

Holistic Admissions: Successes and Lessons Learned

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Abstract

An area of focus in nursing education is to increase admission rates of underrepresented rural nursing students and other underrepresented groups. Literature illustrates the importance of diversity among students pursuing health care professions. Such initiatives will lead to diverse providers to meet the needs of growing multicultural and rural populations. Our poster focuses on the positive impact that grant funding has had on the holistic review admission process that we implemented at Viterbo University School of Nursing in May 2020 for the Fall 2020 cohort. Funding has allowed us to develop and implement holistic review as a strategy to increase diversity in the nursing student body and subsequently in the professional nursing workforce. We illustrate our successes and lessons learned in developing a holistic admissions process that focused on rural and Hispanic populations. Deeply rooted in our successes is our School's mission which has provided a foundation for holistic review. We also highlight our future commitments to grow and refine the process further. Strengthening and evaluating holistic admissions will lead to positive outcomes to meet the needs of our students, program and community.



Introduction

The Nursing for Underrepresented Rural Students seeking Educational Success (NURSES) scholarship program is a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funded Nursing Workforce Development Program that began in 2017. The goal of this program is to increase the number of nurses who are prepared and willing to serve rural populations. Recipients of the scholarship are students from underrepresented backgrounds living in rural areas, with the recruitment focus on the Hispanic population. One of the program objectives is to increase enrollment of rural, disadvantaged students into the BSN program to impact the rural nursing workforce shortage and improve rural health outcomes. Viterbo University School of Nursing implemented a holistic application review process as a strategy to increase the diversity of the rural health workforce. Viterbo has partnered with the American Association of Colleges of Nurses (AACN) to provide customized services in the development of a holistic review process, as well as strategies for student recruitment of underrepresented groups in nursing.



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Method

A multi-faceted approach using the AACN's recommendations of using a balance of applicant experiences, attributes and academic metrics (EAMs) to create a diverse applicant pool and student body. This process is grounded in data that provides evidence supporting the selection process.

Measurements that reflect EAMs include:

- Grade point average
- Three student essays
- Letter of recommendation
- Resume

The Nursing Admission Review Team utilizes an evaluative method that ranks students based on the assessment and measurement of EAMs.

Results

- Cumulative and GPA and retention data comparison

Cohort	GPA average	Retention
Fall 2018	3.33	90%
Fall 2019	3.40	91%
Fall 2020	3.36	94%

- Essay: Personal attributes of a successful nurse

"Forming meaningful relationships has taught me so much about the people I work with and truly makes me love what I do."

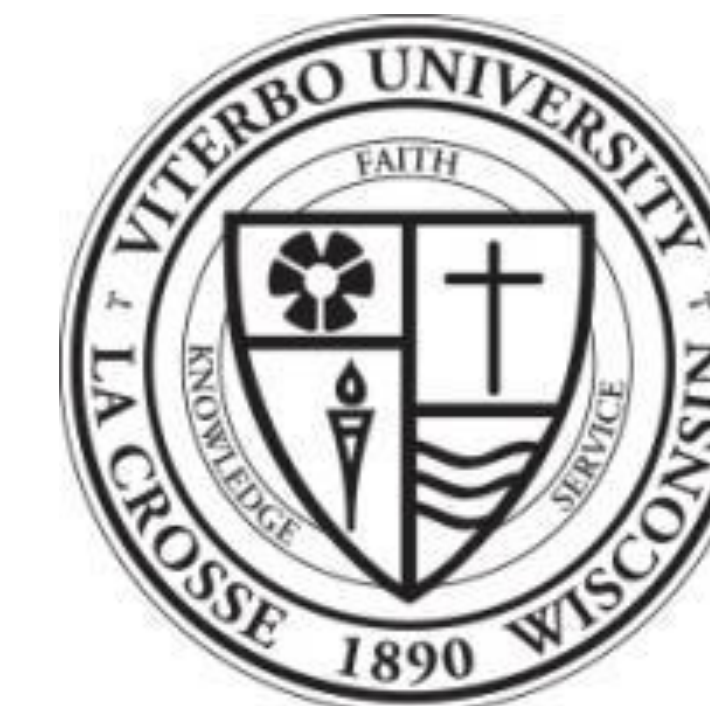
"I understand that no matter what someone is going through, I can help by listening and trying to understand what the patient is saying and making sure they are more at ease with the situation before moving on with my other duties".

- Gender of applicants - overall increase in males, especially transfer student population
 - Fall 2018 96% female 4% male (baseline)
 - Fall 2020 92% female 8% male (internal)
 - Fall 2020 83% female 17% male (transfer)
- Preliminary evidence shows a more diverse applicant pool including rural, Hispanic and male students applying to the nursing program
- 14 to 20 (43%) increase in diversity of Hispanic students admitted into the Professional Nursing Sequence (PNS) during the grant period.
- Limitations: Only two semesters of data currently available for analysis since 2020 implementation of the new holistic admission process.

Successes

- Opportunity to increase student diversity leading to a diverse nursing workforce
- Applicant pool meeting or outnumbering available seats
- Stronger collaboration between nursing, admissions and advising
- Greater inclusivity in admission policies based on expanded evaluative criteria
- Evaluation of students through a holistic lens
- Potential to expand holistic admissions to other disciplines
- Interest and buy-in from external stakeholders to promote a diverse workforce
- Selection criteria clearly linked to the School of Nursing mission and core values to promote diversity and to achieve institutional excellence.
- Meticulous adherence to the holistic admissions process and to the data analysis of applicant EAMs.
- Individualized consideration by the team related to how each applicant may contribute to the School's learning environment.
- Funding for strategies in the areas of student recruitment and student retention

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Lessons Learned

The importance of:

- promoting understanding of the holistic admissions process among all levels of the university community from faculty to top administrators
- addressing unconscious bias and beliefs during holistic admissions training process
- allowing for continuous open communication for all stakeholders in the university system
- realizing that holistic admissions process takes longer to implement than anticipated requiring great patience and transparency along the way.
- securing added university resources to meet the needs of a diverse student population
- developing ways to meet increase in demand of available seats – including clear communication with students and families
- adhering to continuous quality improvement and patience when glitches occur in the process.

Future Commitments

- Continuous data collection of student EAMs to analyze future trends in admissions
- Increase resources to expand the process to include applicant interviews
- Maintain current knowledge of evidence based practice related to holistic admissions processes
- Assess the use and weight of current metrics to pinpoint student strengths and challenges which can trigger earlier implementation of student resources.
- Share holistic admission resources and process with other disciplines and other nursing programs within the university
- Collecting student feedback on the holistic review process



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