ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW
2017-2018
School of Nursing
Byrdine F. Lewis College of Nursing and Health Professions
Georgia State University

Team Report

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1. Contributions to the Discipline

a. To which subfields of the discipline does the department make the most significant scholarly, creative, or clinical contributions (as appropriate)?

The discipline of nursing includes research, teaching and practice in healthcare activities that minimize risk of illness, treat active processes and support restoration of highest level of function for humans across the lifespan. Georgia State University nursing faculty have particular strength in care of urban underserved populations. The program prepares practitioners of nursing at AD, BS, MS, DNP and researchers at the PhD level. The faculty who hold advanced practice nursing designation are active in maintaining their clinical practice, both to maintain their advanced credentialing, and to maintain currency for teaching. The department has developed a rich network of clinical partners in the community where teaching and research activities can occur.

b. To what extent are the faculty number and composition sufficient to support the research and educational missions of the department?

Faculty member composition is heavier in non-tenure track lines than tenure track lines. This will make it hard for research agenda to be met. Current faculty are teaching four courses per term. The clinical faculty as a group are producing 0.31 publications per year. They have the background and capacity to increase publication rate, but the workload of four courses per semester plus maintaining clinical practice for many results in no time to invest in writing or pursuing clinically based research or practice improvement.

Tenure track faculty are exceedingly successful in grant funding and in publication. They are particularly known for health of minority populations in the community, including elderly grandmothers caring for grandchildren, and minority caregivers for Alzheimer’s disease patients.

Numbers of faculty will need to increase in order to support supervision of doctoral students in the DNP and PhD programs. The work of doctoral supervision needs consistent workload recognition on faculty assignments. There may be confusion about how this work is counted, but it does not sound consistent from the point of view of faculty.

c. Based on your knowledge of similar departments in the discipline, evaluate the overall strength of the department.

The school has real strength in a 50-year history in preparation of members of the discipline, and more recent success with grant funding. It has rich connections with clinical agencies throughout the Atlanta area and graduates are highly valued by practice partners. Students are well prepared and successful and repeatedly attribute their success to the investment of faculty in supporting their growth. The school is stronger than most in its teaching mission and consistent with high quality programs in meeting its research agenda.

3. Quality of the Department’s Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

a. For each of the department’s programs, evaluate the quality and currency of the curriculum in terms of disciplinary standards and trends.
BSN programs are academically challenging but highly valued by students. Graduate success is evident in high licensure pass rates. Recent curriculum changes have supported this increase in pass rate scoring. Students report strong levels of satisfaction in their curriculum and highly value the support of their faculty. Curricula are mapped to accreditation standards and are up to date.

Pass rates for graduate certification and licensing examinations reflect steady performance above the national average. The program has set targets higher than accreditation levels of success and have met on almost all marks for past three years. Data have led to program improvements that resulted in positive change.

The PhD program has leadership from tenure track faculty and is maintaining consistently strong enrollments and completion rates. Again, students value the support that faculty have provided them.

b. Evaluate the quality of both incoming and graduated students in the department’s programs, relative to discipline-specific norms.

All programs, particularly the BSN, are sought out by students and admissions are competitive. The upper division curricula for the BSN is rigorous and requires students with both academic and personal skills in order to be successful. Applicants come from Georgia State “native” students, as well as Associates and other Bachelor’s degree programs. The large pool students admitted by the university who indicate preference as “Pre-nursing” students need advisement and support to be prepared to meet admission standards. Advisement support for this group has increased in recent years to support good choices in prerequisite courses and a realistic view of their chances for admission and success in nursing. From a variety of sources, the program review team heard dissatisfaction with recent changes in the selection of the nursing major class groups. One issue relates to controlling the mix of applicants accepted and the use of analytic predictors of success to control aspects of the admission process. Assuming that all parties value admitting the best qualified candidates for the rigorous nursing program which supports timely completion and licensure examination success, increased listening and cooperation may support resolving some of these issues. Nursing faculty and administration point out the success of the model that was in place before in terms of completion and exam score passing. They note that with changes in admission policies, there is now a shrinking pool of nursing applicants and a higher need to support students for academic success.

Master’s program enrollment, graduation and, if appropriate, certification success are all strong. There are a number of specialty tracks for NP preparation that have few students. These are being considered for closure to focus on the strong Family Nurse Practitioner track. The Leadership track is growing and other non-NP tracks have the potential for adding students without opening many if any new courses. To support MSN enrollment, they may be considered. The non-NP tracks required fewer faculty and clinical resources to be successful. Master’s prepared students who are in advanced practice nursing tracks exceed national averages on certification examinations. The MSN program is clearly strong.

The DNP program for Post Master’s students is growing and the first BSN to DNP students are in the pipeline. Certification success will be tracked when the first classes finish.

PhD students value highly the support and research training that they receive in their program. Graduates have active research careers and are taking positions in academic as well as practice settings.
c. Based on your professional experience, are the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates appropriate? If not, what changes might the department make to improve them?

