

From the Classroom to the Capitol: Enhancing Student Nurses' Advocacy Through Experiential Learning

Caitlin McArthur, DNP, RNC-MNN • Watts College of Nursing, Durham, NC



Affiliated with the
Duke University Health System



REFERENCES



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SUMMARY & LESSONS LEARNED



Students and faculty in Bicentennial Plaza in Downtown Raleigh, which is between the North Carolina State Capitol building and the North Carolina Legislative Building.

The students demonstrated meaningful growth in their political self-efficacy. The greatest increases were seen in areas related to expressing political opinions, promoting political campaigns, engaging in community mobilization, and developing working relationships with candidates. These gains suggest that exposure to real-world policy processes, paired with structured educational support, can empower nursing students to view political engagement as an accessible and essential part of their professional role.

Lessons Learned

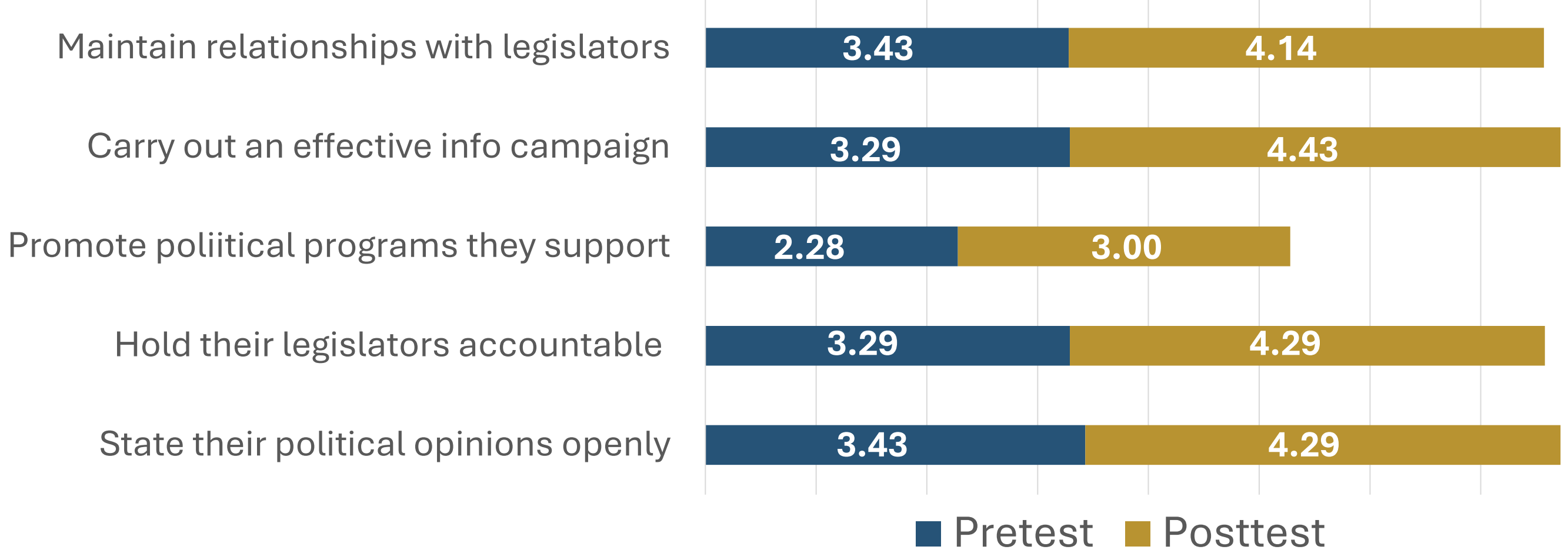
- Experiential learning can be a powerful tool for developing advocacy skills in nursing students and demystifies the political process.
- Students benefit from actionable strategies for engaging with policymakers.
- Early exposure to the intersection of policy and practice strengthens students' professional identity as nurse advocates.

OUTCOMES

Students completed the **Perceived Political Self-Efficacy (P-PSE) Scale** before and after the intervention, using anonymous identifiers to match responses. Of the 10 student participants, **7 completed both surveys**.

A paired samples t-test revealed a statistically-significant increase in political self-efficacy scores [$t(7) = -3.03$, $p = .023$], with an average increase of 8.57 points, reflecting greater confidence in students' ability to engage in advocacy.

Items from the 10-question P-PSE where growth was the highest:
1 = Completely disagree ... 5 = Completely agree



Students and Representative Carla Cunningham (106th District). Rep. Cunningham is a nurse and a member of NCNA.

