University of New Mexico, Health Sciences Center, College of Nursing

Successful strategies in Nursing Education to Mirror the Population of a Minority-Majority State

Carolyn Montoya, PhD, RN, PPCNP-BC, FAANP, FAAN, Professor, Associate Dean Clinical Affairs
Judy Liesveld, PhD, RN, PPCNP-BC, CNE, Professor, Associate Dean of Education & Innovation

New Mexico is one of five majority-minority states with a population just slightly over two million (U.S. Census Bureau, QuickFacts, New Mexico, 2019). Approximately 49% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, 11% identify as American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), and 2.6% identify as African American. New Mexico is home to 19 distinct Native American pueblos as well as the Navajo and Apache tribes.

Founded in 1889, the mission of the University of New Mexico (UNM) is “to serve as New Mexico’s flagship institution of higher learning through demonstrated and growing excellence in teaching, research, patient care, and community service.” As a Hispanic-Serving Institution, UNM represents a cross-section of cultures and backgrounds, with 22,792 students attending the Albuquerque campus and another 6,893 students attending branch campuses and education centers across the state. UNM, the Health Sciences Center, and the College of Nursing share the core values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

While we value diversity in the broadest sense, this article focuses on successful strategies aimed specifically at increasing the number of AI/AN in the BSN program and the number of underrepresented minorities in the Advanced Practice Registered Nurses graduate programs. Diversity is our strength and we are committed to meeting the educational needs specific to New Mexico as well as meeting the health care needs within our state.

BSN Program: Successful strategies for increasing AI/AN nurses – Dr. Judy Liesveld

Forty years ago, I spent the summer between my junior and senior year in college volunteering at a primary care clinic in a remote area of the Navajo Nation in Arizona. I was offered the position of clinic/school nurse at this clinic upon graduation. Having grown up and attended college in Iowa, I wanted to experience a different part of the country. I spent the next seven years working on the Navajo Nation as a clinic/school nurse, as a generalist nurse in a small community hospital, and as a public health nurse for Indian Health Services. After completing my master’s degree, I eventually returned to a Navajo Nation border community and worked 10 years as a pediatric nurse practitioner. All of these experiences shaped my world view and commitment to promoting health care and the nursing profession. Fast forward forty years, as a faculty member and Associate Dean at UNM, I have the privilege to influence recruitment, clinical experiences, mentorship, and support that impacts AI/AN students. With the profound effect that COVID-19 has had on AI/AN populations, the importance of these activities remains vital. Knowing that there are better health outcomes for individuals and communities when care is received from individuals with similar backgrounds, the CON is committed to recruiting and educating AI/AN nursing students. The following sections focus on recruitment, clinical experiences, mentorship, and support for AI/AN students at the CON.
Recruitment

The CON has partnered with community colleges in New Mexico for the past six years to offer the BSN on community college campuses through the New Mexico Nursing Education Consortium (NMNEC). The CON has been fortunate to partner with two community colleges in border communities of the Navajo reservation and two of the community colleges that are nearby to Pueblos. Bringing the BSN to these parts of the state allows students to remain in their communities and close to family support, which can be important for retention and success in nursing programs. Presently, 5.82% of our BSN pre-licensure program is comprised of AI/AN students and rises to 6.44% with the addition of our RN-BSN students. Offering the BSN on community college campuses can make a significant contribution to diversify student enrollment.

The CON implemented Holistic Admissions for their BSN pre-licensure program starting with the Spring 2019 admissions. Previously, only GPA and a standardized nursing admission test ranked candidates for admission. Realizing the inadequacy of this system to create a diverse pool of applicants committed to the nursing profession, the process was changed to include the evaluation of applicants’ fit for nursing as demonstrated through personal statements and prior experiences such as working with elderly individuals or having military experience. Attributes, such as being a first-generation college student were also included in addition to the standard metrics such as grade point average.

The CON also implemented a Direct Admissions program in Fall 2019 where 11 incoming freshmen students interested in the nursing profession, received direct entry/admission into the BSN nursing program. The Direct Admissions program offers significant opportunities to recruit qualified AI/AN high school students directly into our nursing program, particularly from high schools serving a high percentage of AI/AN students such as those located in Zuni, Gallup, and Farmington, NM. The Direct Admissions program provides a strong mechanism to assure recruitment of AI/AN BSN students continuing to graduate nursing programs.

From 2016 through June 2020, the CON provided full scholarships and monthly stipends for 11 AI/AN students through an American Indians into Nursing grant funded by the Indian Health Service (IHS). This funding also supported mentoring, cultural humility training by the UNM Center for Native American Health (CNAH) for students, and faculty development workshops on issues relating to Native American health care. While this funding has ended, the CON remains committed to securing further grants to support recruitment of AI/AN students.

The CON targets high schools with significant Under-Represented Minority (URM) student populations for recruitment, including AI/AN students. Classroom presentations and tabling opportunities at career fairs are taken advantage of whenever available. Additionally, the CON provides specific presentations to URM students from around the state who visit UNM and have specifically expressed interest in pursuing nursing careers.