Completion rates for undergraduate students include consideration of Pre-nursing students who have not yet been admitted to the school and for whom faculty or staff have limited access. GSU students who have not been admitted to the nursing major need advisement for efficient completion of prerequisite course and admission tests. The School of Nursing does not have the goal or capacity, because of clinical practice setting access limitations, to prepare all the pre-nursing students as BSN nurses. Alternate educational pathways need to be communicated to students, and realistic communication about student likelihood of admission to the BSN needs to be available. Anecdotally, potential applicants either choose or are encouraged to change educational goals, which may be reducing the numbers of applicants to the BSN. SON faculty need to remain the decision makers for BSN enrollment given the success of the program. Completion rates are strong, particularly due to the alternate pathways available, which offer fast and slow track preparation options.

Overall, MSN completion rates are high, although enrollment in some tracks is low and these are being phased out. Completion rates have been above the school’s target of 90%. MSN and DNP curricula are being adjusted for preparation of nurse practitioners with an eventual shift to DNP only preparation for nurse practitioners. This plan will support a gradual increase in numbers of DNP students needing supervision to complete programs, but will eventually also result in decreased MSN degrees.

Likewise, the PhD program is robust given the number of tenure track faculty able to teach PhD students. Completion rates are admirable, given that essentially all graduate students in nursing are working.

d. Are there appropriate resources and support structures for the department’s educational programs?

Transition to DNP preparation for NP students will require faculty supervision of a greatly increased number of DNP projects. This will require more faculty with appropriate preparation to manage the load. Space continues to be a need particularly in the area of room scheduling.

The SON is a leader in the university for limited seat access programs. Most of these require some seat time, but not on a weekly basis. It seems that the room scheduling process for the university has not kept pace with the fast growth of limited seat access programs. For an urban university, limited seat access programs should be a top priority, as they allow growth in student numbers without overburdening classroom space. The management of the room resources likely needs a more sophisticated system that can accommodate multiple courses “sharing” the same room space over the semester. If the central university system cannot handle complex requests, then a block of rooms could be designated for SON use and the faculty can work out how many lie classes are scheduled and when.

e. Evaluate the potential for growth of the department’s graduate programs.

The School of Nursing has capacity to grow in MSN, DNP and PhD programs. As discussed above, the MSN will maintain tracks for the preparation of nurse practitioners for several years as the Post BSN
DNP track is now underway. There is still a market for both of these options. As more students move into DNP preparation, the MSN numbers will decrease. The Leadership MSN track has the potential to grow, particularly by recruiting within partner institutions regionally. As a completely online track, however, it could recruit nationally. Its unique curriculum that includes informatics content could be marketed and provide a competitive edge for the track. Additional online MSN tracks are possible to be developed with minimal effort, such as a Nurse Educator track.

The DNP will grow as it becomes the single pathway for nurse practitioner preparation. Access to clinical facilities for NP practice courses as well as for practice based projects required for the DNP degree may be a limiting factor. The need for faculty support for completion of these projects will also limit growth without the addition of additional faculty, however, the high ratio of non-tenure track to tenure track faculty, does provide many who are prepared to lead DNP projects. The transition from MSN to DNP preparation for nurse practitioners will result in increased student credit hour production even if degree numbers remains stable.

The PhD program may be at capacity given the relatively few tenure track faculty in the school. Filling empty positions will help this, but more faculty may be necessary to support PhD student growth.

4. Quality of the Department’s Research Culture

a. Based on your knowledge of the discipline, what is your assessment of the quality of the department’s faculty?

SON faculty are well prepared and productive. The two different tracks for faculty (tenure and tenure-track) sets up a large difference between expectation and supports for the two groups. Greater scholarly productivity could be expected with a lower course load and with consistent recognition of the workload of doctoral, particularly DNP, advisement.

Faculty are well prepared to carry on research activities and are funded in important areas. Student value the chance to participate in research activities with faculty.

b. From a disciplinary perspective, what is your assessment of the research areas in which the department is already strong, and areas with the potential for further growth?

The faculty are strong in funding related to underserved urban population and an assortment of common health concerns such as diabetes and stroke risk. Diversity of the faculty is a strength both for educational and research programs.

c. What is your assessment of the support structures for faculty and student research (e.g., grantwriting support, travel grants, laboratories, student funding, administrative support, etc.)?

The faculty would benefit from a more focused research center with data management, statistical consultation, grant management, submission, writing and librarian support among other roles. There needs to be stronger administrative support for grant review, travel. Focused Research Fellowships that are competitive and open to all ranked faculty would enhance preparation for grant submissions. Research supports are college wide and with only two staff, there is need for more well-developed research structure. Faculty note an absence of access to clinically related resources such as spaces for
clinical laboratory specimen collection and analysis. Given that the college as a whole has a number of clinical programs, this would possibly benefit multiple research programs.

