

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Leveraging faculty practice to grow the nurse practitioner faculty workforce

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose is to explore opportunities to leverage faculty practice to grow the NP faculty workforce.

Methods: The data were a subset of a larger study surveying NP students and faculty.

Results: Findings support faculty practice as an innovative strategy that can be leveraged to grow the NP faculty workforce.

Conclusions: There are missed opportunities for growing the NP workforce when faculty practice is not being used 1) as a strategy to recruit and retain faculty and 2) to entice NP students to consider a future career in academia.

Key Words: Vacancy, Shortage, Academia, Work-life balance, Recruitment, Retention, Burnout

1. INTRODUCTION

The healthcare workforce is seeing unprecedented rates of burnout, and nationwide health professional vacancies are well-known.^[1] In a 2023 United States Senate hearing regarding the state of the healthcare workforce shortage, the aging workforce, limitations to enrolling more students, and a faculty shortage were identified as significant issues.^[2] In a recent letter highlighting the American Nursing Association (ANA) federal legislative priorities for 2024, ANA reviewed several legislative proposals to invest in nursing education to rebuild the nation's nursing workforce.^[3] While there is a need for a national focus on faculty vacancies, there are innovative strategies that individual nursing programs can leverage on a local level. Faculty practice has been proposed as one strategy for recruiting and retaining nursing faculty.^[4-6]

According to an American Association of Colleges of Nurs-

ing (AACN) report, nursing schools turned away 78,191 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs due to an insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites and preceptors, and budget constraints, which demonstrates the nursing faculty shortage and its impact on growing the nursing workforce.^[7] Efforts to expand the nurse educator population are constrained as AACN reported that 5,907 qualified applicants were denied admission from master's programs, and 4,784 qualified applicants were denied admission from doctoral programs. The primary reasons for not accepting qualified students include a lack of faculty and clinical education sites. The inability to accept qualified applicants exacerbates the nursing faculty shortage.

Burnout and well-being have garnered additional attention, particularly as they have implications for faculty retention. In 2022, the Dr. Lorna Breen Healthcare Providers Act was signed into law, and a national campaign was launched to pro-

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mote resilience and wellness in the healthcare workforce.^[8]

The literature has increased regarding nursing faculty recruitment and retention, including an interest in work-life balance. Significant variation in workload designation exists among nursing faculty.^[5] Nursing faculty have identified numerous time-consuming activities that are frequently unaccounted for in the workload calculation.^[9] It has been suggested that a universal and comparable model for workload calculation is created that accurately reflects the work of nursing faculty.^[5] Only one article was found specific to faculty practice and work-life balance and workload, which suggests that work-life balance and workload are improved with faculty practice versus independent practice, as multiple roles and duties can be acknowledged and woven into one position through faculty practice.^[4]

Another strategy for the nursing faculty shortage includes developing collaborative positions or joint appointments, which typically involve a faculty and advanced practice appointment.^[5] Faculty practice refers to direct patient care and other professional services provided by nurse faculty to individuals, communities, and other entities.^[10] Moss et al. identified that faculty practice may aid in recruiting and retaining early-career faculty and noted that the faculty practice pipeline model has been underutilized.^[4] Bittner and Bechtel⁵ also recommend “grow-your-own programs” and supporting current students and faculty to continue their education to double the number of doctoral-prepared nurses. No other literature was identified specific to faculty practice and nursing faculty recruitment and retention, nor related to NP faculty and recruitment and retention.

While a call for national initiatives may lead to additional attention and resources for addressing the workforce issues in the United States, academic nursing also has an opportunity to consider innovative strategies from within, and faculty practice is one such strategy. The purpose of this study is to explore opportunities to leverage faculty practice to grow the NP faculty workforce.

2. METHODS

2.1 Design, setting, and sample

The data used is a subset from a larger descriptive study and results on faculty practice as an educational strategy have previously been reported.^[11] A convenience sample of NP students and faculty were recruited from six different nursing programs in the United States, five in the Midwest and one in the South. Eligibility included: NP student completing any degree or a post-master’s certificate at any point in their academic progression or nursing faculty who has engaged in faculty practice as an NP within the past year and teaches in

an NP program as previously described.^[11]

2.2 Instruments

A survey was used each for NP students and faculty and have been previously reported.^[6,11] Surveys, which were pilot tested in a previous study,^[12] were developed by the authors using their expertise in survey development (KG, LS) and faculty practice (KG, LH), as well as current literature (KG, AK, AH).^[6,11] The surveys included Likert-scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. Survey question categories used for this subset include questions on academia as a career and faculty practice as it pertains to professional and personal balance.

2.3 Procedure

The study received Institutional Review Board approval. Recruitment included emailing university contacts about the study including description, inclusion and exclusion criteria, consent information, and survey links, and they were asked to send the email to eligible participants at their university. Participants demonstrated consent through survey completion. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, including percentages, frequencies, and means.

3. RESULTS

One hundred seventy-three NP students and 25 NP faculty participated. Students were between 22-54 years of age and were 33 years of age on average. Students were from five of the six universities with most students seeking a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. Students were registered for an average of eight credits. Faculty participants represented four of the six universities and were 30-68 years of age and were 49 years of age on average. Faculty reported being an NP for an average of 14.5 years (range of three to 36 years) and teaching for an average of 10 years (range of zero to 41 years). Faculty indicated their academic Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) an average of 0.86 FTE (range of 0.1 to 1.0), and an average of 0.27 FTE for faculty practice (range of 0 to 0.75).

