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## MDAC 2021: "Frostburg State University Pre-Nursing PEP: Preparation, Engagement, and Practical Experience"

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Authors	Staggers-Gardner, Lindsey;Platt, Kara
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# Frostburg State University Pre-Nursing

## PEP: Preparation, Engagement, & Practical Experience

Lindsey Staggers-Gardner, MSN, RN, NP-C, CNE; Kara Platt, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, CNE

Frostburg State University

### Background

Across Maryland, registered nurses (RNs) are in demand. Nearly 3,500 RN positions open annually, however, only 64% of those positions are filled (USM Health Care Workforce Working Group, 2018). To address the nursing shortage, schools of nursing must develop strategies for student success. Admission into nursing programs involves meeting rigorous criteria and maintaining high academic achievement. The competitive nature of becoming a nursing student is stressful and retention of these students can be challenging. Implementing innovative and engaging academic support and mentoring, and, providing experiential learning opportunities during the pre-nursing phase, is crucial to the retention and success of these future student-nurses (Klein, 2012).

Pre-nursing students benefit from connecting with each other and developing peer-mentoring relationships before and into nursing school (Jacobs, 2018), in addition to mentor-mentee relationship with their faculty and advisors. Further, benefits to providing care and mentoring for pre-nursing students has been proven to reduce attrition, foster career development, and increase confidence in their abilities to be successful nursing students (Whiffin, et al., 2019).

### Objectives

- ✓ **GOAL 1:** To create a mentoring program for pre-nursing students who are in their first 3-4 semesters to foster preparedness, engagement, and practical experience before entering nursing school.
- ✓ **GOAL 2:** To cultivate successful nursing students, Frostburg State University's Department of Nursing decided to utilize the time in the 3-4 semesters to engage with and prepare pre-nursing students through a variety of supports and experiences, referred to as **Pre-Nursing PEP: Preparation, Engagement, and Practical Experience.**

### Development

Since the introduction of Frostburg State University's BSN Collaborative Program in 2016, the Department of Nursing desired to produce pre-nursing students who were well-qualified and prepared to enter their prospective nursing schools. Faculty recognized the rigor and demand of not only the admission process, but the transition from pre-nursing to nursing. In effort to ensure that students that were ready for the challenges ahead, they created a mentoring program that would benefit all pre-nursing students from day one of their first semesters until their acceptance into nursing school.

The mentoring program provides guidance and support to achieve success academically and to reduce attrition risk throughout the program. Similar to the more common associates-to-bachelors (ATB) programs, the BSN collaborative program partners with a local community college which provides the pre-licensure components of a BSN degree. However, in ATB programs, students receive their pre-nursing support from their community colleges. In the BSN Collaborative model, students begin or transfer in to Frostburg State University before acceptance into their nursing programs. The faculty at Frostburg State University decided to take advantage of this critical phase to empower students through supports and experiential opportunities to better prepare them for success through graduation.

### Preparation

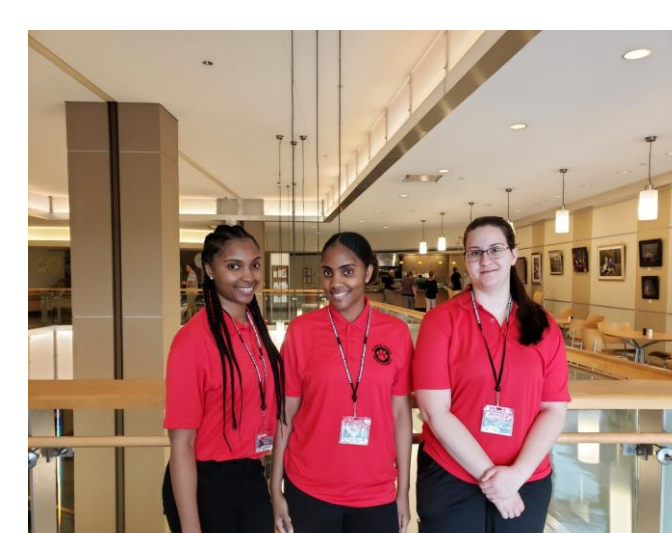
- ✓ Pre-nursing students begin their first semester at FSU with an orientation course specifically designed to prepare them for nursing school. This specialized ORIE 101 course provides the fundamentals present in all ORIE courses but gradually introduces important information on what to expect as pre-nursing students and the transition to nursing students and beyond.
- ✓ Students perform a variety of activities to learn time management, develop meaningful study habits, and to discover available university resources that foster academic success and wellness. Students meet the faculty and support staff in the Student Success Services (SSS) department on campus which forms connections between students and the academic, financial, and wellness service personnel. Students not only become aware of available services but feel comfortable when reaching out for support.
- ✓ Students receive an overview of their pre-nursing course progression and they learn realistic expectations of the nursing program admission and acceptance.
- ✓ In addition to orientation, students are assigned to advisors who are nursing faculty who will assist them in preparing for their entrance examination and application to their prospective nursing programs. Specialized advising ensures that students choose the appropriate pre-nursing courses as well as other pre-requisites and graduation requirements. Additionally, nursing faculty understand the application process requirements and offer HESI/TEAS testing study group sessions, assist with filling out applications, and serve as guides through the process until students are accepted into their prospective programs.

