The shortage of nursing faculty in the United States may be an even greater problem than the current shortage of registered nurses. With the average nurse educator age of 55.2 years, a wave of projected retirements of 400 to 500 master’s- and doctorally prepared faculty per year is expected over the next 10 years (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2009). The importance of retaining current nursing faculty in the workplace cannot be overstated, but of equal and perhaps greater importance is the need to attract, enculture, and retain new nurse educators (Gazza & Shellenbarger, 2005).

Academic work environments that are empowered provide educators with access to information, support, and resources, as well as the opportunity to learn and grow (Nedd, Galindo-Ciocon, & Belgrave, 2006). Positive relationships that occur between coworkers and management also provide power and meaning to the workplace. Sarmiento, Laschinger, and Iwasiw (2004) tested a structural empowerment model and applied it to nurse educators’ perceptions of workplace empowerment, burnout, and job stress. High levels of empowerment and low levels of burnout were significant predictors of work satisfaction, with empowerment being the stronger predictor.

Several strategies have been suggested to promote empowered work environments that may assist in job satisfaction and retention of newly hired faculty. One strategy that meets educators’ needs for preparation for the academic role, professional growth, and the development of a social network is the implementation of a new faculty orientation program (Hessler & Ritchie, 2006; National League for Nursing, 2006). This article provides a brief analysis of new faculty orientation as related to best practices in the current literature and describes the implementation and evaluation of a nursing faculty orientation program at a California community college.

Formalized orientation can prepare and socialize nurse educators for academic roles, increasing job satisfaction and retention. This article describes a community college nursing faculty orientation program that includes goals, pre- and post-assessment, a group-determined instructional plan, support and mentoring, and outcomes evaluation. Posttest scores showed that at program completion, perceived teaching competency was either the same or greater in all identified skill areas (increase of 40% to 60% above the original group baseline). Nurse educator participants reported that the program contributed to their overall perception of support and satisfaction with academia, with open group discussion times rated highest. At the end of 3 years, 91% of novice faculty \( n = 11 \) were retained. 


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NEED FOR FACULTY ORIENTATION

Because of an infusion of state money into California community colleges to increase the number of nursing graduates, an unprecedented hiring of 11 mostly inexperienced nurse educators occurred at a large Southern California community college over a 2-year period. With qualified faculty at a premium, the nursing program faculty and administrators considered different strategies not only to help novice educators to assume their new roles more easily, but also to aid in their retention. Previous departmental orientation practices consisted of pairing new faculty with “seasoned” faculty teaching in the same semester level, with no formalized structure or objectives available to facilitate the process. New educators were not given additional opportunities for professional development not offered to the entire nursing faculty. New educators were also given the same (or even greater) teaching and committee loads as were the experienced nurse educators. The seasoned educator assigned to assist the new educator functioned as both a preceptor and a mentor, with reported mixed results, largely depending on how committed the preceptor/mentor was to the assigned role.

INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE: BEST ORIENTATION PRACTICES

In a brief review of the literature, several evidence-based strategies emerged as best orientation practices for faculty, and many were in direct conflict with the previous methods used at the college. The importance of a more formalized orientation program immediately emerged in several reports in which such programs were evaluated for program effectiveness and instructor satisfaction (Hand, 2008; Hessler & Ritchie, 2006). Nursing faculty transitioning from the role of expert clinician to novice educator may require information on topics such as curriculum development, classroom instruction, and testing and evaluation (Bell-Scriber & Morton, 2009; Blauvelt & Spath, 2008). Lack of knowledge can lead to frustration or role strain in novice faculty and can decrease job satisfaction and increase faculty attrition rates (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2009).

An area identified as an important component of orientation programs is orientation to the college overall as well as to the nursing department. Essential components include a review of the college mission, goals, and organizational structure; curriculum; and policies and procedures (Peters & Boylston, 2006). New faculty should be given copies of all important guidelines to minimize misconceptions and ensure that work expectations are clear (Gazza & Shellnabarger, 2005). Because of the anxiety that the faculty evaluation process may cause, a detailed explanation of the process, as well as tenure and promotion policies, should be given, with key dates and requirements emphasized. To ensure that needed information is integrated, an orientation program conducted over an extended period (e.g., 1 year) is recommended (Hessler & Ritchie, 2006).

Novice nurse educators may also require information related to the actual instructional process, including development of syllabi, lesson plans, and lectures, and suggestions for clinical teaching, grading, and handling student issues (Bell-Scriber & Morton, 2009). Because available time may be limited, assessment of self-perceived teaching competency and identification and prioritization of learning needs are needed to ensure that the orientation sessions are personalized and meaningful to new faculty (Peters & Boylston, 2006). Assigned faculty mentors can reinforce the learned content by providing feedback on developed materials and other instructional strategies. Reassessment of perceived competency in designated teaching skills after the orientation sessions are completed can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program (Peters & Boylston, 2006).

