



Leading with inquiry and institutional knowledge: A collaborative approach to program review

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Background:

ACC Institutional Researchers observed that in recent years the students enrolled in vocational nursing (LVN) programs at ACC were more likely to be Hispanic/Latino and African American/Black students (60% to 80% of students), and students in the professional nursing (RN, also referenced as ADN) programs were more likely to be White (about 60% of students).

In comparison, the demographic composition of Austin Community College's (ACC) general student population in fall 2020 was: 42 percent White, 38 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Black, 6 percent Asian.

These programs each require students to apply for admission, so the population differences between the programs appear to be driven by student choice.

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Agenda:

- Background and context for our collaboration with our nursing departments
- The equity in nursing study
- Findings and recommendations
- Departmental responses

Collaboration with ACC Equity Council & Nursing Dep't

With the support of a grant from Austin Community College's Equity Council, and with the support and partnership of Nursing Department leaders, we set out to research factors influencing student major selection.

Our study had two major components:

Study Part 1 - Student Focus Group Interviews

These were done in affinity groups according to students major and student race/ethnic groups

Study Part 2 - Applicant Survey

Key Takeaways from Focus Group Analysis

1. ACC and its Nursing programs are highly regarded in the community.
2. Students cited affordability and convenient location(s) in choosing ACC.
3. Nursing students may not know the difference between LVN and RN occupations.
4. Nursing students perceive a career progression from CNA to LVN to RN and beyond.
5. For LVN students, the perceived length and rigor of prerequisite courses, and the application process are significant factors in program selection.
6. Vocational nursing students are eager to enter the workforce (citing 12-months to employability). They seek a program that is more “hands-on” in its instruction, is taught by faculty with experience in the field, and graduates nurses who are very likely to go into the field of nursing.
7. Vocational nursing students perceive a need to build their nursing skills and confidence incrementally.
8. Professional nursing students were more likely to mention pay, job characteristics (caring, hands-on, many specialties), passion, and labor market demand for nurses as factors influencing their major selection.

Study Part 2 - Applicant Survey

Researchers reviewed results of the student focus group interviews with the Nursing Department faculty and collaboratively designed a survey of students who applied during the past 3 years to one of the college's ADN or LVN programs

- Invitations to participate were emailed to 1,366 eligible nursing program applicants, of which 1,120 emails were opened. 196 of the invited participants responded to the survey questionnaire, yielding a **14.3% response rate**.
- For analysis, race-ethnicity was handles using two groups: Black/Hispanic & White/Other groups
- Both race-ethnicity groups and programs were well and proportionally represented in our population of survey respondents. The population was skewed heavily female, consistent with the composition of the program applicant pools for both programs.

Key Findings for All Respondents

Nursing Program Applicants (both ADN and LVN)

- More than three-fourths indicated their life and/or financial situation influenced program selection
- More than half were working full-time when they applied; majority had customer service experience; Key sources of program info included: ACC contacts, family & co-workers, and independent online research provided
- More than half indicated financial aid availability influenced program selection
- A majority indicated that job market demand and wages influenced program selection
- Over half plan to use financial aid to meet their financial needs while completing their program
- More than one-third of Black & Hispanic respondents indicated diversity of the faculty influenced program selection
- More than half of White or Other respondents reported parent(s) who had completed an associate's degree or higher, compared to less than a third of Black and Hispanic respondents

Key Findings Between Groups:

- Almost half of ADN respondents reported having completed a degree prior to 8/31/2021, compared to about one-third of LVN respondents
- Over half of LVN respondents and less than half of ADN reported prior caregiver experience
- ADN Applicants reported not being employed at the time of program application at higher rates than LVN respondents
- LVN applicants were more likely than ADN applicants to have compared the LVN and ADN programs prior to applying (49% vs 22%, respectively)
- Hispanic or Black respondents reported first hearing of their program from a Scholarship Provider or Community Based Organization (Capital IDEA, etc.) at a higher rate than respondents from the White or Any Other group, regardless of program selection.
- More than three-fourths of Hispanic or Black LVN applicants reported plans to pursue additional education at some point after completing their program, compared to a little over half for the ADN and the White/All Other LVN students
- More than three-fourths of Hispanic or Black LVN respondents indicated weekend or evening course availability influenced their program choice, slightly less than half for all other groups.

