

An Exploration of Providing Additional Support for Direct Entry Nursing Students

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By
Hannah Spencer
Nursing Major

The College at Brockport
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Thesis Director: Jennifer Chesebro, MSN, FNP-BC Clinical Instructor

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Abstract:

Change can always be hard, especially the transition into a new role. Nursing students across the country struggle to make this transition from a high school to a college student. This struggle is evident with the direct entry nursing students at The College at Brockport. A select few students are chosen out of high school to be directly entered into the nursing program as a freshman. These students are just responsible for maintaining a 3.25 GPA and complete all the required prerequisites. If these students fulfill these requirements they automatically gain entry into the nursing program their junior year. These individuals who earn this privilege of direct entry into the competitive nursing program face great difficulty attending classes, living in the dorms, and socializing with students who are competing for a seat in the program. I explored the effectiveness of a mentor program for these individuals that modeled the mentor programs offered to new graduate nurses at hospitals.

Background:

The Brockport nursing program is extremely competitive to obtain entry into. Freshman students are labeled as nursing intent as they complete the first two years of their prerequisites. There is a lot of stress to maintain high GPA's while completing very difficult classes. There are many resources for nursing intent students. There is even a Living Learning Community (LLC) specifically for these individuals. This is a group that students can be part of within a dormitory that allows nursing intents to live among one another. The dorm provides programs that are geared toward the nursing intent major. During the winter of these students' junior year they apply for a seat in the program and find out if they gained a seat in the spring.

During the application process of acceptance into Brockport as a senior in high school there is the opportunity to obtain direct entry nursing student (DENS) status. Brockport accepts 20-30 DENS in each freshman class the rest of the nursing students are accepted in as nursing intent. As a DENS it is required to maintain a 3.25 GPA and receive a C in all your pre-requisite courses. If these requirements are achieved these students have a seat saved for them their junior year.

Unfortunately, there are not as many resources for these individuals. For example DENS are offered to live in the nursing intent LLC, but it is frowned upon due to their premature acceptance into the program and the competitiveness of the program. It is extremely competitive to obtain entry into the nursing program so nursing intent students often resent DENS. The divide between the DENS and nursing intent students can often cause turmoil within the dorms, classroom, and even the dining halls. It is common for DENS to feel isolated and there are little outlets for them to go to have support through this isolation.

These same challenges are often experienced by new graduate nurses as well. Researchers state that the transition for new nurses is “a challenging time that can be interwoven with stresses, experiences of horizontal violence, feelings of being unprepared, difficulties socializing, reality shock, and personal changes” (Missen, McKenna, & Beauchamp, 2014, p. 2420). Many hospitals have implemented mentor and support programs to combat these challenges. I believe that providing a support group for direct entry nursing students will reduce the alienation these students feel and improve their academic and clinical performance.

Challenges of New Nurses:

There are simple things that need to be taken in account when it comes to the stress free transition of new nurses, “the overwhelming attitudes, behaviors and experiences that are encountered in beginning practice that most influence the quality of transition” (Phillips, Kenny, Esterman, & Smith, 2014, p.110). Bullying from their peers can be a major stressor of these individuals. The bullying within the hospital often stems through, “scheduling, patient assignments and workload, or use of sick and vacation time” (Simons & Mawn, 2010, p.307). This bullying often times leads to alienation and feelings of being alone in this new chapter in a new registered nurse’s life. One hundred eighty-four graduate nurses responded to an open ended survey inquiring about bullying they experienced in the workplace. There were four major themes that came out of this survey that included, “structural bullying; nurses ‘eating their young’; being out of the clique; and leaving the job” (Simons & Mawn, 2010, p.305). Respondents stated this bullying led them to have, “feelings of alienation and not feeling part of the group” (Simons & Mawn, 2010, p.308).

A lot of these same challenges are challenges that our nursing students at Brockport face especially our DENS. Their stresses stem from their lack of confidence in being able to perform the skills required for nursing school, passing prerequisites, and specifically the DENS have the stress of being alienated by the nursing intent students. I personally remember sitting in class among nursing intent students and automatically feeling isolated when the topic of obtaining entry into the nursing program was talked about. My fellow direct entry nursing peers confided in me how when they disclosed that they were DENS intent students would stop sitting with them in class or switch lab partners.

