The Role of the Pre-Professional Organization in Baccalaureate Nursing Education

An Honor’s Research Paper

Presented to

the faculty of the Department of Nursing

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Of the requirements for graduation with Honors

Bachelor of Science in Nursing

By

Lindsey Siefferman

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Approval

This Honor’s Project is approved for recommendation to the Department of Nursing

_______________________________________, Faculty Sponsor

______________________ Date

Julie Meaux, PhD, RN, CNE

_______________________________________, Student

______________________ Date

Lindsey Siefferman, BSN Student
Permission

Title: The Role of the Pre-Professional Organization in Baccalaureate Nursing Education

Department: Nursing

In presenting this honor’s thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an undergraduate degree with Honor’s from the University of Central Arkansas, I agree that this university shall make it freely available for inspection purposes granted by the professor who supervised my study, or by the Chair of the Department, or Dean of the Undergraduate School. It is understood that any copy or publication or other use of this honor’s thesis or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my express written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Central Arkansas in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my honor’s thesis.

Signature _______________________________ Date ____________
Abstract

Background and Significance: Involvement in NSNA provides for interaction with nursing leaders, discussion of current trends and research in nursing as well as a platform to practice leadership and professionalism. According the National Student Nurses Association website, NSNA.org, “the National Student Nurses' Association mentors the professional development of future registered nurses and facilitates their entrance into the profession by providing educational resources, leadership opportunities, and career guidance.” Despite its great benefits, many students are reluctant to join such a group.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to determine the student perceptions of involvement in the National Student Nurses Association as well as perceived benefits and limitations of membership for Baccalaureate nursing students.

Methods: A 21-question paper survey was administered to a total of 164 Baccalaureate nursing students comprised of questions designed to address the perceptions of students of the National Student Nurses Association. The nursing students surveyed were in various stages of their program and were asked to complete the survey whether they were members of the NSNA or not.

Results: Of the 140 surveys received, 89.9% of the students were under the age of 27 with 89.1% being female. 82.9% of the participants were completing their first baccalaureate degree and 98.6% reported that their school did not require membership in NSNA. Of those students surveyed who were not members, the most common response for what has prevented them from joining NSNA was money (8.6%), work schedule (7.1%) and NSNA not being important (6.4%). The participants who were not members had a response rate of 60% who either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt the faculty supported their involvement in NSNA. Both members and non-members were split on whether or not membership in NSNA should be mandatory.

Conclusions: Further research needs to be done to clearly identify benefits of membership. Student reports indicate that continued faculty support as well as increased time for NSNA activities may contribute to membership and involvement.
Background and Significance

Each year students across the country graduate from nursing schools and eagerly attempt to enter the workforce. What many of these students are finding is that it is now harder than ever to secure any job (Agnew 2006), yet alone their dream job. Tougher yet is that many students lack evidence of activities that demonstrate leadership, engagement, and participation firmly within the nursing profession. Additionally, these same students are leaving their nursing schools with only basic knowledge of the opportunities available to them. While the economy and job market may be out of our control, student preparedness to enter this tough field of Nursing is not. Involvement in Pre-professional student organizations, such as the National Student Nurses Association (NSNA) provides opportunities for students to expand their experience in leadership and professionalism and enter Nursing with a foundational knowledge that is not offered in the traditional nursing classroom. Involvement in NSNA provides for interaction with nursing leaders, discussion of current trends and research in nursing, as well as a platform to practice leadership and professionalism. According the National Student Nurses Association website (NSNA.org) “the National Student Nurses' Association mentors the professional development of future registered nurses and facilitates their entrance into the profession by providing educational resources, leadership opportunities, and career guidance.” Despite its great benefits, many students are reluctant to join such a group. According to the NSNA website, there are 54,835 members in the United States, while the National Council of the State Board of Nursing in 2009 reported 282,819 student nurses who took the NCLEX. This means that approximately 19% of student nurses are involved in their
pre-professional organizations. Even more startling is that this number is higher than the national enrollment in nursing professional organizations.

