Title:
Maximizing Undergraduate Research Outcomes Through Honors Education: A Win-Win for Faculty and Student Development

Keywords:
Development, Honors and Research

Description/Overview:
Honors education can serve as a gold mine for cultivating future researchers, while discovering untapped faculty talents. This session will explore strategies for developing innovative research opportunities and partnerships through honors education that increase research productivity, while bringing the joy back into teaching.

Abstract Text:
Nursing honors programs provide faculty an excellent forum for developing and cultivating the next generation of nurse leaders, researchers, and scholars. In addition, with the guidance of faculty mentors, they equip nursing students with an early foundation for advanced practice. They allow high-achieving students to gain early exposure to the roles and skills necessary to navigate contemporary healthcare challenges and to advance the nursing profession through research, in alignment with recommendations outlined in the Institute of Medicine’s Future of Nursing Report. Nursing honors education also provides faculty with the opportunity to implement innovative ideas they have always wanted to try, but do not fit within the traditional nursing curriculum. When approached strategically, these programs provide a structure for developing faculty and students, cultivating academic-clinical research partnership, increasing productivity, and improving faculty satisfaction.

The challenges associated with effective nursing honors education, however, are complex, multifaceted, and widespread. A paucity of literature leaves leaders with limited guidance for developing or sustaining high-quality programs. In addition, nursing honors programs in the United States operate largely in silos, with few formal opportunities designated specifically for strategic collaboration among program leaders, which could significantly increase program success and scope of impact. While some programs thrive, many nursing honors programs struggle with sustainability.

This presentation will share strategies employed by a Scholar participating in the Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI) Experienced Nurse Faculty Leadership Academy (ENFLA) to strategically transform a nursing honors program to promote sustainability, increase productivity, cultivate new research opportunities, and develop a team of nursing honors faculty. The nursing honors program highlighted, located in the southwest region of the United States, experienced rapid and significant expansion in student numbers over a three-year period, accompanied by an increase in the depth, breadth, rigor, and quality of honors work and requirements. As the program thrived and yielded meaningful outcomes, with tangible benefits to students, faculty, the University, the College of Nursing, and to community partners, university leaders and administrators recognized the value of continued investment in the program. However, as resources in higher education became increasingly competitive, resource allocation failed to keep pace with the program’s growth, thereby jeopardizing program sustainability and research productivity.

This purpose of this Scholar’s ENFLA project was to develop a plan for sustaining the existing nursing honors program across the university’s three campuses, and developing a team of talented faculty who were new to honors education. Current best practices in nursing honors education served as the foundation for the project’s strategic imperatives. Preliminary initiatives included a comprehensive review of the literature, a contextual evaluation of the existing honors program, and alignment of the program’s mission, vision, and values with the University Honors Scholar Program, the College of Nursing, and the university at large. The data from these activities provided a foundation for securing the buy-in from key program stakeholders. These preliminary processes also provided valuable insight into the benefit and plethora of potential opportunities for faculty to thrive professionally and increase scholarly productivity through active engagement in honors education. Therefore, the project approached program
sustainability from the perspective of faculty empowerment, which served as a primary foundational principle threaded into the project’s initiatives.

The success of strategic initiatives to promote sustainability relied on assembling and coalescing a team of nursing faculty across campuses. Early project activities provided clarity that the nursing honors program’s sustainability relied on significant changes in the areas of faculty workload structure and recognition, ongoing faculty development, exploration of program funding sources, and the development of a new nursing honors curriculum that integrates research and leadership into each course. Specific program initiatives sought to promote efficient utilization of resources, increase productivity, and to yield increased mutually beneficial outcomes.

ENFLA project outcomes brought university recognition to the College of Nursing as successful strategic initiatives were adopted and integrated into the university’s honors scholar program. The project’s key concepts, strategies for promoting sustainability, project outcomes, and recommendations for other honors leaders are described. Looking to the future and ideas for strengthening nursing honors education are addressed, including the development of collaborative initiatives that provide resources and a supportive network to empower nursing honors faculty and students to maximize their leadership and research potential.

References:


Content Outline:
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Author Summary: Omar Ali is a nurse educator with research interests in mentorship and leadership development. He manages faculty development programs at Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI).
Professional Experience: Jennifer Wilson is an Associate Clinical Professor and the Coordinator of the Honors Nursing Program at Texas Woman's University. She was awarded the American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s Novice Faculty Excellence in Clinical Teaching Award in 2011, TWU's Redbud Faculty Champion Award in 2011 and the Best Associate Nursing Award at NIH (Pediatric Branch of NCI) in 1992. She is the author of Wilson (2012). The New Graduate Nurse’s Survival Handbook: How to Avoid Being Labeled as Scary. Her clinical background includes 25 years of pediatric oncology experience, as a clinical nurse, clinical research nurse, clinical nurse specialist and oncology educator. She is a Scholar with the STTI Experienced Nurse Faculty Leadership Academy (ENFLA).

Author Summary: Jennifer Wilson is an Associate Clinical Professor and the Coordinator of the Nursing Honors Scholar Program at Texas Woman's University College of Nursing. She earned her Doctorate of Nursing Practice from American Sentinel University in 2017, and an MSN with a specialization in Oncology from George Mason University in 1992. Jennifer's clinical background is Pediatric Oncology and her research interests include honors education in nursing.