Clinical & Learning Experiences

Fostering relationships with communities is important when establishing clinical experiences for students. The CON has worked to expand rural clinical sites to increase holistic learning experiences and the visibility of the rural health care needs in our state. The CON works with Acoma Pueblo to place students in clinical rotations within the Acoma-Canyoncito-Laguna Service Unit. We also work closely with the Navajo Nation to accompany students on two-week clinical immersion experiences in the Chinle, Arizona IHS hospital, Chinle Comprehensive Health Care Facility. During this time, students also complete home visits with public health nurses throughout the Chinle Service Unit. The CNAH provides cultural humility training for our students prior to the experience and the Chinle Service Unit employs a Navajo Medicine Man who provides orientation for our students upon their arrival. This clinical experience is offered twice a year for 8-16 students including BSN students from our partnering community colleges. The Chinle clinical immersion experience was started initially with funding from a grant through HRSA. Further generous funding was received from the NM Board of Nursing and most recently an anonymous donor has provided funding to continue the experiences twice a year. We are also developing telehealth experiences for our students in collaboration with the Gallup Indian Medical Center IHS facility. Potential student experiences include phone follow-up to recovering COVID-19 patients; participation in contact tracing; and providing education on COVID-19. Offering clinical experiences in Native American communities is important for our AI/AN students and for all students who will work with Native American patients during their careers.
Navajoland Nurses United for Research, Service, and Education (N-Nurse) is an organization of Native American nurses that partners with the CON and is dedicated to nurturing nurses who serve the people in and around the Navajo Nation. N-Nurse promotes nursing as a career, provides mentorship workshops, and builds learning networks from which nursing students and other nurses impact Navajo area health systems and provide culturally safe care. Every two years, N-Nurse hosts a two-day symposium that focuses on health care issues impacting the Navajo Nation through the lens of culturally safe care. Our nursing students and faculty have the opportunity to learn and participate in this dynamic and culturally sensitive symposium.

**Mentorship and Support**

The CNAH is a special project of the HSC and is critical in terms of supporting our AI/AN students. The center employs two American Indian faculty, four staff (three American Indian staff), one American Indian student, and has a number of collaborating faculty across the missions of research, education, and service. A long-term signature program of CNAH is student and health professions workforce development that engages students in achieving academic success and preparing for licensing requirements in order to return to their communities as fully prepared and credentialed health care professionals. CNAH also engages tribal community health programs in creating opportunities for graduating health professions students.

The faculty and staff of CNAH take personal interest in each student’s academic success. A beautiful ceremony is held for graduating students at which time CNAH awards each student a Pendleton blanket for their achievement.

The CNAH is available to assist in providing cultural, academic, and social supports to AI/AN students in the CON nursing program. The CNAH director is the official mentor of the Society of Native American Health Professions Students (SNAHPS), a UNM-chartered organization. CNAH sponsors a number of SNAHPS events and offers all CNAH-sponsored events to AI/AN students enrolled at the HSC, as well as in the broader NM community for recruitment purposes.

The CON is proud to have a diverse student body and has invested in resources to facilitate its success. In 2009, a position was created for a BSN Student Success Coordinator and in 2017, a Student Success Coach was added to the team. These positions participate in the orientation of students to the college to set the expectation that the student will succeed and that a key element in success is knowing when and how to get help. Students can refer themselves to the Success Team or can be referred by a faculty member for academic concerns. Students often use this service for social support or emotional concerns. When this type of concern goes beyond the expertise of the Student Success Coordinators, they provide a referral to a health care provider or social support organization. Students seek support for a wide range of difficulties, including those related to reading and writing skills, studying, test grades, time management, anxiety/stress management, and difficulty passing the licensure examination. The Student Success Team sees students individually and presents workshops, such as time management, testing, and studying strategies. The Student Support program has been invaluable in assuring success of our AI/AN students.

The CON employs many synergistic strategies to recruit and ensure the success of our AI/AN students. Work and development of new ideas will continue to prepare AI/AN students for careers in Native American communities.

**Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) Programs: Moving the needle from undergraduate to graduate nursing for underrepresented minorities – Dr. Carolyn Montoya**

My commitment to diversity and inclusion stems from being a native New Mexican from a semi-rural community and a first-generation college graduate. I have over 30 years as a faculty member and administrator at the CON; however, I can still recall my journey in obtaining my BSN degree from UNM. While I was considered a “good” student at my high school, I was not enrolled in any pre-college courses. I went from a small town where everyone knew me and my family to UNM where no one knew me, registering for classes where there were a 100 or more students, and being enrolled in biology and anatomy classes where my lab partners had already completed similar work as high school students and I had not. I was, however, extremely fortunate to have the following support systems that enabled me to be successful: 1) an outstanding high school counselor who guided me through the UNM application process and assisted me with navigating financial aid applications; 2) enrollment in a UNM-sponsored summer program for minority and/or disadvantaged students
interested in health careers; 3). enrollment in UNM College Enrichment Program, which provided general assistance, counseling, and tutorial services throughout my bachelor’s program; and 4). an extended family who supported my dream to become a nurse. I mention these resources as they framed my philosophy as an educator committed to diversity and inclusion, particularly regarding the education of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) students.

