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

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REFERENCES



A special "thank you" to the following people

- My mentor, Beth Herold, for her advice on
- Beverly Murphy for her invaluable assistance with search engine queries and her friendship.
- the IRB process.
- Dr. Yolanda Neal, who models advocacy for

Qualitative responses on the post-test survey reinforced these findings:

Students described a **stronger sense of professional identity**. One student shared, "I didn't know that nurses could work so closely with lawmakers, which is SO exciting to learn." Another stated, "After this experience, I felt more motivated to openly advocate for issues regarding nursing and healthcare."

- Several students described increased confidence: "My confidence has increased because I now know HOW to engage," and "Knowing that many [legislators] are looking for information from the community made it easier for me to engage."
- The most impactful aspects included visiting the legislative building, hearing from nurse leaders, and witnessing advocacy in action. As one participant wrote, "Walking to the legislature brought us closer to the political environment without being scary or overwhelming."
- were now more open to professional membership and future advocacy **involvement**. One student came with me the following week to have coffee and talk about nursing-adjacent political issues with a local legislator.

BACKGROUND

PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS

SPONSORING SCHOOLS

Forsyth Tech

Thank You!

College of Nursing

ECU COLLEGE OF NURSING

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 Forward® 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:

- 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.

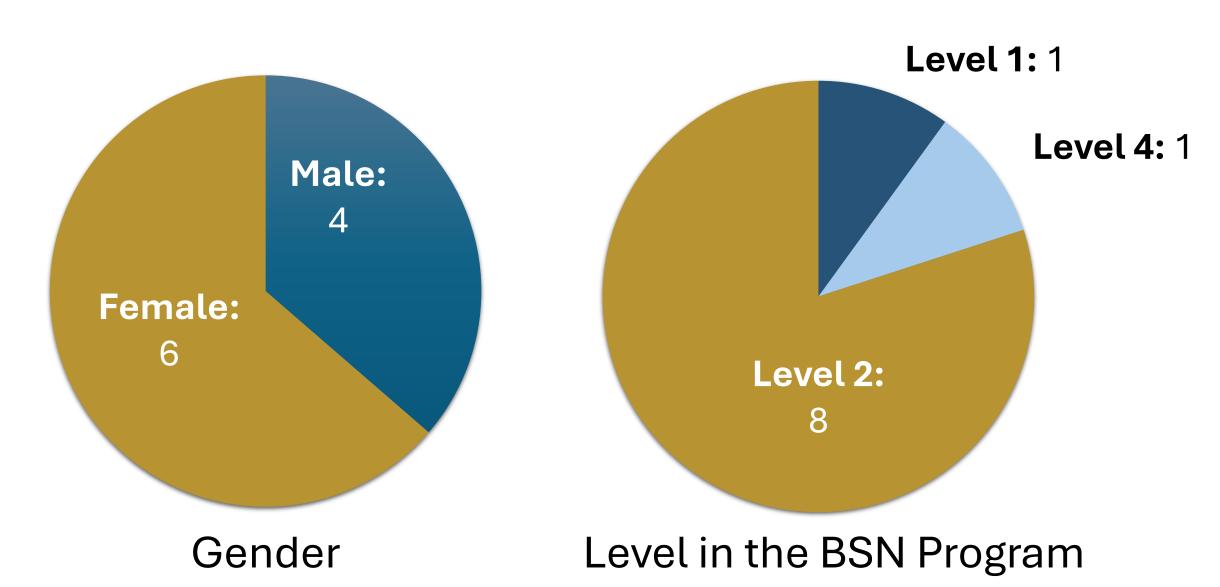
INTERVENTIONS

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



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.

SUMMARY & LESSONS LEARNED

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

for their support in completing this project:

- work, life, and politics.
- Hutch Allen, for patiently guiding me through
- President of Watts College of Nursing, her students and team in all that she does.

OUTCOMES

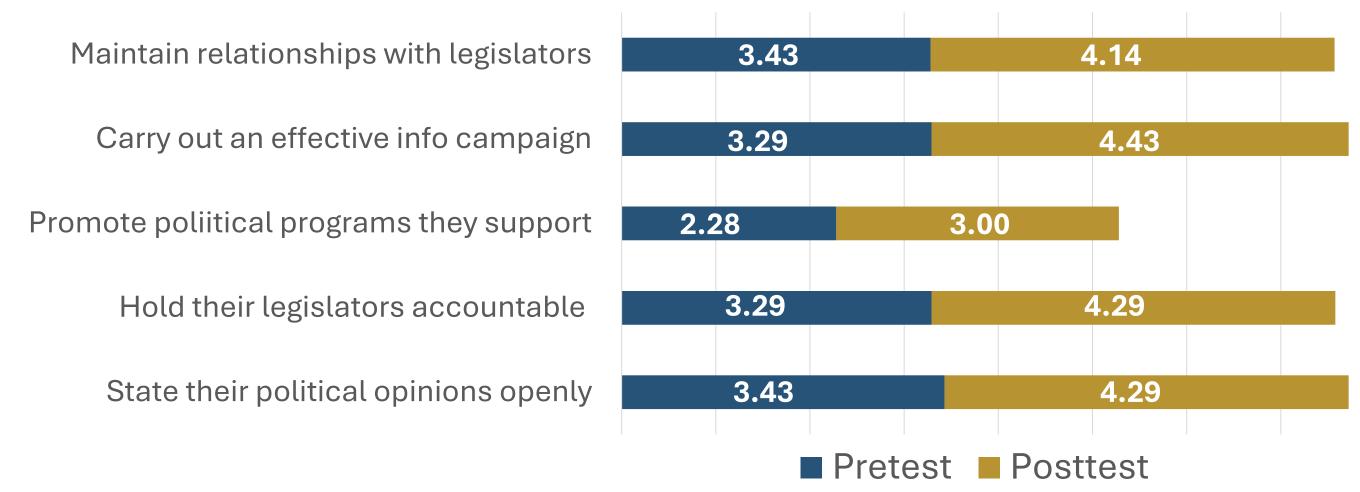


Students and Representative Carla Cunningham (106th District). Rep. Cunningham is a nurse and a member of NCNA.

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



A few students even joined NCNA during the event, while others indicated they