

# Fostering Belonging and Connection for Nurse Practitioner Students in a Hybrid Curriculum

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## Introduction

Over 80% of NP programs offer remote courses, which can lead to student disconnection and burnout. We theorized that when students come to campus for in-person intensive training, providing time for team-based self care and informal social time can build needed connections to their cohort and their university. This study explored Nurse Practitioner (NP) students' experiences with community-building and self-care activities.

*Name one thing that  
You learned today:*

*92% reported positive  
learning and feelings.*

*Much more feedback @  
“How they felt” →*



*Name one thing that  
You felt today:*

- “Monday I felt anxious,
- Tuesday I had more confidence

*“I feel extremely grateful  
for the opportunities I have  
had at Duke and for the  
environment and culture  
that was created among  
the students and teachers”*



## 4 Key Take-Aways

1. Community connection
2. Confidence and comfort
3. Anxieties and difficulties
4. Feeling supported and grateful



## Exemplar Table

Table 1 (page 1). Exemplar in person activities with goals for NPs

Activity	Goal
1 <sup>st</sup> clinical semester: Intentional Icebreaker activities (with active faculty participation) with processing/debrief (what did you like/dislike about this activity, what you learned, how it felt) Examples: 1. How you got your Name 2. Stand up if (examples: you like chocolate/have horseback ridden, voted this year, have pets, grew up with your grandparents, etc) 3. People Hunt (bingo style: find classmate who loves pasta, been in Canada, plays musical instrument, speaks more than one language, etc.).	Promote Connection  Creating a sense of belonging (bringing in each voice/equity is key)
2 <sup>nd</sup> clinical semester: Group Facilitation skills workshop: learning and leading interactive group care medical appt model (based on the Centering Healthcare Institute model).	Strengthen active listening, team building, connection in safe space, build trust.
1 <sup>st</sup> clinical semester: Walking Dyad Exercise: Find a partner, ask name, where lives, current job, and one thing that makes them unique. Come back together and introduce partner to the group. Debrief the process. How is it different to introduce someone else vs yourself?	Promote connection w peers and university when walk on campus grounds.  Listen and value another person. Reflect on value of connecting.
Self-care activities-2 in each session: Make rice sock wrap w essential oils with a partner; include guest interprofessional teaching faculty. Visit student wellness center w massage chairs/drum circle led by a non-nursing university student. Mindfulness activities Stretch yoga led by np students	Promote connection, valuing self-care, empowerment.  Interprofessional interaction



## Qualitative Descriptive Design

Several integrated activities occurred during the Women's Health on campus days. See Exemplar Table 1.

At the end of each day, two question were asked:

- 1) *Name one thing you learned today*
- 2) *Name one thing that you felt today*

Anonymous answers were written on an index card.

A Directed Content Analysis was conducted using an *a posteri* codebook from seven on-campus teaching events. (n=89).

## Conclusion

These themes demonstrate the importance of fostering community and belonging in distance-based APN programs. Specific activities during brief on-campus sessions can facilitate positive experiences and connection.

## Selected References

Office of the Surgeon General. (2022). Addressing Health Worker Burnout: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Building a Thriving Health Workforce. Office of the Surgeon General. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/health-worker-burnout/index.html>

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Self-care activities-2 in each session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Make rice sock wrap w essential oils <u>with a partner</u>; include guest interprofessional teaching faculty.</li><li>Visit student wellness center w massage chairs/drum circle led by a non-nursing university student.</li><li>Mindfulness activities</li><li>Stretch yoga led by np students</li></ul>	<b>Promote connection, valuing self-care, empowerment.</b>  <b>Interprofessional interaction</b>



Table 1 (page 2). Exemplar in person activities with goals for NPs

Activity	Goal
Professional and Institutional Affiliation Group photo each clinical semester Swag: Tee shirts/mugs/license plate holder with specific NP program logo (once in the clinical year) Treasure hunt at university archival library to view history of women’s health (specific to (WH) program)	<b>Envisioning future professional role</b>  <b>NP student Empowerment</b>  <b>See themselves as belonging to their cohort/university.</b>  <b>Combat possible imposter syndrome</b>
Socializing Potluck/wine&cheese @school patio with local 1 <sup>st</sup> year students invited. 1st on-campus session: Meet your cohort/program director over lunch during initial campus visit.	<b>Promote Connection</b>  <b>Creating a sense of belonging, enhancing belonging to larger university</b>  <b>Build relationships with faculty and peers</b>
Mentorship Admission semester: “Peer mentor/mentee Partnership” (graduate/senior with entering student) 3 <sup>rd</sup> clinical semester: Teaching clinical skills by seniors	<b>Support</b>  <b>Build confidence</b>
Social media connection Closed group fb page	<b>Support/socialize</b>