Since the inception of our Nurse Practitioner (NP) and Nurse-Midwifery programs in 1989, we have been committed to serving diverse populations throughout the state. Health care access can be particularly challenging with 34% of the state’s 2 million residents living in rural and frontier areas (NM Health Care Workforce Committee, 2019). As of 2019, 32 of 33 counties in New Mexico have a Health Professional Shortage Area designation (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2019).

The APRN programs have consistently included a holistic admission process in various forms from the inception of each program. A committee of diverse faculty reviews the applicants and develops the list of applicants to be interviewed for admission. Interviews are conducted by two faculty members using a predetermined set of questions that is reviewed and revised annually by the admissions committee. The interview includes questions related to goals, understanding of the APRN role, problem solving, commitment to rural and/or underserved communities, proficiency in a foreign language, community service, and professional leadership. Table 1 demonstrates the enrollment growth over a period of five years as well as the sustained effort to enroll underrepresented minorities in our primary care programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2014</th>
<th>Fall 2015</th>
<th>Fall 2016</th>
<th>Fall 2017</th>
<th>Fall 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total URM Students</strong></td>
<td>14 (31.82)</td>
<td>27 (42.86)</td>
<td>34 (45.33)</td>
<td>27 (41.0)</td>
<td>33 (41.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>3 (6.82)</td>
<td>6 (9.53)</td>
<td>8 (10.67)</td>
<td>3 (4.5)</td>
<td>4 (5.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>2 (3.17)</td>
<td>5 (6.66)</td>
<td>5 (7.6)</td>
<td>3 (4.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>11 (25.00)</td>
<td>19 (30.16)</td>
<td>20 (26.67)</td>
<td>15 (22.7)</td>
<td>24 (30.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races:</td>
<td>1 (1.33)</td>
<td>4 (6.1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Non-URM Students</strong></td>
<td>30 (68.18)</td>
<td>36 (57.14)</td>
<td>41 (54.67)</td>
<td>39 (59.0)</td>
<td>48 (59.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1 (2.27)</td>
<td>2 (3.17)</td>
<td>3 (4.0)</td>
<td>4 (6.1)</td>
<td>5 (6.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>27 (61.36)</td>
<td>34 (53.97)</td>
<td>36 (48.00)</td>
<td>34 (51.5)</td>
<td>41 (51.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity Unknown</td>
<td>2 (4.55)</td>
<td>2 (2.67)</td>
<td>1 (1.5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Students</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*URM as defined by HRSA-17-067 includes American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Students who identified as Two or More Races with one being from one of the URM-defined categories are included in the Total URM count.

Our strategies to increase the diversity and number of APRNs working with diverse populations in rural settings include recruiting students from rural areas, requiring all APRN students to complete a minimum of one rotation at a rural and/or underserved site, incorporating cultural humility throughout the curricula, and providing stipends for students through the Health Resources and Services Administration Advanced Nursing Education Workforce (ANEW) grants. The ANEW grants have also allowed us to provide our primary care APRN students with a Medical Spanish immersion course, a poverty workshop, the opportunity to attend the Navajo N-Nurse conference described by Dr. Liesveld, the ability to participate in APRN-led TeleEcho™ sessions, and an immersive three-month clinical rotation in a rural or underserved area. Of the 21 students who received ANEW grants from 2017 through 2019, 48% (n= 10) of the graduates are working in rural and/or medically underserved clinics/hospitals.

Like the undergraduate program, the APRN programs have a dedicated faculty position for a Student Success Coordinator (SSC). Students can self-refer at any time, and course instructors may also make referrals. The SSC works with students on individualized academic plans, strategies for study/test-taking, clinical skill deficits, stress reduction, and school/life balance. The SSC helps students identify additional resources,
including a graduate writing lab, foreign student support programs, special academic needs evaluation, and clinical psychology resources. In 2018, the SSC developed a one-credit course to provide individualized and small group peer/faculty feedback and coaching for students who, due to personal or academic reasons, needed to step out of the program for a semester.

**Conclusion**

There is no perfect strategy to increasing diversity in the nursing profession. Each college or school needs to understand and value the uniqueness of the communities they serve as well as expanding the concept of diversity beyond government definitions of “underrepresented minorities.” While the UNM CON recognizes the richness of our diverse state, we continue to struggle with the fact that we educate our students on land that originally belonged to indigenous tribes and that some of our “sacred” university symbols can be viewed as hurtful to indigenous people. The fact that we can acknowledge these, and other deficits provides hope that we can also develop the cultural humility to resolve these issues.