Stress is something that is difficult to completely eliminate especially among a high intensity field like nursing, but there are implementations that can be made in order to reduce it. The main one is providing a support system that understands what these individuals are going through (McDonald, Brown, & Knihnitski, 2018). When exploring the transition of students into nursing school it was found that, "Support has a direct, positive effect on adjustment by buffering the stress of transition and improving student self-esteem" (McDonald, Brown, & Knihnitski, 2018, p.90). This support should be modeled after the successful support and mentor programs among hospitals that help support new graduate nurses. At the Children's Hospital in Los Angeles there was a mentor program implemented for newly graduated nurses. Each newly licensed nurse received a peer and veteran nurse mentor. The participants were surveyed on the effectiveness of this program and, "one hundred per cent of participants commented that having both a peer and veteran mentor were beneficial in transitioning to independent nursing roles" (Verret & Lin, 2016, p. 756).

Research:

We currently see lots of hospitals implementing programs for new graduate nurses in order to make the transition smoother. There has been a great success in these programs. Through a literature review it was determined, "that implementing a supportive transition programme, irrespective of the duration, will assist with positive job satisfaction levels and increased confidence and retention rates" (Missen, McKenna, & Beauchamp, 2014, p. 2430). Often times these programs just allow the new nurses to know they are not alone during this transition period. All they are looking for is a little bit of support and someone to lean on during the challenging days. This added support improves the performance of our new graduate nurses and allows them to provide the best care possible. As a new nurse this support system,

“encourages them to think about their decision-making and develop their clinical judgement, more knowledgeably assess clients and provide holistic care, and incorporate appropriate credible evidence and client preferences into their care.” (Ferguson, 2006, p.112). One of the most successful new graduate programs that have been implemented is mentoring programs. Mentoring provides, “favorable behavioral, attitudinal, health-related, relational, motivational, and career outcomes for mentees” (Navarra et al., 2018, p.21).

There is a huge nursing shortage across our country and it is important to examine all levels of nursing to determine how we can both recruit and keep people in the field. One level that is often overlooked is the student nurse population. There are many parallels between the stresses of nursing school and the stresses of the first year of nursing practice. You are in a new environment learning new information weekly. Also during clinical hours you are in a new space each semester becoming familiar with different units. You are forced to collaborate with a different group of staff members and new lay out of where supplies are. Nursing school is about making adjustments and transitioning from each semester to another as smoothly as possible. This is comparable to the first year as a new graduate nurse. Nursing schools may find that support programs for their students would be beneficial in order to increase retention rates and confidence in their nursing students. This would reflect well both on the students and universities, because the students will be more confident in both class and at their clinical experiences.

One of the main reasons programs like these are not implemented in the hospital are the resources needed to continue to run things like a mentor program. The health care environment can be described as “financially constrained” therefore hospitals already have financial burdens so it is difficult for them to fund programs like these (Halfer, Graf, & Sullivan, 2008, p.243). The

biggest goal that needs to be achieved is achieve leaders support for these programs. It is described by researchers that, “In the financially constrained health care environment, a resource-intensive program can be sustained only by leaders who see quantitative evidence of organizational impact over time” (Halfer, Graf, & Sullivan, 2008, p.243). There is also a shortage of nursing instructors and they are stretched thin with their responsibilities at the universities.

Intervention:

Reflecting on the challenges as a DENS at the College at Brockport I realized that there would be benefits if the college provided a peer mentor program in order to provide support and answer questions. Hospitals across the nation are implementing mentor programs for their new graduate nurses, because they are aware of the stresses the first year of being a nurse can bring. Given I personally was a DENS I was aware of the stresses and difficult situations these students experience the first two years before entering the program. I took it upon myself to collaborate with Jennifer Chesebro, a nursing professor at Brockport, to develop this program. I also had two upper level nursing students who were in the program help me. These students were DENS as freshman as well. I felt it was beneficial to have multiple points of views given that everyone’s experience is different.

