NEDG) 2013-2019 including awardee sociodemographic profiles, degree type, student debt-load, and retention in faculty role among others.

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