

Holistic Admissions: Blinding the Process, Seeing Results

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BACKGROUND

Samuel Merritt University's (SMU) Nursing Workforce Diversity (NWD) Program continues to address a documented need to increase nursing education opportunities for students who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. SMU's mission is to "educate students to become highly-skilled and compassionate health care professionals who positively transform the experience of care in diverse communities." Even though minority groups comprise 40.3% of the U.S. population, only 24.7% of registered nurses come from those groups (African Americans and Hispanics comprise a total of 14.7%). Multiple studies have shown that this lack of diversity among healthcare providers negatively affects patient outcomes, in part because many patients prefer to seek care from providers of their own race. Holistic Admission, a thoughtful and systematic approach, has demonstrated success in increasing admissions of ethnic and racial minorities to healthcare professional programs, including nursing schools.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this poster is to describe revisions to the College of Nursing (CON) Admissions process and the resultant increase in the number of African American and Latino students enrolled in the BSN program.

METHODS

- Full-time **faculty role** added participation in the admission process as essential.
- **CON Admission Committee** structure was formalized; members participated in various Holistic Admissions trainings facilitated by AACN, SMU Diversity and Inclusion forums, and skill-building activities (e.g., how to grade rubrics with consistency)
- **Experiences, Attitudes, & Metrics (EAMs)** were rebalanced within screening rubrics to reflect SMU values (e.g., diversity, structural competence)
- **Metrics blind** processes were implemented. Faculty scored applicant essays without knowledge of corresponding metrics.
- **Applicant selection.** EAM scores were electronically calculated & prioritized. Final candidates were reviewed and confirmed by BSN Chair.

RESULTS

- **Faculty participation** in admissions screening and selection processes increased from two faculty and one administrator to twelve faculty and one administrator.
- **Qualified** African American and Latino applicants were consistently admitted.
- **Student admission and enrollment** increased among African Americans (3.6% to 15.1%) and Latino (25.7 to 28.7%) BSN students from 2015 to 2020.
- **Unique challenges** of a diverse environment were made more visible (e.g., biases among faculty, biases among students, and needs to balance academic efforts with long work hours and family and cultural obligations).

DISCUSSION

- Our results are consistent with published reports of similar projects.
- The applicant pool and enrollment of African American and Latino nursing students increased in response to the metrics blind admission process, faculty training, commitment to diversity, strong collaboration with admissions staff, institutional support, consultations with AACN Holistic Admissions staff and the NWD grant financial resources.
- Faculty are committed to continuing enhancements to all phases of the Holistic Admissions process (e.g., interrater reliability of rubrics, innovative recruitment strategies and pipeline access at lower grade levels, expanding restorative practices to address the dynamics within an increasingly diverse academic environment).