### Engagement

- ✓ Pre-nursing students at FSU are engaged through a living-learning community which provides the opportunity for them to reside in the same residence hall. A sense of community is developed when students have the convenience of studying together, attending presentations together, and providing friendship and support to one another. Students who feel supported by their peers develop self-motivation and strive to achieve success (Bauer & Kiger, 2017).
- ✓ In the pre-nursing ORIE 101 course, when possible, a student success mentor (SSM), which is typically a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> semester pre-nursing student assists the instructor and provides support and encouragement to the students. Additionally, the SSM encourages students to become involved in activities and clubs/organizations to connect to peers and the university.
- ✓ Faculty engage students in learning about their future pathways and careers by inviting guest speakers who are nurses in a variety of fields and levels of advancement. Students can learn about nursing specialties and share conversations with the guest speakers.

### Practical Experience

- ✓ FSU's pre-nursing students can job-shadow with nurses at the local hospital. Students are encouraged to choose departments which interest them and are connected to nurses to shadow.
- ✓ Students are provided with custom FSU Pre-Nursing polo shirts and they learn about professional appearance and behavior, and how these elements can impact interactions with patients and coworkers, prior to shadowing.
- ✓ Students are introduced to HIPAA regulations and confidentiality when working with patients as professionals.
- ✓ Faculty prepare students for shadowing and encourage students to ask the nurses questions that can help them to realize their own interests.
- ✓ Job shadowing also helps students to decide if nursing a good fit based on watching first-hand, rather than learning exclusively through texts or media.
- ✓ Students also participate in an immersive poverty simulation activity to develop a sense of awareness and understanding of poverty at individual and systemic levels so they can be prepared to assist and provide care for those living in poverty when they are in nursing school and beyond.



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### Conclusions

- ✓ When surveyed, pre-nursing students at FSU describe their experiences as a positive. They express satisfaction in their orientation courses stating that they feel more prepared to achieve their course progressions, utilize university supports and resources, and understand the application and admission expectations for nursing school.
- ✓ Students feel connected to their advisors and are appreciative to have support from advisors who understand FSU's pre-nursing program and the lived experience of being nursing students themselves.
- ✓ Students have also expressed that they found value and meaning in the experiences of job shadowing and connecting with guest speakers. Students have connected with specialty nurses during these events and have been invited to shadow those nurses in their practices for additional experiences.
- ✓ From a faculty perspective, the students are well-prepared for entrance into nursing school.
- ✓ From a marketing perspective, offering the mentoring program sets Frostburg State University apart from competitors.

### Future Directions

- ✓ FSU's pre-nursing faculty and advising team are planning to implement interprofessional educational experiences (IPE) both within the hospital during job shadowing and with the education, business, psychology, and sociology departments at the university. This will help to prepare students for future clinicals and when learning to provide holistic approaches to patient care.
- ✓ Faculty are also planning to incorporate service-learning activities within the local community as there are many health initiatives and needs in the area. Service-learning will not only provide the students with hands-on experiences, but will introduce them to leadership skills, interpersonal communication, and diversity among communities (Adegbola, 2013).
- ✓ Faculty are going to provide opportunities for pre-nursing students to connect with current nursing students in an effort to provide more opportunities for peer mentoring and student connections.

### Notes

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#### Contacts

Lindsey Staggers-Gardner, MSN, RN, NP-C, CNE  
[imgardner@frostburg.edu](mailto:imgardner@frostburg.edu)

Kara Platt, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, CNE  
[knplatt@frostburg.edu](mailto:knplatt@frostburg.edu)

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