Professional nursing organizations are the primary means in which the voice of nursing is heard. The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics states “the profession of nursing, as represented by its associations and its members, is responsible for articulating nursing values, for maintaining the integrity of the profession and its practice, and for shaping social policy (ANA, 2001). The book, *From Silence to Voice* (Buresh & Gordon, 2006), acknowledges that when public health issues are addressed in the media only 1.1 percent of the quotations on the topic come from nurses. Compare this to the physician group who was quoted 30 percent of the time and the issue becomes clear; the voice of nursing is not being heard despite the fact that it is the professional responsibility of nurses to communicate to the public through its associations. Pre-professional groups, such as the National Student Nurses Association, can provide an introduction to organizational membership and engagement while students are pursuing their degrees. This involvement teaches students to engage and have a voice long before their profession requires it, making the transition from student nurse to practicing nurse easier.

The research regarding the specific benefits of membership in pre-professional organizations is scant and is largely based on disciplines outside of nursing, making it difficult to ascertain specific student benefits of membership. The purpose of this research is to determine student perceptions of involvement in the National Student Nurses Association, as well as perceived benefits and limitations of membership for Baccalaureate nursing students.
Methodology

Participants

For this cross-sectional descriptive research, Baccalaureate Nursing Students were recruited from the University of Central Arkansas. All students (N = 164) were eligible to participate. A total of 140 (n=140) surveys were received for a response rate of 85.4%. There was no identifying information collected from the participants. Of the 140 surveys received, 89.9% of the students were under the age of 27 and 89.1% were female. Most (82.9%) of the participants were completing their first baccalaureate degree. Of the students surveyed, 25.7% were completing their second semester, 20.0% were completing their fourth semester, and 62% were completing their sixth semester of a six-semester baccalaureate program (Figure 1).

Instrument and Data Analysis

A 21 item survey was developed based on the literature from other disciplines (Appendix A). Four demographic items were included for the purposes of describing the sample. Five items on the survey were meant to determine current participation in SNA. Eight items required students to respond to questions regarding motivation and beliefs about SNA involvement using 5 point likert-type scale ranging form "disagree" to "strongly agree". The remaining 4 items were meant to elicit student perceptions regarding motivators and barriers to SNA involvement. One open ended question was included to gain further insight from students regarding involvement in SNA. Participation in the survey was voluntary. No charge, inducement, or remuneration was provided for participation. Completion of the survey took approximately 5 minutes. This
study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board (Appendix B). Data generated were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and descriptive analysis.

**Results**

A large percentage (75.9%) of the students were members of the NSNA and 46.4% reported that their chapter of the NSNA held meetings often with 3 to 5 activities per month. Despite having 75% of students as members and a high report of chapter activity, only 9.3% had ever attended a National NSNA convention. Additionally, despite having events often, 86.2% of participants reported rarely (1-2 per month) or never (0 per month) participating in NSNA events at the chapter level.

When asked how students primarily heard about NSNA and its activities, students responded that they heard most often from another student (65%), faculty (38%) and the NSNA website (4%). Surprisingly only 1% of students heard about NSNA through Facebook (Figure 2).

In order to gauge the perceptions of students regarding NSNA, participants who were members were asked a series of questions. When asked if NSNA had increased the individual understanding of nursing issues, 40% of the participants agreed. When asked if participants felt that NSNA was worth their time, 38.6% agreed that it was, while 29.3% remained neutral and 2.9% disagreed. When asked if the members would encourage others to join, 46.4% responded that they agreed and when asked if they felt that faculty supported them, 65.7% either agreed or strongly agreed that they had faculty support.

