

Nursing Education Research Conference 2018 (NERC18)

University of Connecticut Major and Mentor: Nursing Mentoring Program

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Undergraduate nursing education programs are challenging and inherently stressful. In fact, Cameron, et al. (2011) reported that over half of nursing school students debated dropping out. When academic institutions lose students to attrition it exacerbates the looming nursing shortage. To add to this dilemma, the American Association of Colleges of Nurses (2014) reports that by 2022, there will be a need for 3.44 million nurses in the United States, yet the demand and supply remain imbalanced. These statistics demonstrate the importance of developing programs to support and retain undergraduate nursing students to degree completion. With these facts in hand, our institution chose to enhance the positive dynamics of peer mentorship within the undergraduate nursing learning community as a gateway to student success and retention.

An innovative mentorship course was developed specifically for freshmen undergraduate students residing in a dedicated nursing learning community at a large academic institution. The mentorship course was developed by a graduate assistant assigned to the nursing learning community in collaboration with a faculty member and the director of pre-licensure nursing programs. This articulated, undergraduate course was built on the premise of Benner's (2001) novice (undergraduate students) to expert (dedicated graduate assistant and faculty member) model which conveys that through experience mentors progress to higher levels of performance. The course was offered to second semester freshmen students in the nursing learning community as a path towards leadership through mentorship. Ten students out of forty freshmen nursing learning community residents expressed interest in investing in their leadership potential by becoming student mentors for the upcoming freshmen. Eight students enrolled in the course. Two students withdrew due to scheduling conflicts. Six students completed the hybrid 1-credit curriculum and will be mentors with assigned freshmen mentees in the nursing learning community throughout the 2017-2018 academic year.

The course, titled "Major and Mentor: Nursing Student Mentorship" was developed in an effort to help students understand how they conceptualize mentorship and be better prepared for and able to articulate the reciprocal and collaborate learning relationship between mentor and mentee. Mentors must be willing to share things about themselves both positive and negative in order to build trust and connection with mentees. In an effort to facilitate self-discovery among the enrolled students the graduate assistant created a private course blog with biweekly assignments focused on the ways in each student uniquely transitioned to college and how the presence of a mentor would have aided them in the process. The students convened in class every other week for one hour with the graduate assistant and a faculty member who specializes in mental health nursing. During class sessions the blog posts were highlighted in a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed in detail to assist students in visualizing their leadership potential through mentoring others.

Faculty and student interaction, both formal and informal, are noted as key elements to students' ability to conceptualize leadership (Dunn, Odom, Moore, & Rotter, 2016). The same graduate assistant in the classroom maintained a weekly presence in the nursing learning community space in the evenings approximately 10 hours per week. This unique graduate assistant assignment encouraged the idea that faculty and student interaction, both informal and formal, are noted as key elements to students' ability to conceptualize leadership (Dunn, Odom, Moore, & Rotter, 2016). The goal is to continue this program with the ongoing presence of a graduate assistant in the nursing learning community to support the newly established mentors and encourage their journey from novice to expert mentor and future nursing leader.

Becoming a mentor is often an essential step in a nurse's leadership development. The mentors are prepared to reciprocate a supportive presence to the new students within the nursing learning community. Helping students discover their untapped potential as mentors will only enhance their personal and professional success.

Research has shown campus living and learning communities foster a successful transition to academic life by providing curricular structure, meaningful relationships, sustained interactions, engagement, and deeper learning experiences. Living and learning communities have been known to cultivate strong academic and social connections as well as community and a sense of belonging (Spanierman, et al, 2013). Mentoring holds the potential to be a rewarding experience for all involved. A research study is intended in the fall of 2018 in order to draw on the students' experiences and provide a deeper understanding of how their participation in the mentorship course and subsequent role as mentors in the nursing learning community has influenced their personal and professional growth as well as their leadership capabilities.

Title:

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Keywords:

Learning Community, Mentorship and Undergraduate Nurses

References:

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Abstract Summary:

A 1-credit course was created to enhance student mentorship within a nursing learning community. Students successfully completed the mentorship course and will serve as role models, school of nursing resource experts, and trusted points of contact for incoming freshmen in a dedicated nursing learning community.

Content Outline:

Content Outline Step

I. Introduction

A. Nursing learning communities cultivate strong social and academic connections.

B. Nursing learning community mentors have the ability to guide mentees through the complex transition to college by communicating information regarding expectations, learning opportunities, and stressors.

C. Students have the ability to progress from novice to expert peer mentors throughout their undergraduate education.

II. Body

Main Point #1: Freshmen nursing students have the ability to develop nursing mentorship skills early in their education.

Supporting Point #1: Exploring mentorship desire and skills

Supporting Point #2: Promoting positive nursing community interactions
through mentor / mentee relationships

Main Point #2: Freshmen nursing students explore peer mentor roles and responsibilities through personal reflection.

Supporting Point #1: Developing a personal philosophy of mentorship

Supporting Point #2: Identifying and developing mentorship resources

Main Point #3: Freshmen nursing students articulate the value and importance of peer mentors in creating a positive nursing learning community.

Supporting Point #1: Developing a peer mentorship blueprint

Supporting Point #2: Preparing to institute the peer mentorship program

III. Conclusion

A. Through a course blog and bi-weekly meetings mentors were able to reflect on preparing to become a student peer mentors.

B. Mentors established a strategic plan for building the mentor / mentee relationship in the upcoming academic year.

C. Participation in a mentorship course and subsequent role as mentors in the nursing learning community holds the potential to influence personal and professional growth as well as develop leadership capabilities.

First Primary Presenting Author

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Professional Experience: Annette T Maruca, PhD, RN-BC, CNE is Associate Professor at the University of Connecticut, School of Nursing. She is board certified in psychiatric mental health nursing and has extensive clinical experience in this specialty area across the life span. She has been in nursing education since 2006, serves as Course Coordinator for psychiatric mental health courses, and involved in both clinical and didactic courses. Her expertise is carried into her research in education, simulation, and correctional health nursing. She is currently involved in an interprofessional SAMHSA grant to promote SBIRT training across nursing curriculum.

Author Summary: Annette Maruca is an assistant professor of nursing at the University of Connecticut with a focus on mental health and substance use disorders as well as corrections and simulation education. She is actively involved in the undergraduate living and learning community.

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Author Summary: Jamie Beth Rivera is a certified pediatric nurse from Springfield, MA. Jamie has held various roles in the pediatric emergency department at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford, Ct where she remains clinical active in per diem status. Jamie is currently an assistant professor of nursing at Westfield State University in Westfield, Massachusetts. She is a PhD candidate at the University of Connecticut focusing on pediatric behavioral health.