The program was designed to provide guidance in scheduling, nursing skills, and most importantly navigating relationships with nursing intent students. As a group we also wanted to explore healthcare community service opportunities. This would help these individuals build their resumes and gain some experience in the healthcare field. All three of us also wanted to expose the students to some nursing skills, because that is one thing we wish we received as

Freshman and Sophomore. The first meeting four students attended and we discussed the nursing paths they wanted to pursue and any healthcare experience they had. The students were freshman at the time, so they also asked questions about the workload to expect as a sophomore. The students were extremely receptive and eager to learn about what there is to expect in the nursing program as they move forward. Concerns were also brought up about how they were being treated by nursing intent students. This was the prime reason for starting this program. It was expressed that once individuals found out the students DENS they stopped collaborating with them in class and stopped eating with them in the dining hall.

The second meeting was held on a different night and at the library instead of the nursing building. After receiving feedback from the students my peers and I determined that a different night and more central location might lead to a higher attendance. Three students attended. None of the students were returners from the previous meeting. The meeting began with them asking questions about the program and workload. At the end of the meeting we taught them how to take a manual blood pressure. The students were very receptive to this and enjoyed learning a nursing skill.

Zero students attended the following two meetings we held. At these meetings we were going to further practice blood pressure and discuss scheduling and acquiring nurse's aide positions over the summer. After reflecting with professor Chesebro and my fellow nursing peers the following fall of 2018 we wanted to try and target the incoming freshman in hopes they would be more receptive.

The College at Brockport requires all freshmen to take a GEP Academic Planning Seminar which teaches students study skills, time management, and all the resources Brockport

has to offer. All the direct entry students are put in the same GEP class. The second week of classes during the Fall 2018 semester I attended this class in order to explain the peer mentor program to them and the support it would offer. I obtained their contact information and offered them mine so they had a point of contact in case they had any questions. I tried to hold a meeting in the library to field any questions and help the students with scheduling difficulties. No students attended the meeting.

At this point I decided the students were not receptive to the program and instead was going to reflect on why these individuals would not want to utilize the resource of a peer mentor program.

There are several reasons why these students did not want to attend these meetings. Often times these students that are DENS are highly motivated and high achieving students. Asking for help for individuals with Type A personalities like these individuals can be challenging. These students are tackling a whole new chapter in their lives that is more challenging than their previous chapter. Students believe that with the title of direct entry nursing student it means they should not be struggling, so they therefore do not ask for help or attend these types of meetings. A study was done where 64 undergraduate women were given a task and were given the option to perform the task on their own, collaborate, or ask for help. It was concluded that overall individuals were nervous and uncomfortable asking for help. DePaulo and Fisher state that individuals asking for help were, “nervous and uncomfortable about approaching the helper and believed that their helper would perceive them as incompetent” (1980, p.32).

Alternative Intervention:

Due to the lack of response I received from the direct entry students I chose to reflect on an alternative way to reach out to these students in a way that would be beneficial to them. I determined that it would be beneficial to partner with some of the area hospitals to implement a mentor program where each student was paired with a nurse. There would be a class incorporated with it similar to GEP. A senior nursing student would teach the class along with a nursing faculty member. Each student would keep in touch with the nurse peer mentor similar to a pen pal relationship asking any questions they may have about nursing or class material.

A lot of the direct nursing students come into the program with limited exposure to the nursing field. A common request of the direct entry students was that they wanted more exposure to the field. I believe by having a mentor who is currently practicing as a nurse will allow them to gain this exposure and determine if they still want to pursue a career in nursing. It would be beneficial for these students to figure out if nursing is not for them, because then their spot can be given to a nursing intent who has determined nursing is for them. It would be helpful for there also to be a shadowing component to the class where each student has the opportunity to shadow their mentor in order for them to see the flow of a nurse's day.