Participants were asked what the biggest benefits of NSNA were and could choose between networking, mentoring, speakers, service opportunities, resume building,
conventions and leadership opportunities. Of those options, students who were members selected networking (39.3%) and resume building (29.3%) as their top two with service opportunities (18.6%) third. Those who were not members of the NSNA selected what they believed the primary focus of NSNA should be and selected service opportunities (25%), leadership opportunities (20.7%) and networking (17.1%) (Figure 3).

Of those students surveyed who were not members, the most common response for what has prevented them from joining NSNA was money (8.6%), work schedule (7.1%) and NSNA not being important (6.4%). The participants who were not members had a response rate of 60% who either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt the faculty supported their involvement in NSNA.

Both members and non-members were asked if they felt that membership in NSNA should be mandatory. Of the students who were members, 26.4% agreed or strongly agreed, 22.1% were neutral and 17.9% disagreed. The non-member group responded with 15% either agreed or strongly agreed, 27.9% neutral and 16.4% disagreed (Figure 4).

**Discussion and Recommendations**

The importance of the nursing professional organizations and pre-professional organizations can’t be underestimated especially as the nursing profession expands and is challenged along with our modern healthcare system. As the profession of nursing becomes more diverse and more essential to this system, the voice of nurses will need to be heard far more than it has in the past. Professional organizations provide the structure necessary for the voice of nurses to be heard in the national arena and the pre-
professional organization is the natural starting point to launch a fully engaged nursing career.

The Baccalaureate Nursing student must be prepared to enter an increasingly diverse and challenging workforce. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s *Essentials of Baccalaureate Education* states that baccalaureate prepared nurses must, “Articulate the value of pursuing practice excellence, lifelong learning, and professional engagement to foster professional growth and development (The Essentials, 2008).”

Involvement in the NSNA provides opportunities for students to practice this involvement and develop these skills firmly within the nursing curriculum. NSNA conventions offer many influential speakers and presenters who can educate students about the importance of continuing education and inspire professional engagement. Also, by encouraging student involvement in the NSNA, faculty are fully demonstrating and living the value and importance of life long learning, starting in nursing programs.

These skills are especially important for the baccalaureate prepared nurses who according to the AACN position statement serve in unique positions:

Unlike graduates of diploma or associate-degree nursing programs, the nurse with a baccalaureate degree is prepared to practice in all health care settings - critical care, outpatient care, public health, and mental health. Accordingly, the BSN nurse is well-qualified to deliver care in private homes, outpatient centers, and neighborhood clinics where demand is fast expanding as hospitals focus increasingly on acute care and as health care moves beyond the hospital to more primary and preventive services throughout the community (AACN, 2005).
For nurses prepared at the baccalaureate level, a more comprehensive education and level of engagement is required to function in the dynamic roles they are suited for.

According to the findings of the survey administered, many nursing students feel that the NSNA is valuable, but encounter barriers to becoming more involved. Although a high number of respondents stated they either agreed or strongly agreed that their faculty supported their involvement in NSNA, many still were not participating in NSNA events. This limited engagement could explain why a percentage of individuals (6.7%) who were not members felt that NSNA was not important. In order for nursing students to be fully engaged in NSNA activities at their local, state and national levels they must have the opportunity to attend events. While the rigors of nursing school can be naturally limiting, providing structured meeting times to ensure all students have the opportunity to be involved may be beneficial.

Additionally, many students who were not members indicated that money was a primary reason for not joining. The argument could be made that if NSNA fees were part of tuition or fees, the students would be less reluctant to join or would be able to utilize tuition funding to pay for the membership. The fees for membership are not prohibitively expensive, so perhaps notice of membership at the time of acceptance would boost membership numbers.

The participants were largely split on whether or not membership should be mandatory for baccalaureate students. Some are strongly opposed, where as others can see the value. One student reported, “I think that membership should be an option not a requirement. Faculty and Staff should strongly encourage membership”, while another stated that “it [NSNA] encourages the idea of nursing as a profession and a life-long
sense of the need for education.” The students are split on the idea of mandated membership and mandating involvement may create even further resentment toward the organization. Continued faculty support as well as creating schedules that include NSNA events as learning opportunities, possibly even clinical experience, will likely be more effective than mandated membership.

Limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size and all participants attended the same program, which may account for similar experiences. Additionally, the survey should be refined to prevent confusion in which questions to answer based on membership.

Further research is needed on this topic to provide more evidence as to the value of the pre-professional organization. Would encourage larger scale survey be administered to baccalaureate programs in different settings. Survey results from programs that mandate membership or include it in their fees would provide unique perspective on the perspective of students in mandated programs versus voluntary programs.
References

AACN - Publications - Position Statements. (2005, January 1). Welcome to AACN.
Retrieved April 10, 2011, from
http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Publications/positions/baccmin.htm


Strapp, C. M. & Farr, R. J. (2010). To Get Involved or Not: The Relation Among


Appendix A
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators**
Lindsey M. Siefferman and faculty advisor Julie Meaux PhD, RN, CNE from the Department of Nursing in the College of Health and Behavioral Sciences, will conduct this study at the University of Central Arkansas located at 201 South Donaghey Avenue Conway, AR 72035. Dr. Meaux can be reached at (501) 450-5529 or juliem@uca.edu.

**Purpose of the Research**
This research study is designed to assess the perceptions of students enrolled in baccalaureate nursing programs about the value of the pre-professional organization, specifically the National Student Nurses Association (NSNA). The data from this research will be used to provide recommendations to faculty, SNA groups and other baccalaureate programs about student desires regarding involvement. As a student, this research will be used to complete my undergraduate honors thesis requirements.

**Procedures**
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 21 questions survey by hand. Your participation will take approximately 10 minutes.

**Potential Risks or Discomforts**
There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

**Potential Benefits of the Research**
There are no potential benefits to the participants of this study. Information obtained may provide data to support alterations in scheduling and faculty needs based on student response.

**Confidentiality and Data Storage**
No personal or identifying information will be collected during this study. Results will be stored in the office of Julie Meaux PhD, RN, CNE at the University of Central Arkansas.

**Participation and Withdrawal**
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop participation at anytime without penalty. To stop please return your survey to the administrator and inform them that you have decided not to participate.
Questions about the Research
If you have any questions about the research, you may contact Julie Meaux at (501) 450-5529 or juliem@uca.edu.

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Central Arkansas.

I have read the information provided above. I understand that by returning the completed survey, I am agreeing to participate in this research study.

KEEP THIS INFORMED CONSENT COVER LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS.

Lindsey M. Siefferman ________________________________

Julie B. Meaux PhD, RN, CNE ________________________________
National Student Nurses Association (SNNA) Involvement Survey

Please answer the following questions as thoroughly as possible.

Check one:

1. Age:
   ______ 18-22
   ______ 23-27
   ______ 28-32
   ______ 33-37
   ______ 38 over

2. Gender:
   ______ Male
   ______ Female

3. Semesters in Nursing program:
   ______ 1
   ______ 2
   ______ 3
   ______ 4
   ______ 5
   ______ 6
   ______ 7+

4. Which of the following best describes you?
   ______ Working on completion of my first college degree.
   ______ Currently hold an Associate’s degree in another field.
   ______ Currently hold a Bachelors degree in another field.
   ______ Currently hold a Master’s degree in another field.

5. Does your School Require Membership in SNA?
   ______ Yes
   ______ No

6. Are you a Member of NSNA? If yes, continue. If “no” move on to question #19.
   ______ Yes
   ______ No

7. How active is your local NSNA Chapter?
   ______ Never holds meetings/activities (0 per month)
   ______ Rarely holds meetings/activities (1-2 per month)
   ______ Often holds meetings/activities (3-5 per month)
   ______ Frequently holds meetings/activities (More than 6 per month)
8. Have you attended an NSNA Convention?
   _____ If yes, how many?