An orientation program should also include an overview of available college and departmental resources, including technology. This assists the new educators in functioning more efficiently and effectively, decreasing levels of stress (Gazza & Shellnabarger, 2005). New faculty should be given information such as how to access resources (i.e., equipment), obtain library materials, use computerized grading programs, and access word processing or copying services. If new faculty will be teaching web-based courses or in the simulation laboratory, they should be provided with orientation to these areas and given technical support, which will allow them to focus on content development (Hessler & Ritchie, 2006).

Another key aspect of successful faculty orientation is the extent to which faculty are able to build relationships within the department (Tracy & Nicholl, 2006). The formation of a new faculty orientation group provides an instant learning community and informal support group, in which open and planned sessions can be scheduled for faculty to engage in joint activities and problem-solving activities as situations arise. This type of group mentoring can be beneficial both emotionally and practically, serving to decrease stress, increase collegiality, and provide novice educators with a safe “sounding board” to air their concerns (Billings & Halstead, 2009).

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Based on the identification of best practices in the review of current literature, a faculty orientation pro-
gram for new nurse educators was developed. The comprehensive program encompassed multiple aspects of orientation, including program goals, pre- and post-self-assessment of nursing faculty competencies, a group-determined instructional plan, support and mentoring, continuing professional development throughout the first year of employment, and outcome evaluation.

Goals
The overall goals of the new faculty orientation program were to provide orientation to the philosophies, goals, and general policies and procedures of the college and the nursing department; support and assist novice faculty in the development of needed instructional skills; establish a learning community in which novice faculty are supported and socialized into the role of nurse educator; and retain new educators in the nursing program.

Format
New faculty orientation meeting dates were planned throughout the academic year, with sessions scheduled to coincide with times when the rest of the faculty were engaged in standing committee work. Meetings were held outside the department to provide privacy so that faculty could feel comfortable in disclosing their perceptions. The dean of nursing facilitated the meetings, with guest speakers scheduled to deliver special topics. At the initial meeting, the dean provided an overview of the purpose and objectives of the sessions; the mission, vision, values, philosophy, and overall curriculum of the school of nursing; and a notebook containing key college and nursing department information, curriculum, policies, and procedures.

The format of the orientation program was based on a loosely structured seminar approach, allowing adequate time for engagement in joint activities, discussions, sharing of information, and assistance in solving teaching/learning problems. This approach was chosen to foster the atmosphere of a learning community, where faculty could develop and grow, mentoring each another in a collegial environment (Billings & Halstead, 2009). The establishment of enduring relationships within the group, as well as with the dean, was encouraged throughout this process to increase the sense of support and job satisfaction among faculty.

Self-Assessment Survey
A survey based on Benner’s (2001) novice-to-expert competencies was a key component of the new faculty orientation program and was given at the initial meeting for faculty to self-assess their current knowledge and skill levels (Peters & Boylston, 2006). The survey, a 17-item instrument, was modified from one previously developed for mentoring part-time faculty and consisted of four-point scales asking instructors to rate their competency or knowledge on such instructional topics as developing a lesson plan, delivering a lecture, distinguishing differences in student work, providing student feedback, guiding learning in the clinical setting, and handling student problems (Sidebar 1). Frequencies and percentages were obtained for all item responses. In an attached but separate survey, faculty members were also asked to identify their own areas of learning needs. In an attached but separate survey, faculty members were also asked to identify their own areas of learning needs (Peters & Boylston, 2006). The completed surveys were compiled and analyzed for trends, and upcoming session topics were structured based on the results. Using test results to determine which topics are discussed follows the principles of adult learning, which note that adults are motivated to learn primarily because they identify a use for certain knowledge or skills (Billings & Halstead, 2009).

Oermann and Gaberson (2009) suggested that self-evaluation encourages learners to determine their own strengths and weaknesses and provides the teacher or facilitator with the knowledge to create learning oppor-

| SIDEBAR 1
| NURSING FACULTY ASSESSMENT SURVEY |
| Please rate your competence or knowledge in the following subjects as: |
| a. Not competent/knowledgeable |
| b. Somewhat competent/knowledgeable |
| c. Competent/knowledgeable |
| d. Very competent/knowledgeable |
| Explain the curriculum I have been assigned to teach. |
| Develop the learning outcomes, syllabus, and lesson plan. |
| Facilitate effective student discussions. |
| Use small group activities to facilitate learning. |
| Develop and deliver a lecture. |
| Use technology to assist in student learning. |
| Assign grades to students’ work. |
| Construct and analyze test items. |
| Select clinical learning experiences. |
| Facilitate clinical pre- and post-conferences. |
| Guide student learning in the clinical setting. |
| Supervise student performance of skill competencies. |
| Provide feedback to students about their clinical and academic performance. |
| Evaluate students in the clinical setting. |
| Use a variety of strategies to assist in student learning and remediation. |
| Handle difficult situations with students. |
tunities that will best meet student needs. It is important for learners to feel safe in disclosing their self-assessment results so that an optimal climate may be created that will maximize learning and enhance teacher/learner communication.

