

**Barriers and Facilitators to Academic Progression in Nursing (APIN) Montana  
Results of Site Visits with Faculty of Nursing Programs  
Report by Dr. Rita Cheek & Dr. Cynthia Gustafson- April 18, 2013**

**What are barriers and facilitators to seamless academic progression in nursing in Montana?**

**Main barriers and facilitators identified by faculty:**

This table is a summary of the findings expressed by the 99 nursing faculty members who participated in program site visits made by Dr. Rita Cheek August 2012 – March 2013. The four categories (Students, Nursing Programs, Employers of Nurses, and Nursing Profession) emerged as main themes for the barriers and facilitators to academic progression for nurses.

| For                  | Main Barriers   | Main Facilitators  |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Students:            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financing education including the loss of income and health insurance if not working.</li> <li>• “Maxing out” on available financial aid before finishing their progression</li> <li>• Don’t realize how rigorous nursing education is.</li> <li>• Different admission criteria between programs on the path to progression</li> <li>• Few summer courses</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to practice nursing at BSN level or beyond.</li> <li>• Financial aid assistance at their college</li> <li>• Statewide common curriculum and course numbering.</li> <li>• Online courses</li> </ul>   |
| Nursing Programs:    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low faculty salaries impede faculty recruitment and retention</li> <li>• Heavy faculty workloads.</li> <li>• Clinical sites saturated with students (nursing and other professions).</li> <li>• Competition for clinical sites can occur across programs.</li> <li>• Few rewards for recruitment of needed clinical preceptors.</li> </ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty creativity in teaching, clinical, &amp; simulation labs.</li> <li>• Mentors for new nursing faculty.</li> <li>• Well-organized clinical sites.</li> <li>• Articulation agreements between ASN and RN to BSN programs.</li> <li>• Incentives to offer preceptors such as continuing education credits</li> </ul>   |
| Employers of Nurses: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little recognition for nurses with a BSN or seeking a BSN.</li> <li>• Lack of pay differential for BSN nurses.</li> <li>• Unrealistic expectations of new graduates which may lead to new graduates leaving nursing</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitals requiring BSN for nurses for hire or within a hire timeframe</li> <li>• Hospitals pursuing “magnet” status which recognizes levels of nurses’ education</li> <li>• Support for nurses to pursue lifelong learning</li> <li>• Support for new graduate nurses through transition to practice programs</li> </ul> |
| Nursing Profession:  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of support among nurses to each other.</li> <li>• Competition between ASN &amp; BSN.</li> <li>• Poor communication between nurses in practice and education.</li> <li>• Few incentives for nurses to become educators.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for different levels of nursing education.</li> <li>• Understanding differences in the roles of preparation and practice for each level of education.</li> <li>• Use of technology to enhance learning opportunities and facilitate dialog.</li> </ul>  |

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**Background:**

As part of the 2012 RWJF APIN grant to Montana, 10 of the 11 nursing programs in Montana were visited between August 2012 and March 2013 to share the purpose and goals of the APIN grant with faculty and engage them in dialog. Faculty members from the following colleges participated in these sessions: Carroll College, City College, Flathead Valley Community College, Helena College, Miles Community College, Missoula College, Montana State University- College of Nursing, Montana State University Northern, Montana Tech of The University of Montana, and Salish Kootenai College. Great Falls College was not visited during this time as their nursing program was on “hold” having no program director or faculty, but will be included in a visit in the future as new program director and faculty will be in place by fall of 2013.

It is not news to Montanans that from these interviews the general fact that Montana is a large, rural state with some disparity in opportunities for nursing education in the eastern and western parts and these facts are barriers to college education in general. Long distance travel to nursing classes and clinical experience are an obstacle, particularly in winter for students and faculty.

Faculty expressed the opinion that the general public lacks accurate information about nursing, what nurses do, different types of nurses, and different paths to becoming a nurse. Nurses know that the nursing profession is not easy to understand and too often nurses remain silent in their ability to articulate the importance they have on the health of Montanans. Nurses may not articulate their importance even though they are the largest sector of health care providers in the state and the only health care providers that surround the patient 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

This general lack of understanding of nursing roles and nursing education by the public including students, potential students, healthcare administrators, as well as some nurses and nursing faculty members is a barrier to academic progression or even the start of an academic career path for nursing. There is also a lack of consensus that academic progression in nursing can significantly improve the health of Montanans.

Barriers and facilitators to seamless academic progression in nursing in Montana are multifaceted, complex, and dynamic. Addressing the main barriers and strengthening the main facilitators can help lead toward the 2010 Institute of Medicine Future of Nursing Report’s 2020 goal of 80% BSN nurses in the workforce. (Montana has approximately a 50% BSN prepared nursing workforce.)

One of the most significant facilitators to academic progression in nursing is the statewide common curriculum of the Montana University System for nursing programs offering the AAS LPN and ASN RN programs. The partnership among these units of the university is growing and increasing the clear pathway to progression.