A Closer Look at the Latino BSN Student
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Abstract

While the population of the United States has become more diverse, almost 90% of the nursing workforce continues to be made up of White, non-Hispanics. The Comprehensive Support for Disadvantaged Students (CSDS) program offered to educationally or economically disadvantaged Bachelors of Science Nursing students. The University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) School of Nursing (SON) addresses the need to diversify the nursing workforce through the retention of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities. Methods: Retention strategies include: (1) social work interventions; (2) academic enrichment programs; (3) financial stipends; (4) group workshops to address the academic needs of at-risk Latino students; (5) faculty mentoring; and (6) support groups for English Language Learners. Results: Eight of the nine Latino students have been retained since the inception of the project in July 2009. Implications: A program that addresses the academic, social and financial needs of students can be successful in contributing to an increase Latino nurses.”

Keywords: nursing, ethnic minorities, Latino nurses
Introduction

According to Minority Nurse, the population of the United States has become more diverse and almost 90% of the nursing workforce continues to be White, non-Hispanics. The local nursing workforce in Kansas City, Missouri is not representative of the population, and this disparity can result in health care that is not represented, culturally. The CSDS program offered to Hispanic Bachelors of Science Nursing students at University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) School of Nursing (SON), addresses the need to diversify the nursing workforce and increase the pool of culturally competent nurses through the retention of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with an emphasis on underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities. This paper looks at the barriers to success faced by these underrepresented minority students and describes the components of a successful retention program for Latino students.

Barriers to Success for Minority Students

A number of barriers that effect college success have been identified for undergraduate Latino students from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. Before getting to a college campus, barriers include deficient secondary academic preparation, limited high school career counseling, and a lack of academic financial support (Baron & Swider, 2009). Students who actually gain admission to college must often work outside the home while in college (Hood, 2010). A very limited number of professional role models and mentors or practicing nurses, with whom they can look up to. (de Leon Siantz, 2011).

Latino Program Eligibility

Program participants were students at UMKC-SON, from educationally or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, living in Jackson County, Missouri, Wyandotte, and Johnson Counties in Kansas. Eligible students had an educational background with at least one of the following conditions: (1) English not the primary language and language is still a barrier to academic performance; (2) first generation in family to attend college; (3) from a county with less than 50% of the population with a high school education; (4) graduation from a high school where at least 30% of students had free or reduced price lunches; and (5) from a high school district in which per capita school funding falls in the C+ or below grade.

Of the 45 program participants, 29% (N = 13) were African-American, .09% Asian (N= 4), 20% Hispanic (N=9), .02% Native American (N=1) and 40% Caucasian (N=18). Of these, 78% (N = 35) were economically disadvantaged by federal guidelines (HRSA, 2011) and 22% (N = 10) were classified as educationally disadvantaged.

Retention Program Content

Early recognition of at-risk students can serve as a voice to support services, in turn preventing academic failure or withdrawal from school (Reason, 2009). The three-year (2009-2012) CSDS program addresses the need to diversify the nursing workforce and provide the necessary support services that allow and note taking, and as a result, spend more time studying and preparing for classes. It is easy for them to become overwhelmed and fall behind in their coursework, resulting in feelings of self-doubt, shame, and fear of failure. This often leads to doubt in their ability to obtain a degree. Other students face non-academic challenges that can overwhelm them, such as financial constraints that make it necessary for them to balance work, school and family. Inadequate time for schoolwork results in poor grades.
students to be successful in their program. Retention strategies include a combination of: 1) social work interventions; 2) academic enrichment programs; 3) financial stipends; 4) group workshops to address the academic needs of at-risk Latino students; (5) faculty mentoring; and (6) support groups for English Language Learners.

Financial Issues

One barrier to the retention was unanticipated financial problems. Students voiced difficulty staying in school when unexpected financial constraints arose and they were unable to pay for rent, utilities, groceries, or other essential living expenses. Forty-five students in the program received a yearly $2,500 stipend in their sophomore, junior and senior years, to reduce financial stress, allowing them to concentrate on their education.

Academic Enrichment

The mentoring program pairs Latino students with a community nurse, with mentors recruited from the School’s Alumni Association, professional organizations, and the local chapter of the Hispanic Nurse Association. Mentors worked with a minority nurse, who has specific mentorship skills, in a three-hour training that provided them with an overview of their responsibilities, expectations, and boundaries of the mentor/mentee relationship, and strategies to engage the mentees. The project coordinator matched students with trained mentors and the pairs met monthly.

Group Workshops

For students whose first language was not English, including Spanish language dominant Latino students, unique challenges surrounding acquisition of the English language and American culture existed. This population of students often expressed difficulty with reading and comprehending technical texts, resulting in issues such as the need to read assigned chapters multiple times in order to understand the content. These students also had difficulty understanding the cultural nuances of the English language, medical terminology, and some health care concepts. The English Language Learner (ELL) support group evolved to respond to these unique needs. The support group met regularly with native English speaking students who served as peer tutors for ELL students and to discuss academic and acculturation issues. Tutors also guided Language Learners to succeed in challenging courses. Since developing fluency in English takes practice, ELL students were encouraged to talk within small informal settings and practice their communication skills, in order to gain confidence in their English-speaking abilities. The school social worker facilitated the ELL sessions and worked one-on-one with students to improve note taking, study, and testing skills.

Social Work Interventions

The CSDS program was coordinated by a social worker that identified a significant need within the student population, with a masters degree. SON data showed that, in addition to financial and academic supports, students social-support needs, such as problems with housing, child care, employment, and personal issues, were potential barriers to success in the undergraduate nursing program.

The social worker provided services to program participants through assessment, conflict mediation, resiliency building, community referrals, suicide, drug and alcohol prevention and intervention and crisis intervention. Additionally, the social worker helped students improve self-concept, cope with stress and develop decision-making skills. These services were based on the social worker’s strength perspectives, or an individual’s ability to function competently even in the presence of major life stressors.

Working in collaboration with school psychologists, school counselors, school faculty and administrators, the Social Worker integrated information from all of these sources to provide social, emotional, behavioral and adaptive functioning support to the student, the student’s family and the school.
Mentoring by Trained Faculty

Students in the program received academic advising from faculty who had received additional training on how to assist disadvantaged students. The academic advisors developed plans of study for students on an individual basis, factoring in the results of their Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS). The test measured readiness in math, science, reading, and English. In addition to the TEAS, students underwent an assessment of writing and computing skills to determine the need for additional preparation prior to admission into the nursing program. Participants also received an additional academic advising session prior to the midterm of each semester when there was still time to identify struggling students with problem areas, such as low grades. Struggling students were referred to Supplemental Instruction, UMKC’s Writing Lab, UMKC’s Math lab, and other tutorial opportunities. The additional advising meeting per semester provided extra academic support referrals and served as a relationship-building experience.

Implications for Retaining Hispanic Students

Outcomes for students who participated in the program were encouraging. Of the 45 students who participated, 85% were retained including eight of the nine Hispanic students. An exit survey completed by the one Latino student who dropped out of the program indicated the student had personal issues resulting in her inability to stay in school, specifically, the need to work and care for her children, ages two and four.

Conclusion

Retention of Hispanic and other underrepresented students is a challenge. However, the benefits justify the effort required. Given the current critical shortage of nurses from underrepresented minority groups, formal retention programs such as CSDS are essential if nursing is to successfully address the lack of diversity in the health care workforce. A more diverse nursing workforce is essential for better health outcomes for a diverse America and for reduction of health disparities (Institute of Medicine, 2010; Sullivan, 2004).

References


