

The UOG BSN program: successes and challenges

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Introduction

The University of Guam (UOG) offers a baccalaureate degree program in nursing which is accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC). The uniqueness of this nursing program comes from Guam's political and economic connection with the United States and its geographic proximity to other Asian and Pacific countries in the Western Pacific region. This uniqueness creates a continuous exposure to the interaction between Eastern and Western cultural values and beliefs. Guam's geographic location fosters positive networking and the ability to meld U.S. educational expectations and standards to this culturally diverse environment. The students of the Nursing Program reflect the cultural diversity of the University, with many students speaking English as only one of the languages spoken at home.

This uniqueness also creates challenges in finding the most effective teaching methods that would lead to the same learning outcomes. Because of this diversity, the many cultural issues, communication patterns, language barriers, religious practices, and prioritization of family obligations are ever-present considerations and challenges in the Nursing Program, enriching class discussions, influencing teaching methods, and affecting client care. Class activities are designed to address the complex interaction of these variables. Such constant contact with diverse cultures provides daily experience in respecting all human beings as unique and valued individuals.

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The challenges of unifying the nursing students' cultural diversity gave birth to the program's ten core concepts which are the foundations of the characteristics of the BSN graduate. These core concepts include Professionalism, Caring, Creative and Critical Thinking, Cultural Competence, Communication, Research, Ethical and Legal principles, Management, Leadership and the Nursing Process. The application of the nursing process using the holistic approach of the Neuman Systems Model (Neuman, 1995) is intricately woven into the curriculum, providing not only a basis for organizing and analyzing client data, formulating and evaluating an intervention plan, but also a basis on which to evaluate the students' ability to demonstrate the

10 core concepts with increasing complexity. As a result, students from any of the Pacific island jurisdictions, the U.S. mainland or any country who successfully complete the program, achieve a baccalaureate education that makes them competitive with graduate nurses from other nation-

ally accredited programs, giving them more opportunities for pursuing graduate education.

The BSN program has two tracks: the Generic BSN track for high school graduates and Licensed Practical Nurses; and the Second-Step track for graduates of Diploma or Associate Degree nursing programs. Graduates of other health programs are evaluated and placed within the BSN program on an individual basis.

Accomplishments

The College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CNHS) began in 1966 as the Department of Nursing in the Division of Human Ecology, offering an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN). In 1982, the Second-Step baccalaureate program was added. In 1988, the ADN program was replaced by the 4 year BSN Program. In 1989, the Department became the School of Nursing and Allied Health (SNAH) within the College of Arts and Sciences. Under the leadership of Dr. Maureen Fochtman, the SNAH became autonomous as the College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CNHS). In 1996, the BSN program was granted a five-year initial accreditation by the NLNAC which was extended to an 8 year reaccreditation

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in 2002. The current university structural reshaping will reduce the number of colleges at UOG, with the College of Nursing and Health Sciences becoming the School of Nursing, Health and Social Work.

Faculty leadership

Nursing faculty serve as leaders in nursing and health care; participating in community health projects, organizing and teaching continuing education courses, workshops, and conferences; and holding leadership positions on community boards and committees, such as the Guam Board of Nurse Examiners (GBNE), Guam Nurses' Association (GNA), and the American Pacific Nursing Leaders Council (APNLC). In 1994, the College expanded its outreach efforts and began offering distance education credit courses and continuing education courses to students on the Micronesian islands. This year, the program acquired a continuing education provider number and has begun to fill the need for continuing education credits and inservices toward nursing license renewal.

Employment of graduates

Since 1992, the UOG program has been the main source of staff nurses for Guam Memorial Hospital Authority (CMHA) and other Guam health facilities. Many UOG graduates also assume management positions on island and in the region. Many of the nurse leaders in the island jurisdictions are graduates of the Second-Step track. Many UOG graduates practicing in Guam are now certified in their specialty areas or pursuing their master's degree.

Needs assessment

The students engage in faculty-mentored research projects designed to establish and increase the data base of health, nursing and educational needs. These are useful activities that promote evidence-based practice and health promotion opportunities. One such activity of the past two years is the community assessment project focused on the village of Dededo, the most populated village on Guam. Last fall, a needs survey was also done to determine educational needs of nurses in the region.