The class would meet weekly and each week there would be a different topic similar to GEP, yet in this class it would strictly be geared towards nursing. For example staff from the area hospitals would come in and speak about patient care tech opportunities for students. They could also speak on behalf of their tuition reimbursement opportunities as well. This would serve as a huge benefit for the hospitals, because it will allow them to start early recruitment of the students to come work for them. By getting them into the hospitals early there is more of a

chance these students will stay and want to be employed by them post-graduation. Figure 1 displays an example of what a sample syllabus would look like for this fifteen week course

Figure 1:

Direct Entry Nursing GEP I

Course Information

Credits	Location	Days	Times
1 Credit	Lennon	Mondays	11:00am-12:00pm

Course Faculty Member(s) Name(s) and Credentials	Office Hours: Location(s), day(s), and time(s)	Contact Information (phone number(s) & email
Senior Students Name Faculty Member's Name	Mon., Wed, and Fri 10am-12pm	Email of both student and faculty member.

Course Overview: This course is designed to allow direct entry nursing students to further explore the nursing field. It will give students the opportunity to learn about the nursing field from several different perspectives which will solidify their career path in nursing and what area they want to pursue. It will also provide students with a mentor who can assist them in the transition into college.

Course Schedule

Date	Topics	Assignment Due
1/28/19	Introduction of class Receive mentor/contact information	
2/4/19	Why nursing? What kind of nurse?	Email mentor Why Nursing Assignment
2/11/19	Patient Care Tech (hospital representative)	Email Mentor

2/18/19	Resume workshop	Email Mentor
2/25/19	Nursing Home Representative	Email Mentor
3/4/19	Hazen Nurse	Email Mentor
3/11/19	Aurora House Representative	Email mentor Course Reflection #1
3/18/19	NO CLASS	Email Mentor
3/25/19	Pediatric Nurse Faculty Member	Email Mentor
4/1/19	Tour of Lathrop	Email Mentor
4/8/19	Maternity Nurse	Email Mentor
4/15/19	Nurse Recruiter Strong	Email Mentor
4/22/19	ICU Nurse	Email Mentor
4/29/19	Nurse Recruiter RGH	Email Mentor Shadow Experience Reflection
5/6/19	Party with Mentors	Email Mentor Course Reflection #2

Assignments:

1. **Why Nursing Assignment-** Two page assignment where the student answers the question of why they chose nursing. The student will also include what kind of nursing they want to pursue and why. Next the student will include a short excerpt of what they would like to get out of this class.
2. **Course Reflection #1-** This reflection will be written half way through the course. The student will reflect on what they have learned and if their nursing path has

changed due to the presentations. Students will also reflect on what they have learned through their mentor.

3. **Shadow Experience**-Students are required to arrange with their mentor a time they can come and shadow for at least two hours.
4. **Shadow Experience Reflection**- Students will write a two page reflection on their shadowing experience. They will discuss what they liked and did not like about the experience. They will also identify three tasks they observed the nurse perform while shadowing.
5. **Course Reflection #2**- Students will reflect on the course as a whole. They will discuss what they learned, if they still want to pursue nursing, and evaluate the effectiveness of the course.
6. **Emailing Mentor**- Students will be required to email their mentor weekly. They must include three questions in their email about any aspect of nursing. They can reflect on challenges or triumphs they have experienced.

I included several other guest speakers and topics that will help make this course a positive experience. I have implemented a resume workshop which can be extremely helpful to new nursing students. The process to write a resume is vastly different for nursing students when compared to the average college student. Nursing resumes should include items that prove the student can interact with people and their future patient population. It can be daunting and confusing for students to start compiling their resumes. These students are younger and may not have a large array of activities to put on their resume, but this workshop can help them receive ideas of what to get involved with. During this workshop it will be explained what recruiters and hospitals are looking for which allows students to plan on participating in events that are outlined in the lecture. These activities will not only allow them to build their resume, but will also allow them to delve deeper in the nursing field.

As mentioned prior students biggest concern was to have more exposure to the nursing field. This course has been designed to allow time for several guest speakers to share their expertise on important aspects of nursing. Some speakers will show aspects of community health nursing which include a nursing home representative, a nurse from the college health center (Hazen), and a representative from a local hospice house like the Aurora House. Other speakers while help represent hospital nursing and these include pediatric nurse faculty member, maternity nurse, and ICU nurse. This large array of different speakers will allow nursing students to be exposed to both community and hospital nursing. It will also give students ideas of areas to volunteer at. For example the Aurora House is a comfort care living home for individuals who have less than three months to live. This organization welcomes volunteers to help care for the patients. This volunteer opportunity is a great resume builder and allows nursing students to practice simple nursing skills like repositioning, feeding patients, and communicating with

patients and their families. Some of the guest speakers will be faculty members which will be beneficial for DENS to meet a variety of the nursing faculty. These faculty members can be mentors as well and, hopefully by meeting a variety of them, students can connect with at least one whom they can go to with any concerns they have going through the process.

