

SUS Deans' Recommended Strategy for Establishment of a Competitive Grant Program

As noted by the *American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)*, enrollment in nursing programs is limited by budget restraints, impending faculty retirements, and a critical shortage of preceptors and clinical placement sites. Faculty shortages are of particular concern with a national nursing faculty vacancy rate of 6.9%. This vacancy rate translates into 1,236 faculty vacancies across 714 nursing colleges and schools (AACN, 2014). Reasons cited for nursing faculty vacancies are insufficient funds to hire new faculty (61.3%) and a critical shortage of qualified applicants (56.5%). As noted by AACN, 89.6% of faculty vacancies require a doctoral degree and there is a critical shortage of nurses prepared at this level.

To address the critical shortage of nursing faculty in Florida, the State University System (SUS) Deans and Directors recommend short and long-term investments in nursing education. The long term strategy (presented under separate cover) includes direct appropriation to the SUS schools of nursing, approval of a differential tuition rate for graduate nursing programs and approval of fees to support clinical learning.

Several ideas are presented for potential short-term investment to create and sustain a state-wide nursing faculty recruitment and retention. Each program within the SUS has unique needs for faculty members, depending on program offerings and strategic plans. Some programs are focusing on hiring tenure-earning faculty who can contribute to the programs' teaching and research missions while others may focus hiring on clinical faculty to support teaching and clinical practice, such as the practice doctorate. Thus recruitment and retention strategies vary across the SUS programs. Prospective faculty members want to know that they will be supported in their role at the institution. Support includes a variety of strategies.

1. What are best practices in recruiting and retention that would be appropriate for a grant program to support? Provide examples either from within the system or elsewhere?
 - Junior faculty members in research-focused positions need a formal mentoring program to support success. The University of South Florida have instituted a formal program, called *Institute for Nursing Faculty Recruitment, Retention, and Mentoring (INFORM)*. Other SUS programs have instituted similar programs at University and program levels. Programs include formal mentorship and regular faculty development. Formal programs could be developed across the SUS system, modeling and adapting the INFORM model. The goal of INFORM is to recruit, retain and mentor nursing faculty in the areas of teaching, research, and scholarship. INFORM is evidence-based and addresses the following key elements of the faculty role:
 - Academic citizenship to prepare faculty for the university environment and the faculty role including strategies for managing heavy workloads.
 - Academic partnerships for rapidly implementable programs of research.
 - Teaching expertise in both live and online venues including pedagogical knowledge, classroom/online technology, simulation and clinical instruction.
 - Expertise in interprofessional education and the preparation of nurses for collaborative patient-centered care.

- Skills in grantsmanship and writing for publication.
- Competitive “packages” are needed to effectively recruit and retain faculty. SUS programs have reported losing potential hires to programs across the nation that offer a comprehensive package to support their success as a faculty member. The package is often combined with a formal mentoring program. Funding to support competitive packages for recruitment of both junior and senior faculty members include:
 - Competitive salaries (Florida SUS salaries have been below the national average). Some specialties require higher salaries than others.
 - Reduced teaching loads for at least the first 3 years to allow the faculty member time to develop as a researcher and/or clinical scholar. This also requires funding to hire adjunct faculty to support the reduced teaching assignment.
 - “Start up” funding to support research and or clinical scholarship. This funding can support a variety of line items, such as research assistants or graduate student assistants, equipment and supplies, publication costs, and travel to professional meetings to present peer-reviewed papers and projects.
 - Senior faculty, which are the most challenging to recruit, have high expectations for salary and start-up packages.
- Faculty members seek grant funding to support their research and scholarship. Increasingly, funding from federal agencies (the gold standard), has become challenging. The availability of a statewide competitive grant program to support nursing research and scholarship would enhance recruitment and retention and success of junior faculty members. It would also make them more competitive in seeking federal funding as this seed money would facilitate pilot work to support larger, more competitive grant funding. Examples include the following:
 - The state of Florida has the Bankhead Coley and the James and Esther King grant programs that support research related to cancer and tobacco-related diseases. These programs are supported by the Biomedical Research Advisory Council.
 - The state of Texas has grant funding to support competitive proposals for biomedical research.
 - A program to support development of nursing research programs could be modeled after existing Florida programs.
- Incentives and opportunities to support Florida residents to pursue doctoral education and remain in the state upon completion. Examples may include:
 - Forgivable loans for master’s-prepared nursing faculty to attain a doctorate, with an emphasis on PhD education, the greatest need for faculty preparation.
 - Grants to SUS programs for faculty development leaves/sabbaticals to pursue the PhD on a full-time basis and complete within a specified time frame. Upon completion, a term of service at an SUS program would be expected.
 - Tuition waivers for prospective faculty members to pursue the PhD. Upon completion, a term of service at an SUS program would be expected.
- Grants for development of innovative programs for doctoral preparation for state residents could also be an effective strategy. Examples include:
 - Collaborative programs across the SUS programs.
 - Accelerated PhD programs.
 - BSN to PhD options, which some SUS programs already have.

- DNP to PhD accelerated programs. Currently more DNP graduates are being educated nationwide, while most faculty needs support the PhD graduate.
2. Are there specific types of nursing programs (e.g., tracks, concentrations, degrees) that might have a higher priority than others?
 - As a system, the SUS deans believe the greatest need is education, recruitment, and retention of faculty members with PhD preparation.
 3. Do you have specific suggestions for how to structure the grant program to ensure that it's as effective as possible and also meets the states greatest needs?
 - We believe that each SUS program is different and has unique needs, yet faculty recruitment and retention is a commonality across programs. We support funding to all programs to address the specific needs of each institution with the goal of educating, hiring, and retaining PhD-prepared faculty members.
 - Piloting a mentoring program across the SUS-system (such as adapting the USF INFORM program across the SUS programs) may also be an effective strategy. Funding to support development, implementation, and evaluation of such a program would be beneficial.
 - A minimum of 3 to 5 years sustained funding is needed to implement and evaluate programs.