9. How did you learn about NSNA (circle one)?
   _____ Faculty
   _____ Student
   _____ Local Chapter Officer
   _____ Website/Internet
   _____ Facebook
   _____ Other:

10. How active are you in your local NSNA Chapter (circle one)?
    _____ Never participate meetings/activities (0 per month)
    _____ Rarely participate meetings/activities (1-2 per month)
    _____ Often participate meetings/activities (3-5 per month)
    _____ Frequently participate meetings/activities (More than 6 per month)

Circle the appropriate answer:
11. Involvement in NSNA has increased my understanding of nursing issues
    Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. Involvement in NSNA has helped me academically
    Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

13. I feel that involvement in NSNA is worth my time
    Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

14. I would encourage others to join NSNA
    Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

15. I feel my faculty supports involvement in NSNA activities
    Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
16. Membership in NSNA should be mandatory for BSN students

Disagree  Somewhat Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

Why or Why not:

Check one:

17. What is the biggest benefit of the NSNA?
   ____ Networking with students
   ____ Mentoring
   ____ Speakers
   ____ Service Opportunities
   ____ Resume Building
   ____ Conventions
   ____ Leadership Opportunities
   ____ Other: ____________________________________________

18. What should be the primary focus of NSNA?
   ____ Networking with students
   ____ Mentoring
   ____ Guest Speakers
   ____ Service Opportunities
   ____ Resume Building
   ____ Conventions
   ____ Leadership opportunities
   ____ Other: ____________________________________________

*If you answered “no” to question #6 please answer the following:*

19. What has prevented you from joining the NSNA?
   ____ Involved with another organization
   ____ Work schedule
   ____ Academic Standing/Grades
   ____ Money
   ____ Did not know about it
   ____ Not important to me
   ____ Other: ____________________________________________
20. What should be the primary focus of NSNA?
   _____ Networking with students
   _____ Mentoring
   _____ Speakers
   _____ Service Opportunities
   _____ Resume Building
   _____ Conventions
   _____ Leadership opportunities
   _____ Other: ________________________________

   **Circle one:**

21. I feel my faculty supports involvement in NSNA
   Disagree  Somewhat Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

22. Membership in NSNA should be mandatory for BSN students
   Disagree  Somewhat Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree
   Why or Why not:
Appendix B
To: Julie Meaux/Lindsey Siefferman  
From: Tina Pilgreen  
Research Compliance Coordinator  
Date: March 2, 2011  
Subject: Exemption Review of IRB # 11-027  
Title: The Role of the Pre-Professional Student Organization in Baccalaureate Nursing Education

A member of the UCA Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application requesting exemption from further IRB review.

The research, as presented in your application, qualifies for exemption from further IRB review.

Note: Any changes to the original application must be submitted to the Research Compliance Coordinator before implementation as they could change the exempt status of your project.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 450-3451 or tinap@uca.edu.

c: Barbara Williams
Appendix C
Figure 1. Of the students surveyed, 25.7% were completing their second semester, 20.0% were completing their fourth semester, and 62% were completing their sixth semester of a six-semester baccalaureate program.
How Students Learned about the NSNA

Figure 2. Students responded that they heard most often from another student (65%), faculty (38%) and the NSNA website (4%). 1% of students heard about NSNA through Facebook.
Figure 3. Students who were members selected networking (39.3%) and resume building (29.3%) as their top two with service opportunities (18.6%) third. Those who were not members of the NSNA selected what they believed the primary focus of NSNA should be and selected service opportunities (25%), leadership opportunities (20.7%) and networking (17.1%).
Both members and non-members were asked if they felt that membership in NSNA should be mandatory. Of the students who were members, 26.4% agreed or strongly agreed, 22.1% were neutral and 17.9% disagreed. The non-member group responded with 15% either agreed or strongly agreed, 27.9% neutral and 16.4% disagreed.