Transforming the village, Partnering for success

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Ongoing project with IRB approval

Abstract: When nursing students learn how to work effectively as a team, they are primed to collaborate this way in the workplace. This project shows how the use of kindness and collaboration helps students succeed. A program orientation that introduces students to faculty, support services, and other students serves as this catalyst for success.

Content Outline

Austin Community College is committed to promoting faculty expertise and a successful teaching and learning environment that encourages active, lifelong learning and the creation of a collaborative partnership between academic, community and student services to enhance engagement and improve connections for new students as part of its mission statement and strategic plan.

The Association for Supervision and Curricular Development (ASCD), use the acronym SCORE (success, curiosity, originality, relationships, energy), to reflect the goals that drive engagement and fostering peer relationships contribute to contribute to student success. Students who have interpersonal involvement will work harder and have the energy to better manage complex, repetitious, and ambiguous challenges and enhance the drive toward program completion. Fostering student success at ACC is a collaborative approach that promotes equity in our diverse population.

Kindness is the framework used to enhance student engagement and success, develop interprofessional collaboration and bridge the gap between educational and professional implementation. This project is ongoing and the methods are described more fully in this outline.

To define, kindness is behavior marked by ethical characteristics, a pleasant disposition, and concern for others. It implies that other people matter, it is both energetic and interactive, and is implicit in interpersonal relationships.

In order to begin to teach interprofessional collaborations (elements which include accountability, coordination, communication, cooperation, and mutual trust and respect), which is in part a relationship between two or more members, we need to teach appropriate relationship development.

This project utilizes kindness in three areas to enhance student engagement, teach and model collaboration, and prepare students for the role of future nurse leaders.

The first area to discuss is the development of community. Modeling and teaching collaboration begins with a program wide orientation, Team Teal 101; for all entering nursing students and families. This is a time for students to learn about the variety of services and support available, meet with current students, meet their cohort peers and the faculty that will guide their learning. The social setting, availability of food, conversation, and settings would establish a baseline for developing important peer to peer and faculty relationships.

This event is a way to begin building relationships with students in the cohort and with students in the upper levels. Our accelerator program serves to promote peer to peer support and establish collaborative study groups. The community and college partners are involved in this orientation, as well. Students learn about the variety of ACC student services available and meet those that provide them. These partners and the services provided model collaboration and are aligned with the college mission and strategic plan and allow the use of and need for services to promote access to quality education.

The goal of this event is to build community, establish relationships, and get students engaged with one another and the faculty. In essence, it demonstrates to the students that they matter.

 The second area discussed is the use of kindness in the classroom setting. Collaboration in the workplace has been shown to empower members of a team and develop a more communicative environment. Collaboration allows for shared intelligence and improves outcomes. Students want and need work that will enhance relationships with people they care about, and the drive for interpersonal involvement is pervasive in all our lives. Expectations of conduct are made clear on the first day of class. Examples of respectful communication and behavior are provided and it is made clear that incivility is not tolerated by the students to one another or faculty but also by faculty to one another and students. Each day students are greeted by faculty as they enter class. Casual conversations are sparked and relationships are formed. Students feel respected and cared about, gain confidence and learn to network. Students that have an adjunct faculty for clinical are assigned on-campus faculty to aid with coursework, questions, or concerns. Each day before the lecture, the team greets the students, socialization occurs, and relationships developed

Faculty model collaboration by collegial relationships and providing respectful feedback to students. Active learning opportunities and group work facilitate team building and enhance engagement. Student engagement is a useful model for understanding persistence and success. Engaged students do more than attend or perform; they put forth effort, self-regulate behavior, and position themselves for desired academic, social, and emotional learning, all of which are preparation for collaboration.

The final area discussed is the use of kindness and appreciation among faculty members. In as much as collaboration is deemed necessary in the healthcare setting, it begins with students learning respectful, professional behaviors in school. To recognize and appreciate faculty members, a “scatter kindness” basket was developed. Faculty members choose to acknowledge one another with small treats and kind words and once a recipient; they then get to pass the kindness forward to other faculty members. Collaboration is defined in part as a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship…appreciating colleagues aids the trust, shared vision, and communication that promotes collaboration. Students are positively influenced by faculty that support and encourage one another, thereby learning ways to develop critical interprofessional relationships. Students that form this foundation in school are then better able to transition this skill in their professional practice.

These measures have been used in the past three semesters with varying degrees of success. Faculty responses to being appreciated are positive and the ‘scatter kindness” basket is now in the hands of faculty and not the authors. These cohorts of students have remarked positively on the orientation, and influential peer groups seem to have developed earlier in the semester while upper-level students remark that they would have liked to have had the same opportunity. This project is ongoing and persistence rates and end outcomes will be observed for tangible results but we are confident that the kindness and collaboration modeled by faculty and community partners will allow for the development of important scholastic relationships, enhance engagement thus allowing for a more fluid transition of these skills to professional practice.

Background: In previous years, the National Council of State Boards of Nurses (NCSBN) and boards of nursing (BONs) have looked at the issues in the training and retention of new graduate nurses. When a new nurse has difficulty transitioning, serious consequences can occur. Program issues with persistence and outcome successes prompted a review of the nursing program at Austin Community College and the personal teaching and professional philosophies of the authors prompted a different approach to the on-boarding of students and the partnering with college and community resources.

It was determined that three distinct changes could be made that would enhance student engagement, aid in the development of relationships, and promote collaboration. Utilizing current research on student engagement and especially the works of Clark (Creating and sustaining civility in nursing education), we determined that orienting students to the culture of nursing, providing access to community and college partners, and modeling kindness or civility in all areas would have a positive impact and ease the transition to professional practice.

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