Health promotion services

The Nursing Program collaborates with the community to meet educational, health screening and immunization needs of the people. To provide these services, the Nursing Program partners with the Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, public schools and community health agencies in outreach activities. These activities

enhance nursing students' experiences through community service.

Leadership

Faculty involvement in the Council on Nursing Leadership, a subcommittee of the Guam Nurses Association, has also provided opportunities for faculty and the Dean to become involved in policy issues. One policy issue is the implementation of a law passed in 1998 by the Guam Legislature to raise nurses' salaries and make them more competitive.

Distance Education

Nursing faculty offer distance education courses such as community health and leadership courses, to the island jurisdictions. Topics and areas of need are identified by the members of the American-Pacific Nurse Leaders Council (APNLC), during their annual meetings.

Networking

Supporting the College mission to enhance professional preparation for students and continuing education for professionals, nursing faculty continuously search for opportunities to link with resources available in the community and military health sector through networking, making presentations, inviting guest lecturers, enhancing the preceptor program for student practica and providing review courses for the National Council of Licensing Examination for registered nurses (NCLEX-RN), and consultations in person. To address the nursing shortage issue and the student's need for practical experience, the Nursing Program, with the Guam Board of Nurse Examiners, also initiated regulatory changes to enable qualified students to take the Nurse's Aide (after 200 level courses) and Licensed Practical Nurse examinations (after 300 level courses).

Resources

The CNHS Skills Laboratory is fashioned after a hospital ward and bedside tables are equipped with patient care supplies and equipment. The laboratory is greatly utilized at the beginning and end of each semester for skills practice and mastery. This Learning Laboratory has multimedia equipment available for student and faculty use. Graphical access to the Internet and Intranet network as well other electronic communications capabilities, are available to each faculty, staff and students enabling access to current and comprehensive library and information resources.

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Partnerships for health care

Prior to 1998, the Nursing program was involved in several projects that addressed community needs in Guam and the Region. These projects and partnerships included:

1. A team building grant between Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, Guam Department of Education, Guam Community College and the CNHS to increase communication and referrals between agencies for clinical services and educational opportunities;
2. Links between health and positive educational outcomes to create motivation for maintaining the presence of school nurses in public schools and enabling the Nursing Program to create a pool of preceptors for the school health component of the Community-Psychiatric Nursing Practicum, and Family Health Nursing course;
3. National recognition of the CNHS Student Nurses Association of Guam at National Student Nurses Association Conferences since 1996;
4. Partnerships with Palau Community College, Northern Marianas College, College of Micronesia, and College of Marshall Islands to offer the Second-step Nursing Programs track to those Regions;
5. Partnerships with Health Ministers, Telehealth and Distance Education consortium members through Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant;
6. Participation in the Council of Nurse Leaders, an important avenue for addressing nursing and health policy issues, 8) Membership in the American Pacific Nurse Leaders (APNLC) and providing inservice and continuing education courses through distance education.

Current outcomes

The total number of UOG BSN graduates is 245. Of the graduates, 190 were in the generic (GBSN) track and 55 were in the Second Step (SSBSN) track. The yearly graduating class average is 22 per year. The largest graduating class was 33 in 2001. The overall pass rate for all graduates known to have taken the NCLEX is 88%. The most current, 2002 pass rate for first take is 90% (NPEC, April 2003) well over the benchmark for first time pass rate of 75% for GBNE and for the NLNAC.

Since the reaccreditation, several developments have occurred increasing the visibility of the Nursing program, faculty and students. The NCLEX review has been strengthened with offerings for new graduates as well as community graduate nurses. The SSBSN track is seeing more enrollment of ADN nurses from other islands, second degree students,

military-related nurses seeking their BSN, and transfer students from other off-island BSN programs. Students and faculty have presented research projects in GNA conferences. Faculty and students continue to participate in outreach activities which is a major avenue for student learning and faculty involvement in health education and health promotion. The college has also obtained a CEU provider number and has started providing inservices. A generous donation from Pacificare Asia Pacific for the purpose of increasing the number of nurses on Guam and the region has enabled the program to improve educational facilities and resources.

Systematic evaluation plan

The nursing faculty and the Dean/Director of Nursing, Dr. Maureen Fochtman, have worked very hard in establishing a more coherent curriculum with a systematic program evaluation plan. The evaluation is a combined assessment/evaluation process which addresses all aspects of the program. Results are used for decision making to strengthen the curriculum, policies and procedures for advisement, admission, progression, remediation, and graduation.