Students were asked what role they intend to assume after graduation, and 170/173 (98.3%) indicated clinical practice as a nurse practitioner, 1/173 (0.6%) indicated nursing faculty and 2/173 (1.2%) indicated “other” role. Those who responded “other” were able to free-text, and responses included “clinical practice but also research” and “I hope to be practicing and additionally hold a part-time nursing faculty role.” As shown in Table 1, students were asked if they had any interest in a career as a nursing faculty with 69/173 (39.9%) being unsure, 63/173 (36.4%) indicating yes, and 41/173 (23.7%) indicating no. Students were also

asked if knowing that the faculty role can include practice influenced their interest in becoming nursing faculty, with 102/173 (59%) indicating yes, 45/173 (26%) indicating no, and 26/173 (15%) indicating they were unsure. Lastly, stu-

dents were asked if they had ever heard they need to choose between scholarship/research and practice if they become faculty, with 134/173 (77.5%) stating no and 39/173 (22.5%) stating yes.

Table 1. Nurse practitioner student (N = 173) responses related to a faculty career

	I am interested in a career as a nursing faculty	Knowing the faculty role can include practice influences my interest in becoming nursing faculty	I have heard I need to choose between scholarship/research and practice if I become a nursing faculty
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Yes	63 (36.4)	102 (59)	39 (22.5)
No	41 (23.7)	45 (26)	134 (77.5)
Unsure	69 (39.9)	26 (15)	

Faculty were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements regarding work-life balance while engaged in faculty practice, as shown in Table 2. Faculty had some level of agreement with the statement, “I have academic balance when I engage in teaching, scholarship/research, and faculty practice” (16/25, 64%). In comparison, 2/25 (8%) were neutral, and 7/25 (28%) indicated some level of disagreement. Faculty had some level of agreement with the statement, “I have work-life balance when I engage in teach-

ing, scholarship/research, and faculty practice” (14/25, 56%). In comparison, 2/25 (8%) were neutral, and 9/25 (36%) indicated some level of disagreement. Lastly, faculty were asked an open-ended question about any other benefits or challenges associated with faculty practice, and one response pertaining to the nursing faculty role was, “I would not be in academia if I wasn’t provided the opportunity to maintain a practice.”

Table 2. Faculty responses (N = 25) regarding balance in faculty practice career

	I have academic balance when I engage in teaching, scholarship/research, and faculty practice.	I have work-life balance when I engage in teaching, scholarship/research, and faculty practice.
	n (%)	n (%)
Strongly agree	7 (28)	4 (16)
Agree	6 (24)	5 (20)
Somewhat agree	3 (12)	5 (20)
Neutral	2 (8)	2 (8)
Somewhat disagree	3 (12)	2 (8)
Disagree	1 (4)	2 (8)
Strongly disagree	3 (12)	5 (20)

4. DISCUSSION

This study yielded further information on faculty practice as an innovative strategy that can be leveraged to grow the NP faculty workforce. The small proportion of NP students in this sample who intend to assume a faculty role raises important questions about the future of NP faculty recruitment. However, 1/3 expressed interest in academia as a career, and knowing that faculty can practice positively influenced their interest in over half the student participants. This finding supports the role that increased visibility of academic opportunities has on recruiting NP students into academia, echoing the literature that faculty practice is a strategy to recruit and

retain nursing faculty.^[4,5]

Most faculty in this study reported that engaging in faculty practice promotes academic and work-life balance. This finding is congruent to the findings of Moss et al.^[4] Work-life balance includes finding meaning in one’s profession and feeling passionate and enjoyment about one’s work, which may increase performance and allow one to overcome the challenges and demands associated with the faculty role.^[8,9] Faculty practice affords additional opportunities to find meaning and feel passionate about work and can serve as a link between a typically practice-oriented career and academia, thus aiding recruitment and retention.

4.1 Implications

Faculty practice may be an avenue to bring additional meaning to academic nursing as it allows involvement in education, patient care, and scholarship/research and may promote overall well-being for the NP faculty workforce. Recommendations for nursing research is to continue to examine the impact of faculty practice including the personal impact that faculty practice has on individual faculty, while considering the emerging spotlight on work-life balance, burnout, and overall wellbeing. Recommendations for nursing education include further exploration and implementation of faculty practice to grow the nursing faculty workforce.

4.2 Limitations

Limitations include a small sample size, a setting limited to large universities, and self-report data. Additional limitations include the survey having a primary focus on NP education, not specifically on faculty recruitment and retention, and non-practicing faculty were not included in the study.

5. CONCLUSION

Missed opportunities exist when faculty practice is not being used 1) as a strategy to recruit and retain faculty and 2) to entice NP students to consider a future career in academia. Academic nursing must dispel the notion that academia is an “either-or” profession, and individuals must choose between the various missions when academic nurses can simultaneously engage in teaching, practice, and scholarship/research. Previously, faculty practice focused primarily on supporting the education mission or generating revenue for nursing programs. Absent from the conversation has been the potential to leverage faculty practice to grow the nursing faculty workforce. Faculty practice has the unique opportunity to impact the tripartite mission, which includes education, scholarship/research, and service via patient care. Faculty practice also impacts individual faculty on a personal level, including work-life balance, burnout, and wellbeing. Faculty practice may provide a pivotal approach to addressing nurse faculty and, consequently, critical nursing shortages.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors were responsible for study design and revising. Drs. Kelly Gonzales, LeAnn Holmes, and Abbey Klein developed the survey and Drs. Leeza Struwe and Alyson Hanish provided critical edits. Dr. Kelly Gonzales was responsible for data collection and Dr. Leeza Struwe was responsible for data analysis. Dr. Abbey Klein was responsible for creating all figures. Dr. Kelly Gonzales drafted the manuscript, and Drs. LeAnn Holmes, Abbey Klein, Leeza Struwe, and Alyson Hanish revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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DATA SHARING STATEMENT

No additional data are available.

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