Challenges of Implementation:

There are several challenges with implementing this curriculum. Beyond faculty time, this program will not require funding from the college. On the other hand, it will require a large amount of planning and time from those involved. There will need to be 20-30 nurses from area hospitals that will need to agree to become mentors to these students. There also needs to be Brockport nursing faculty members that will be willing to contact the individual speakers and organizations. Although it is a time consuming endeavor there are benefits to all the organizations that will come and speak. The hospitals that will be involved will have the opportunity to recruit future nurses and possible patient care techs. The organizations have the potential to obtain needed volunteers to help run their organizations. Incorporating nurses from area hospitals in this curriculum it will give hospitals opportunity to enhance the leadership skills of their nurses.

Importance of Leadership:

The nurses that we would recruit to be mentors for these students would be nurses that have been practicing for one to two years. These nurses are fresh out of nursing school and will be able to relate to the challenges the DENS are facing. They will be well-equipped to help the students navigate themselves through choosing their nursing focus and taking advantage of opportunities that are offered to them. Also it is a huge benefit for the young nurses to obtain leadership experience with mentoring roles. "Nursing as a profession benefits from mentoring

relationships by ensuring continued growth of future nursing leaders as well as ensuring continuity of highly skilled nurses” (Murray, 2017, p.58). It is extremely important for nurses to eventually take on leadership roles for the growth of both the nurses and institutions. It is thought by researchers that, “leadership represents an indispensable skill in nursing exercise; this skill impacts the quality of institutions on its organizational culture and labor relations” (Amestoy, Trindade, da Silva, dos Santos, Ferrerira, 2017, p.2). Leadership is an important trait all nurses must have whether they obtain a leadership role in the future or not. Nurses are going to have to be leaders when advocating for their patients or when they need to speak up about incidents they encounter. Murray addresses that, “the nursing profession must produce leaders throughout the health care system, from the bedside to the boardroom, who can serve as full partners with other health care professionals and be accountable for their own contributions to delivering high-quality care while working collaboratively with leaders from other health professions” (2017, p.45).

Through this experience, these nurses will be able to explore their leadership abilities. One of the first steps to becoming a leader is assessing your leadership styles, strengths, and weaknesses. “Nurse leaders and managers who have an accurate understanding of their own capabilities will have a team that can provide better results” (Murray, 2017, p.54). This early identification of how they lead will at the very least provide these floor nurses with a stronger nursing foundation. It will also strengthen the relationship between these nurses and their nurse managers, because they will be forced to coordinate their shadowing and mentor experiences with them. A survey was performed in 2017 by the Health Leaders Media Intelligence Unit where they surveyed 266 hospitals about their top nursing challenges and 33% of respondents said nurse leadership development was the top challenge (Bees, 2017).

Conclusion:

There are a vast amount of benefits for students, mentors and the community. Nursing students will gain more exposure to nursing before starting the program and have the ability to network with the local hospitals at the same time. Also through this extra course students will gain a larger support system that they can utilize throughout their college career. The nurse mentors themselves will be able to grow in their leadership abilities and network with higher level staff at the hospital. Amongst it all the community would greatly benefit from this program as well. The hospitals will have the opportunity to recruit individuals who are enthusiastic about their career goals. Also the local speakers and organizations have the opportunity to increase their volunteerism of qualified nursing students. Currently this program is in the midst of being proposed to the necessary personal that would enable us to enact this into the DENS curriculum.

Overall the purpose of this program is to serve a segment of the student population who is in need. DENS are in need of support during the years in between high school and the start of the nursing program. Through a mentorship these individuals will be able to solidify their nursing path and be connected to a well-balanced support system.

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