Challenges

The vision of the Nursing Program is to become an internationally recognized center for excellence in multicultural nursing education, practice and research. The purposes of the Nursing Program are to offer professional nursing education to the culturally and academically diverse population of the region, increase the body of nursing knowledge through research and creative endeavors, and to serve the culturally diverse peoples and health care providers of the region. There are several challenges facing the program.

1. Several vacated faculty positions remain unfilled, limiting the ability of remaining faculty to engage in scholarly activities such as writing and research. Renewed administrative support for these activities is critical.
2. The employment and training of part-time (adjunct) faculty for clinical courses needs to be readdressed. The nursing program has always enjoyed support from the community and a renewed commitment from the nursing community to develop a local pool of adjunct faculty is needed to continue the viability of the program.
3. Recruitment and retention of qualified students is a continuing challenge. Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.7 or better in all Nursing and required support courses to successfully progress through the

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program. Results of the program's Predictor Study done in 1999 were used to justify raising the required GPA for admission to Nursing Fundamentals (NU202B) and for progression through the program. Preliminary study findings for Fall 2001 (n=127) supported the requirement of a GPA higher than 2.7 in prerequisite courses for successful passing of subsequent nursing courses and the NCLEX-RN. Results of the 2002 study supported a recommendation to raise the GPA requirement to 3.0. Attrition from nursing courses and from the program are due to low cumulative GPAs and off-island transfers

There are other issues currently facing the College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

First is the reshaping of the university, where 5 colleges will be consolidated into 3. The proposal, due to be fully implemented in August, includes establishing an autonomous School of Nursing, Health and Social Work within one college. This college will include the current College of Education, College of Nursing and Health Sciences and College of Business and Public Administration.

The second issue is the shortage of full time nursing faculty to fill vacated positions. The shortage of nurse educators is an international occurrence and the state of the economy in Guam diminishes the program's ability to compete with mainland institutions. The options considered are to train a local pool of experienced BSN nurses on island to be adjunct faculty, develop them to become master-prepared nurse practitioners and educators, recruit from military-related nurses stationed in Guam, and develop full-time faculty toward terminal degrees in nursing.

The third issue is implementing regularly scheduled continuing education programs to help meet the need for CEUs credits mandated for license renewal. CEU offerings should also assist in producing revenues for the college to help sustain the program's ability to achieve its mission and goals.

The fourth issue is refining the articulation of ADN programs from the island jurisdictions, such as the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Palau, Saipan and Pohnpei. This will make the transition of their graduates into the UOG SSBSN track smoother and increase the UOG program's presence in the islands.

The fifth issue is conducting more collaborative research or developing collaborative projects to enhance evidenced-based practice in Guam and the region. A corollary to this is seeking funding for these activities. The program receives funding from PacificCare Asia Pacific but only in relation to increasing the number of nurses on Guam. One avenue for conducting research is student-faculty- facility collaborative activities during the nursing research course given in the Fall semester.

Conclusion

In 1988, the ADN program was changed to the current 4 year BSN program to prepare generalist nurses, teaching them skills for leadership, management and research. It was also designed so that graduates can meet the national entry level standard for practice in community/public health, mental health, school health, health education and health promotion. The standard of baccalaureate education, as the entry level preparation for registered nurses, has been advocated for decades by the American Nurses Association. Locally, nurse leaders and community supporters have advocated for the BSN program, safeguarding its standards and viability.

Considering the issues discussed previously, all nurses, health providers and consumers have a stake in promoting nursing education, advocating for strengthening the BSN program, and holding it accountable for producing well educated nurse graduates who will staff health facilities. It provides baccalaureate preparation, adhering to national accreditation standards. It also now has the capability of providing educational/in-service needs and engaging in research activities.

It is to the advantage of the island and the region to sustain the program in that it is producing nurses of good caliber yearly, and is a preferred avenue for nurses from the island jurisdictions to obtain their BSN. Students enrolled in the program also have the option of testing for the Certified Nurse Aide examination after completing their 200 level courses and testing for Licensed Practical Nurse examination after completing their 300 level courses.

Acknowledgements

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Note: For more information on this course, call the University of Guam nursing office, email the author or go to the website www.uog.edu ■