

Barriers to Holistic Admission Processes in Schools of Nursing

All institutional process changes will necessarily have barriers to overcome. Expanding a nursing school's admissions pathways to include holistic admission processes is no exception. Wros and Noone (2017) discussed the barriers and lessons learned by an academic health center that initiated a holistic approach to their nursing school admission process. The barriers identified included the need to update the school's admissions mission statement, researching what experts identify as best practices to follow, identifying in-house champions and early adapters, finding ways to deal with concerns expressed about the ability of disadvantaged students to achieve success, and developing an interview process appropriate for the job of interviewing atypical candidates. Hertig and Dressel (2025) add to the list of barriers the overall complexity of the review process along with the additional funding needed to complete it.

In my opinion, the most difficult barrier to overcome is the age-old nursing attitude that declares, "we've always done it this way, and it works." These attitudes could belie underlying discriminatory beliefs which would likely take time and effort to dispel. This sentiment might be expressed by stakeholders who express concern about a disadvantaged student's ability to succeed in the rigorous curriculum in nursing school. Another difficult barrier is the necessity of amending and adding in a pre-admission interview process to include competency-based interview questions integral to the holistic nature of the overall mission (Morrow, 2021).

The Most Important Characteristics of an Inclusive Learning Environment

Morrow (2021) found that "Diverse learning environments have been found to help students challenge themselves, think actively, broaden their perspectives regarding diversity, increase socialization across racial and ethnic groups, and have led to improved intellectual,

social, and cognitive outcomes for all students” (p. 257). Providing an inclusive learning environment needs to mean much more than a new admissions mission statement or displaying informational posters depicting a diverse student body. Hertig and Dressel (2025) were eloquent when they expressed that “it is not enough to admit diverse students if we don’t provide diverse learning opportunities for those students (p. 58). Billings and Halstead (2023) discuss the importance of addressing the factors that contribute to the attrition of ethnically diverse students including “communication barriers, cultural differences, differing learning needs, and the lack of social-emotional support” (p. 27). In an inclusive learning environment effective communication is prioritized, cultural differences are celebrated, all learners’ needs are addressed, and social-emotional support is available to all.

How do you see faculty accessing and using these characteristics to build a culture of inclusivity in the school of nursing?

Cultural competence has long been taught to nursing students, but it is typically taught so that the students are prepared to deliver culturally competent care for their eventual patients. In this age of inclusivity, it is important that faculty practice cultural competence in the classroom as well as teach cultural competence at the bedside. According to Billings and Halstead (2023) “Minority nursing students face multiple barriers to successful program completion, including insufficient role models, bias, and lack of inclusion” (p. 366). Faculty must infuse their teaching strategies with awareness of this important fact and make every effort to combat these issues.

Billings and Halstead (2023) give examples of faculty making the effort to build a culture of inclusivity including setting up their classrooms to be more amenable to group work and peer-to-peer interaction using an easily modifiable set up and changing it as needed. Faculty can bring in speakers from diverse ethnic groups and plan events to help the students learn about each

other in contexts beyond the classroom. “In the classroom faculty must move from lectures to activity and variety that promote an opportunity to interact with each other, seek understanding, and establish respect for diverse ways of learning, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes” (Billings & Halstead, 2023, p. 377).

References

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