Supporting BIPOC and First-Generation Students' Transition to College

Jennifer Saylor, PhD, APRN, ACNS-BC
University of Delaware

Jennifer S. Graber, EdD, APRN, PMHCNS-BC
University of Delaware

Shayla Crawford-Hymon, MEd
University of Delaware

Zachary Gurock, MA
University of Delaware

Elizabeth Speakman EdD, RN, ANEF, FNAP, FAAN
University of Delaware

ABSTRACT

Background: The literature is replete with data suggesting that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and first-generation college (FGC) students need more support during their transition to college.

Methods: This descriptive, cross-sectional pilot study examined students' satisfaction and program outcomes after skills and team building events in the Connecting Future Caregivers Program (CFCP). This study occurred at a research-intensive university in the mid-Atlantic region. Data were collected using post-event, anonymous evaluation surveys that included Likert-type questions and open-ended questions.

Results: After a skills building simulation event, students realized that healthcare providers must listen, ask clarification questions ($M = 5.00[0.58]$), and be aware of body language ($M = 5.29[0.76]$). Within one month, some students felt overwhelmed with coursework ($M = 4.29[1.11]$), yet most planned on using their newly learned skills ($M = 5.57[0.49]$).

Conclusion: Programs like the CFCP demonstrated that a more deliberate and proactive approach cultivates a supportive community for BIPOC and FGC students.

BACKGROUND

Healthcare inequity remains a topic of concern for those in healthcare professions. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Smith & Blank, 2023) found that among the top 25 healthcare occupations, 61% of workers are White. In some healthcare professions, the inequity is even greater, with 91% of speech-language pathologists, 80% of occupational therapists, 78% of physician assistants, and 75% of nurse practitioners identifying as White (Smith & Blank, 2023). The nursing profession also faces this challenge. Approximately 80% of registered nurses are White compared to 60% of the general population (Smiley et al., 2023), and only 30% of college students are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and first-generation college (FGC) students from all races (Schuyler et al., 2021). Only 37.1% of nursing students in basic nursing programs are from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds (National League for Nursing, 2023). Even though it is important to recruit and retain students from minoritized backgrounds (Burnett et al., 2020), we must simultaneously increase the number of ethnic/minority faculty beyond the current rate of 19.2% (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2022).

The lack of diversity in healthcare professions contributes to inequities in health outcomes (Crooks et al., 2021; Matthews et al., 2022). Healthcare providers from diverse backgrounds are more likely to serve in areas with shortages and provide care to underserved populations (Togioka et al., 2024). Shared cultural experiences or similar race/ethnicity may increase patients seeking and adhering to health care, which is also the foundation for Leininger's Theory of Culture Care Diversity and Universality (McFarland & Wehbe, 2019). This theory emphasizes that healthcare providers must understand and integrate cultural knowledge into healthcare practices to provide a comprehensive, meaningful, and effective plan of care.

Concomitantly, there are noted barriers to success, such as feeling uncomfortable seeking help while under stress, which can stem from racist attitudes on campus, feeling isolated, and the rigor of curricula that are often immediately imposed on BIPOC and FGC students without an adequate orientation (Attis-Josias, 2023; Schuyler et al., 2021). Healthcare curricula are some of the more difficult and rigorous on campus with an increased science and math focus as well as heavier credit loads during the semester. One method of alleviating stress for BIPOC students entering predominantly White institutions may be the deliberate development of programs that foster strong peer support communities (Burnett et al., 2020; Crooks et al., 2021; Matthews et al., 2022; Montgomery et al., 2021; Schuyler et al., 2021). An effective peer support program must provide meaningful, iterative, and non-hierarchical support designed to avoid perceptions of imposed benevolence from faculty and staff (Metzger et al., 2020; Montgomery et al., 2021; Wake, 2022). Therefore, this pilot study aimed to develop the Connecting Future Caregivers Program (CFCP) that facilitates community-building and enhances academic success strategies without positioning faculty and staff as benevolent authorities, providing knowledge to BIPOC and FGC nursing students.