Instructional Plan

Based on the initial survey results, a series of seminars were planned and individualized to the group, addressing topics as outlined in Sidebar 2. Concurrently with the nursing faculty program, new educators attended a monthly general orientation to the college for one semester. Additional optional workshops on test item construction, the use of WebCT/Blackboard, development of PowerPoint presentations, creative teaching strategies, and other topics, as available, were provided free of charge to interested faculty.

In addition to the designated seminar topics, adequate time was planned for discussion and problem-solving activities to address any important issues that a faculty member might choose to bring up to the group. Frequently mentioned topics included how to best approach an interdepartmental conflict with a colleague, student issues, and the faculty evaluation process. All conversations were considered confidential, and these sessions were identified by novice faculty as one of the most helpful components of the program.

Mentoring

As an adjunct to the faculty orientation program, all novice educators were provided with a mentor from among the “seasoned” faculty. The mentors were assigned by mutual agreement among the dean, department chair, and faculty member, and were chosen as much for their enthusiasm and professionalism as for their expertise in nursing education (Blauvelt & Spath, 2008). Mentors were selected based on shared interests (similar content area), outside of the new educator’s semester level, to encourage the development of close, transparent relationships (Bellack & Morjikian, 2005). Mentors were given specific written guidelines to follow with their protégés, including establishing regular meetings and mutual goal-setting, as well as a list of potential items to explore (Hessler & Ritchie, 2006). The mentor and protégé developed a contract of objectives to accomplish, and at the end of the year, the signed contract was submitted to the dean outlining their successes. Mentors were paid a stipend in recognition of the time spent with their protégés. The stipend is currently being underwritten by grant funds.

EVALUATION OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The self-assessment survey was given again as a posttest at the completion of the new faculty orientation program to determine whether the program contributed to the outcome of increased levels of perceived instructor competency. Frequencies and percentages were obtained for all item responses, and scores for the “competent/knowledgeable” and “very competent/knowledgeable” responses were combined and compared with pretest scores to determine whether scores improved.

The survey has been modified since the original cohort of five new faculty took it, but trends remained similar in all three groups (n = 11) tested so far. Pretest survey scores were consistently lowest in the areas of program curriculum; student outcomes/syllabus/lesson plan development; test item development/analysis; supervision of student performance of skill competencies; retention/remediation strategies; and handling difficult student situations. Posttest scores showed that, at the completion of the seminars, perceived teaching competency was either the same or greater in all identified skill areas (increase of 40% to 60% above the original group baseline). Verbal comments related to the seminars have been positive, with feedback indicating that the orientation program was highly effective in meeting the faculty needs for professional development, enculturation into the school of nursing, and engendering a sense of emotional and administrative support. New faculty reported that although the topical seminars were very helpful, the open discussion times with the group for problem-solving sessions regarding current issues were even more so.

The ultimate aim of the program was not only to foster the professional development of excellent nurse
educators, but also to retain them in the college. In the almost 3 years since the program’s inception, 11 new faculty members have been hired and have participated in the orientation program. Of these 11, only 1 has left, for a retention rate of almost 91%. This is especially noteworthy, given that several nursing programs have recently opened or expanded in the immediate region surrounding the college. Also of note is that, of the 10 remaining faculty, 3 have enrolled in doctoral programs, a further indication of success for both the individual faculty members and the college.

CONCLUSION

To attract and retain today’s nurse educators, the old paradigm of “nurses eat their young” is an unacceptable practice. This new faculty orientation program was developed to encourage the advancement of a different paradigm. Program evaluation showed that novice educators felt supported and valued throughout the program, as they became armed with the tools they needed to be successful in academia. The long-term goal of the program is the retention of excellent nursing faculty in academic careers, where they will seek professional development opportunities and continue to develop and grow as educators.

REFERENCES


Formalized orientation is an evidence-based strategy that can be used to prepare and socialize novice nurse educators into academic roles, increasing job satisfaction and retention.

The new faculty orientation program described includes specified goals, pre- and post-assessment, a group-determined instructional plan, support and mentoring, and outcomes evaluation.

Nurse educator participants in the program reported perceptions of increased instructor competency as well as feelings of support and satisfaction with their academic careers.

key points

Professional Development