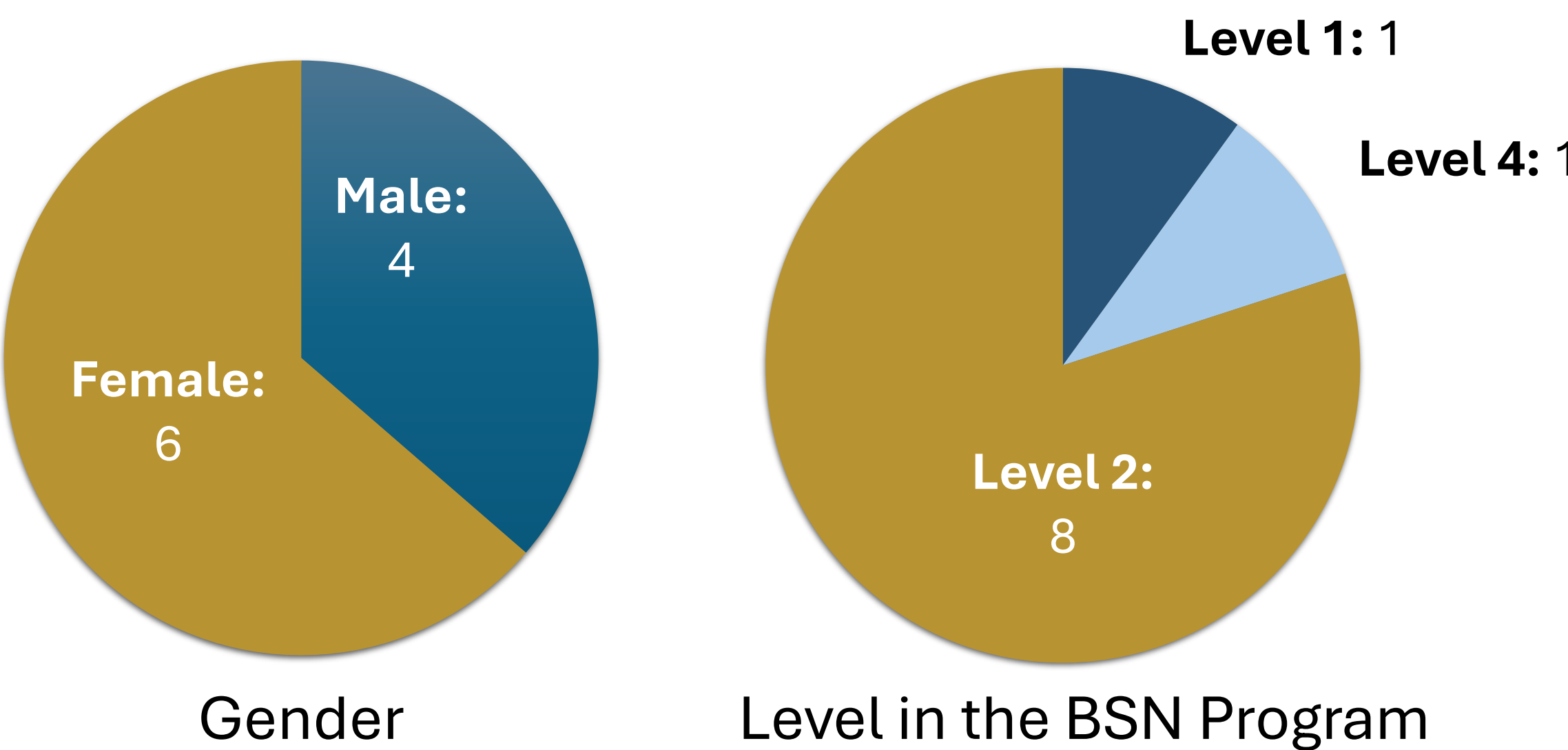
INTERVENTIONS

The intervention for this QI project consisted of two consecutive experiences:

1. **A virtual educational session:** First, students attended a one-hour virtual presentation by the Political Engagement Manager of the North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA), which focused on the role of nurses in political advocacy and current policy positions of NCNA.
2. **An experiential advocacy activity:** Following this, students were invited to participate in the 2025 NCNA Nurses Day at the Legislature, where they had the opportunity to hear from Governor Josh Stein, NCNA leaders, and lobbyists, as well as directly engage with bipartisan state legislators to discuss the current and future state of healthcare in North Carolina.

DEMOGRAPHICS

10 prelicensure nursing students enrolled in a BSN program



BACKGROUND

Problem: Nurses are essential stakeholders in shaping health policy, yet political advocacy is an underdeveloped competency in nursing education.

- Despite guidance from the American Nurses Association (2015) and the Tri-Council for Nursing (2024) affirming political engagement as a professional obligation, many nursing students enter practice with limited exposure to advocacy.
- Only 54% of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs integrate policy into their curriculum, and only 36% of graduate programs offer a dedicated policy course (Staebler et al., 2017).
- This gap in education has contributed to consistently low levels of political engagement, particularly among younger nurses, despite their desire to impact patient and community outcomes (Lewinski & Simmons, 2018).

Potential Solution: The literature reveals that experiential learning may be a promising strategy to address these deficits.

- Participation in structured advocacy events, such as nurse legislative days or direct engagement with policymakers, has been shown to increase students' political efficacy, communication skills, and understanding of the policy process (Primomo & Bjorling, 2013; Sweeney, 2022).
- Students who attended the New Jersey Advocacy Day reported feeling more empowered to discuss legislation with elected officials (Sweeney, 2022).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this quality improvement (QI) project was to implement an evidence-based political engagement initiative for nursing students that:

1. Increased students' understanding of the impact of politics on healthcare and the nursing workforce.
2. Improved students' sense of political efficacy.
3. Assessed students' perceptions of how political engagement influences their professional identity.
4. Encouraged long-term involvement in professional nursing organizations and advocacy efforts.