Connecting Future Caregivers Program

The CFCP began as an initiative to support BIPOC and all races of FGC nursing students who identified that a major obstacle to transitioning from high school to college was the ability to develop a sense of community and belonging within the university and the nursing program. Interestingly, this sentiment is echoed by BIPOC nurses in the profession, who report being discounted, having a lack of community integration, and having difficulty meeting others in marginalized groups (Iheduru-Anderson, 2020). One of the obstacles described in the literature is low enrollment

and subsequent completion of nursing programs by people of color (Montgomery et al., 2021). The underpinnings for the CFCP strategies were based on Leininger's Theory of Culture Care Diversity and Universality, which states that delivering healthcare that aligns with an individual's cultural belief, values, and practices is crucial for health and well-being (McFarland & Wehbe, 2019). In the CFCP, first-year students moved onto campus early, participated in skills building simulations, engaged in events throughout the year focused on academic and social support, and connected with other BIPOC and FGC students and the nursing faculty and staff.

METHODS

This descriptive, cross-sectional pilot study examined students' satisfaction, program outcomes after each CFCP event, and retention in the nursing program. A university Institutional Review Board approved this pilot study.

Participants and Setting

This pilot program took place at a research-intensive university in the Mid-Atlantic region with approximately 700 traditional baccalaureate nursing students, among those are 170 newly admitted freshman nursing students. The Office of Admissions sent an email invitation to all admitted and deposited first-year, BIPOC and all FGC nursing students within a 70-mile radius from campus. To assist the incoming first-year students with the college transition, the advisers and leadership selected peer mentors to be part of this program. The mentors would attend the CFC events and support the first-year students. Among the invited students, 16 nursing students (10 first year and 6 peer mentors) agreed and participated in the CFCP.

The pilot CFCP included five in-person events, including an early move-in event, and two additional events each semester during the first year of college. These 1 to 2 hour events had snacks and refreshments, which occurred in the School of Nursing's Dean's Suite, were scheduled around the first-year students' courses. Although both the fall semester events (Move-In Weekend, Healthcare Theatre© and Study Skills Development) and the spring semester events (Vision Board making and a Final Painting Party) were attended, the researchers noted that spring attendance was lower, possibly related to being scheduled too close to examinations. Therefore, the authors focused this manuscript on the fall semester events. It is also important to note that this pilot program received a small grant that covered early residence hall move-in fees and programming expenditures.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using cross-sectional, post-event surveys with two email reminders sent one week apart. The surveys were anonymous. Due to the small sample size, researchers did not collect demographics or year in college. Each evaluation survey had eight questions that differed based on the event and a few open-ended questions. Using a 6-point Likert-type scale, students responded with their level of agreement with statements about each event, with 1 being *Strongly Disagree* and 6 being *Strongly Agree*. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the post-event evaluations. Each program was analyzed using means, standard deviation, and range for each survey response. The sample size varied based on the number of students that attended each event and completed the survey. The results section includes a description and evaluation of each CFC event with more details in Table 1.

Table 1

Connecting Future Caregivers Program Post Event Evaluation Among Nursing Students Who Were Asked if They Agree or Disagree with the Following Statements after the Healthcare Theatre and Studying Skills Events Using a Likert-Type Scale.*