The development of support for further endowed chairs that have resources to support the development of research trajectories.

d. Do you have any recommendations for improvements in the department’s research culture, productivity, and results?

Use the multidisciplinary strength both in and outside the college. For example, the School of Public Health could collaborate with biostatistics. The overall college could support the research culture by offering stronger support through the Research Office. For example, competitors have research offices that contain, data managers, statisticians, librarians, separate staff for pre and post award work related to grant submissions. All schools and programs in the college could share in supporting these changes to the Research Office. Publicize programs such as a research fellowship for faculty who are preparing major grants. This could reduce the teaching load temporarily to support pilot work and further development of grants.

Support the development of a passion for research with undergraduate honors programs that engage them with active research projects.

Continue to participate in faculty cluster development either with existing faculty cross colleges and programs or by joint hiring of new faculty for specific target areas.

Continue to seek endowment support for designated Faculty Chairs for the school and college.

Develop support for PhD students to be full time students with funding so that they can participate in research and complete the degree in a shorter time.

5. Goals

a. Are the goals the department has outlined in its self-study appropriate for the unit?

Yes. Similar schools are engaged in similar activities. An additional goal for SON is to hold a successful search for a Nursing Associate Dean (or some other title) to head up the nursing program. In addition to research skills, strong experience with administration is desirable in potential candidates.

Recruitment of leadership for the school is necessary over the next year. The size and breath of activities of the school would warrant a change from an Associate Dean to a Dean of Nursing. This change would increase the chances of recruiting a leader of the stature that the institution require, particularly given the shortage of candidates for such positions in Nursing.

b. Are they in accord with disciplinary trends?

Yes. Schools with quality BSN programs are encouraging student to consider graduate school earlier rather than later. Many programs are moving from MSN to DNP preparation of advanced practice nurses. Innovations in PhD delivery and programming are happening in many settings.

c. Are the priorities reasonable?
Yes. They are expected. Research is no longer the activity of a few faculty. It permeates most programs at all degree levels and across faculty lines.

d. Are the resource needs realistic?

As more Student Credit Hours are produced it is entirely appropriate to expect addition resources to the school from the state and the university. Investment in the research infrastructure will result in increased funding from grant sources.

e. Are any changes or additions warranted?

See list below

6. Summary and Recommendations

a. Summarize the department’s major strengths and challenges.

The department’s main strengths are its commitments to increasing the health of person both locally and globally who disadvantaged with regard to healthcare resources. This commitment is enacted through preparing health care providers across all degree programs in nursing and also by testing models of care delivery and its improvement, and by developing new knowledge regarding care of underserved populations. It has particular strength in the diversity of its faculty and students. This may be an advantage for several funding sources.

The faculty are a strength due to their commitment to student success with innovative modes of instruction and personal connection to students in and out of classroom settings. Another strength is the result of longstanding programs, which result in partnership in community health delivery systems.

b. List your recommendations.

First of all the team offers its thanks for the gracious hospitality, the full access to all aspects of academic and research life and for the students who gave their time to provide information about programs they clearly highly value. Our recommendations come from a combination of expressed hopes, a very few areas of dissatisfaction and knowledge of trends in similar institutions.

1. Active search for next school of nursing leader must be a priority. This will support recruitment of faculty. Consider again a change in the name to Associate Dean of the College and Dean of the School of Nursing. This change will increase the chances of recruitment of a leader who is qualified to lead a school with the range of programs and activities that is present at GSU.

2. Explore clinical partnerships that provide research support to agencies with research access also to faculty. Invite professionals in partner institutions to teach part time in the school. Further development of the DNP program will benefit from taking advantage of practice partners in the community.

3. Develop a fully serviced research office. See details above. Increasing research productivity will attract other research faculty and support current faculty award of tenure and promotion. It will provide a context for student development and training.

4. Strengthen advisement staff to support prenursing and BSN students. At the same time allow nursing faculty to choose students who are likely to be successful in completing programs.
5. Engage in scholarship of teaching and learning related to learning success for first generation or educationally disadvantaged students. Georgia State is already successful. Analyze and share the success strategies in place.

6. Clarify access to classrooms for nursing courses that meet with reduced seat time. Authorize access that the school can manage to support multiple courses using the same classroom.

7. Reshaping the MSN program after NP preparation moves to DNP will free up resources for more programs that have minimal clinical content and will increase degree production to offset loss of NP students at MSN level.

8. Recognize the work of faculty who are chairing DNP and PhD student activities outside of formal courses. This work needs much attention to support students in timely completion of projects and dissertations.

9. Have scholarship expectations for all doctoral prepared faculty and reduce course load of NTT faculty to support scholarship development. Training Grants offer faculty and staff support. They should be pursued.

10. Take advantage of interdisciplinary college partners for research, practice settings and international projects. This includes the cluster hire efforts.

11. Name a leader for Honors Student programming with course release to engage in marketing, supporting and leading projects.