Discussing Findings with Nursing Program Leaders

Many factors appeared to be important to nursing program applicants in choosing a nursing program. Applicants did not appear to be weighing the options of an LVN versus an ADN program. They had selected a program and may have been considering whether or not to apply to ACC or another institution for that program, or whether or not to apply at all.

Family/coworkers and CBOs appear to be important influences for White & Other respondents interested in the LVN program. For Black & Hispanic respondents, their life and financial situation, and interest in financial aid and weekend/evening program availability were important influencers.

Program applicants perceptions of the programs being stackable, or having a natural progression from one to the next for credentials and career growth was notable for the LVN applicants.

Some suggestions for activities to support applicants, particularly Black or Hispanic students, in their selection of a nursing program

1. Recommend students take the two semesters of Anatomy and Physiology, if they wish to have more options to continue their nursing education.
2. Strengthen the linkages between entry level programs and the ADN and BSN programs, so students who plan to continue their nursing education can seamlessly transition.
3. Grant points for prior clinical or caregiver experience to nursing program applicants.

Some suggestions for activities to support applicants, particularly Black or Hispanic students, in their selection of a nursing program (continued)

4. Provide joint, rather than separate, orientation sessions for students interested in the LVN and ADN programs. Ensure that the differences between the programs and associated occupations are clear, especially for students interested in the LVN program.
 - a. Include information on the issues of most concern to program applicants: time to complete the program and obtain a job, degree to which one program can be used as a stepping stone to another program, opportunities to build basic skills in each program, etc.

Some suggestions for activities to support applicants, particularly Black or Hispanic students, in their selection of a nursing program (continued)

5. Encourage collaboration among Nursing department and Health Sciences area of study advising staff. Advise potential nursing students early so they can build a long term educational plan if they intend to continue their education beyond LVN.
6. Encourage Nursing faculty to be more open to the possibility of students needing to work while attending college. Consider paid clinical experiences that might meet the requirements of the nursing program and provide income for the students.
7. Consider developing nursing course assignments that would help students better understand the difference between the scope of practice for the LVN and RN occupations.

Discuss: Challenges Related to Responding to IR Findings

- How could our Nursing Departments have responded?
 - Departmental leaders' responses
 - Faculty responses
- How did we did respond?
- What are some of the challenges of responding to research like this?
- Here is the future work we have to do...
 - Plan adjustments to existing programs
 - Apply for grants to support the changes we desire to see

Nursing Department Response: Points Calculations

- As a result of the information brought forth from this research the Professional Nursing Department made some changes in our admission process to our program.
- Maximum number of points needed to rank high: 44
- Minimum GPA 2.7 for all Nursing Prerequisite Courses
- Number of degree plan courses-4 to 7 points
- Hesi Scores
 - 90-100 10 points
 - 89-90 7 points
 - 79-75 4 points
- Honorable Military Service and unencumbered license or certification-3 points
- Essential of Medical of Medical Terminology-2 points
- Each reapplication-5 points

Departmental Response: High School STEM Events

- Recruitment events to inform and expose.
- Realigned our process around recruitment
- You can't start too young--the time is now for STEM

Response: Work with existing student supports

- Survey for student needs
- Scholarship Providers
 - Capital Idea
 - Adult Career Scholars Program
 - Austin Community College
 - Associate Degree Nursing Student Association
- Achieving the Dream

Response 3: Educate candidates on program differences

We have developed a program and career entry map for prospective students

Creating new student support positions to help guide incoming students through their applications

ADN Success Coach

Team Teal program



Thank you!

The researchers thank the Nursing Department for their support and collaboration during this research project. We hope the focus group and survey results provide some insight into what factors are important to Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx students as they select a nursing program.

The researchers thank the ACC Equity Council for their support and the grant funding that allowed us to conduct this research and advance efforts to achieve equity in student enrollment, persistence, and completion. Our hope is that more students of color will be successful in their nursing programs and become employed in occupations that will improve their lives and the lives of their families.