CFCP Program Events	Mean (SD)	Median	Range
Healthcare Theatre Event** (N=7)			
Listen & ask questions for clarification	5.00 (0.58)	5.0	4-6
Patience while patients express their thoughts	5.43 (0.79)	6.0	4-6
Awareness of body language while listening to patient	5.29 (0.76)	5.0	4-6
Effectively restate and clarify information in a conversation	5.14 (0.90)	5.0	4-6
Communicate effectively with people from different cultural groups	5.57 (0.53)	6.0	5-6
Become impatient when people do not express their thoughts and opinions clearly	3.14 (1.21)	3.0	2-5
When I'm not sure about what someone is saying to me, rather than ask questions, I'll wait to learn more	3.88 (0.69)	4.0	3-5
I can determine when to ask open-ended and close ended questions	4.86 (0.90)	5.0	3-6
Building Study Skills Event (N=8)			
Having trouble studying	4.14 (1.57)	4.0	2-6
Feeling overwhelmed with the amount of coursework	4.29 (1.11)	4.0	3-6
Planned on using the discussed studying tips	5.71 (0.49)	5.0	5-6
Plan on pursuing hobbies outside of nursing	5.5 (0.53)	5.5	5-6
I feel supported by the staff/faculty in the SON	5.25 (0.71)	5.0	4.6
I believe that equality in healthcare is pertinent	5.5 (0.76)	6.0	4-6
I experienced quality care from a nurse prompting me to pursue the profession	4.63 (1.71)	5.5	2-6
I look forward to attending more CFCP events	5.5 (0.78)	5.0	4-6

*6-point Likert Scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

** Healthcare Theater Event was a Freeze Frame Scenario: Communication with a Culturally Diverse Patient.

RESULTS

On the overall program evaluation, students noted that the CFCP "made me realize how important my role [registered nurse] is" and "it [CFCP] gave me so much respect for nurses because they have to put up with a lot of different types of people and remain professional when people may be disrespecting them." One student summed up the CGC program by saying, "It made me excited for the future." Results from each event are described below.

Building a Community with Move-In Weekend

The CFCP began with residence hall move-in 2 days early, at no additional cost to the student, so that community building could begin. Families were invited to attend a welcome dinner and lectures with guest speakers on the first day. An accomplished, local BIPOC nurse with national and international recognition provided the first presentation focused on nurses' impact at all levels (locally, nationally, and globally) and reminded everyone that nursing is an art and a science. Another locally well-known Black nurse and state legislator educated students on her journey and the variety of career options in nursing. After this event, families moved their students into the residence hall and returned home. Most students stated that family members work in the healthcare field which piqued their interest in nursing. Students reported that they enjoyed listening to both speakers and felt most engaged when they shared their experiences as nurses. One student said, "The speakers were very impressive and inspiring." Another student stated, "I enjoyed hearing about different paths into higher education and how to strive for more after getting your bachelor's." Based on the evaluation, the authors are pleased to note that students have high expectations of the staff and faculty.

Healthcare Theatre©

Healthcare Theatre© is a collaboration between the College of Health Sciences and the College of Arts and Sciences that trains students and community partners to be simulated patients that help train healthcare students in many specialties (Cowperthwait et al., 2021). This program uses a transformative approach, allowing Healthcare Theater© students and their family members to act as patients so healthcare students can gain practical experience in interpersonal communication and technical skills by practicing in a safe environment. CFCP students engaged with Healthcare Theatre© and two simulation experiences the morning after move-in. In the Healthcare Theatre Freezeframe© technique, the students can freeze the scenario and ask the audience for help with a quick debriefing, followed by another student who continues the scenario, until everyone has participated (Cowperthwait et al., 2021). The first simulation was a visit to a provider's office, where the patient used a crutch and spoke with a speech impediment. The students witnessed unprofessional behavior from the clerk. The second simulation was a hospital discharge of an agitated patient admitted for alcohol poisoning who was living with her partner, who did not want her discharged. The CFC program students role-played using communication skills, were debriefed, and had time for self-reflection.

Evaluation surveys were distributed asking students to rate their ability with communication and basic listening skills. Based on the evaluations, students listen carefully, and then ask clarifying questions ($M = 5.00[0.58]$, range 4-6), are patient when people are having trouble expressing their thoughts ($M = 5.43[0.79]$, range 4-6), are aware of body language while listening ($M = 5.29[0.76]$, range 4-6), and effectively restate and clarify information in a conversation ($M = 5.14 [0.90]$, range 4-6). The students also strongly agreed that they can communicate effectively with people from different cultural groups ($M = 5.57[0.53]$, range 5-6).

Overall, the students realized that nurses must listen carefully, ask clarification questions, be aware of body language while listening, and effectively restate and clarify information in a conversation. One student responded, "Every patient is different, and you need to be able to adjust and think quickly on your feet." Another student noted, "Every [nursing] action that is done has the ability to impact another person whether it is small or not to me [student]

it can affect someone's emotions and perspective." Students felt having the ability to learn these skills early in their academic career increased their preparation for the nursing program.

Building Study Skills

During the beginning of the fall semester, and in collaboration with the Office of Academic Enrichment, CFCP students learned time management, study skills, organizational skills, and how to combat procrastination. After the presentation, the first-year students had time to network with the mentors and learn about the amount of work in nursing school. Just a few weeks into the fall semester, CFCP post-study skills events revealed that some students reported having trouble studying ($M = 4.14[1.57]$, range 2-6) and feeling overwhelmed with the amount of coursework ($M = 4.29[1.11]$, range 3-6). However, most planned on using the discussed studying tips ($M = 5.57[0.49]$, range 5-6).

DISCUSSION

Researchers sought to develop and evaluate a program that facilitates community-building and enhances academic success strategies for BIPOC and FGC nursing students entering college. There is a need to recruit more BIPOC healthcare professional students; however, this must be coupled with a supportive community encompassing academic, social, and emotional support while in college (Burnett et al., 2020; Matthews et al., 2022; Schuyler et al., 2021). While many universities have made institutional level changes regarding increasing support for BIPOC students (Matthews et al., 2022), the CFCP provides student-level data with specific departmental programming. While BIPOC and FGC students are the minority at some universities, such as the study site, the CFCP provided our BIPOC and FGC nursing students with a sense of community before the whole student body returned for the semester. This community continued throughout the year with events that focused on academic and social support.

While the events were met with positive feedback, the School of Nursing plans on hosting events for these student groups to combat attrition and graduate more BIPOC and FGC nurses. Two events are planned for their upcoming semester as students' progress into their second year, a vision board event to draft their preferred second-year outcomes for a positive and successful semester, and a review of the first-year coursework in preparation for second year nursing courses. The plan includes faculty teaching techniques that prepare the student with the application and critical judgment skills necessary for nursing courses. Additional plans include monthly activities that include more frequent check-ins, course reviews, mentor panels, and guest speakers.

Limitations

There were several limitations as this was a pilot program that received minimal funding. The sample size was small ($n = 16$) and did not capture all BIPOC and FGC students in the program as not all students agreed to participate in the CFCP. All CFCP participants actively engaged in Move-In Weekend, but not all participants attended events held during the semester. The CFCP also only focused on the School of Nursing, which sits in the College of Health Sciences and includes several other healthcare professional programs, limiting the generalizability. Future studies should include other programs outside of nursing.

CONCLUSION

This pilot program suggests that the CFCP achieved a level of success in meeting program goals. For example, after the initial weekend many of the BIPOC and FGC students gravitated toward sitting with their fellow CFCP colleagues during class orientation instead of sitting alone. The authors posit that developing a sense of belonging fosters professional growth and will have a direct correlation to retaining BIPOC and FGC students. Yet, securing permanent funding has been a challenge. This year, through a small School of Nursing grant, the CFCP program is scheduled to enroll its next class of students. The goal remains to continue to offer and increase enrollment in the CFCP program and to use attrition, graduation, NCLEX pass rates, and employment rates as benchmarks for programming success. The success of this program could foster development of similar programs in other departments within the College of Health Sciences. The authors firmly believe in the tenants of offering underserved and underrepresented students the ability to build life-long connections with their classmates, student mentors, and faculty members, and form relationships to help support them throughout their entire career.

REFERENCES

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2022). *Reimaging nursing education 2022 annual report.* www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/Publications/Annual-Reports/2022-AACN-Annual-Report.pdf

Attis-Josias, M. (2023). BIPOC nursing students' perceived barriers to help-seeking when under stress. *Nursing Forum, 2023*, 5977511. https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/5977511

Burnett, A., Moorley, C., Grant, J., Kahin, M., Sagoo, R., Rivers, E., Deravin, L., & Darbyshire, P. (2020). Dismantling racism in education: In 2020, the year of the nurse & midwife, "it's time." *Nursing Education Today*, 93, 104532. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2020.104532

Cowperthwait, A., Graber, J., Carlsen, A., Cowperthwait, M. & Mekulski, H. (2021). Innovations in virtual education for clinical and simulation learning. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 37*(5), 1011-1017. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2021.06.010

Crooks, N., Smith, A., & Lofton, S. (2021). Building bridges and capacity for Black, Indigenous, and scholars of color in the era of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter. *Nursing Outlook, 69*(5), 892–902. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2021.03.022

Iheduru-Anderson K. (2020). Barriers to career advancement in the nursing profession: Perceptions of black nurses in the United States. *Nursing Forum, 55*(4), 664-677. https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12483

Matthews, A. K., Abboud, S., Smith, A. U., Smith, C., Jeremiah, R., Hart, A., & Weaver, T. (2022). Strategies to address structural and institutional barriers to success among students of color in nursing programs. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 40*, 96–104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2022.03.005

McFarland, M. R., Wehbe, H. B. (2019). Leininger's theory of culture care diversity and universality: An overview with a historical retrospective and a view toward the future. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 30*(6), 540 –557. https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659619867134

Metzger, M., Dowling, T., Guinn, J., & Wilson, D.T. (2020). Inclusivity in baccalaureate nursing education: A scoping study. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 36*(1), 5-14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2019.06.002

Montgomery, T. M., Bundy, J. R., Cofer, D., & Nicholls, E. M. (2021). Black Americans in nursing education: Reflecting on the past and looking toward the future. *American Nurse Journal*, *16*(2), 22-25. http://www.myamericannurse.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/an2-Black-Education-112.pdf

National League for Nursing. (2023). *NLN releases new survey results of nursing schools & programs showing persistent challenges to addressing the nursing shortage.* https://www.nln.org/detail-pages/news/2023/09/25/nln-releases-new-survey-results-of-nursing-schools-programs-showing-persistent-challenges-to-addressing-the-nursing-shortage

Schuyler, S.W., Childs, J.R, & Poynton, T.A. (2021). Promoting success for first generation students of color: The importance of academic, transitional adjustment, and mental health supports. *Journal of College Access*, *6*(1), Article 4. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jca/vol6/iss1/4

Smiley, R.A., Allgeyer, R.L., Shobo, Y., Lyons, K.C, Letourneau, R., Zhong, E., Kaminski-Ozturk, N., & Alexander, M. (2023). The 2022 national nursing workforce survey. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, *14*(1), S1-S90. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2155-8256(23)00047-9

Smith, S. & Blank, A. (2023). *Healthcare occupations: Characteristics of the employed.* Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2023/healthcare-occupations-in-2022/

Togioka, B. M., Duvivier, D., & Young, E. (2024, May 2). *Diversity and discrimination in health care.* StatPearls. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK568721/

Wake, B. (2022). Service or saviorism: Deconstructing benevolent racism in the helping professions. In K.F. Johnson, N.M. Sparkman-Key, A. Meca, & S.Z. Tarver (Eds.), *Developing anti-racist practices in the helping professions: Inclusive theory, pedagogy, and application* (pp. 93-110). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95451-2_6

Address author correspondence to:
Jennifer Saylor, PhD, APRN, ACNS-BC
jsaylor@udel.edu