



STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

FORGING POSITIVE STUDENT/FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS

BY MICHELLE ACUNA

As the past membership director for my state student nurses association, I experienced the challenges of establishing new student nurse association chapters with highly supportive and sometimes unsupportive faculty. Many articles appear in the nursing literature about faculty promoting professionalism in students, yet many are not supportive of NSNA activities. Are they aware that NSNA promotes leadership skills, professional development, and global awareness, many of which are goals in the curriculum?

Students play a key role in educating professors about NSNA. The following is advice for improving relations with faculty and achieving more support for the student nurses association.

1. Cultivate relationships with faculty. Find ways of helping faculty, such as conducting student orientations for each new incoming class. This serves as a timesaver for faculty and provides students with excellent opportunities to plan, delegate, and collaborate in this team effort. Helping out with fundraising activities to help support nursing program needs such as computers, software, NCLEX review materials, laboratory equipment and supplies, is another good team approach and can be an enormous benefit to faculty.

2. Encourage recognition. NSNA's *Awards and Honors* booklet, available on www.nсна.org and updated each year,

provides applications and a complete description of all NSNA's contests. NSNA's contest winners receive great visibility not only for themselves but for their schools, including being honored with plaques and certificates at the annual convention, and announcements in *Imprint* and on www.nсна.org. NSNA has a special award just for faculty, the NSNA/Mosby Leader of Leaders Award, in which students nominate an outstanding member. The individual selected receives an expense paid trip to the annual convention and a plaque at Convention. (See *Awards and Honors* booklet). Encourage your peers to be on the lookout for that special faculty member who has made a difference for you or your chapter, and nominate them for this special award.

3. Create a mentorship program. All deans and directors want their program to be the best, and you can improve its image by helping to establish a mentor program for new students. At our school, students formed a mentoring program in which those who had completed at least one semester of clinicals volunteered to be mentors for incoming students. Mentors were present at the new student orientation to establish contact right away. New students were encouraged to contact their mentors as often as they wished with any questions they had about buying supplies, books, scheduling, studying, etc. Mentors were encouraged to call



and check in on the progress of the new student and provided new students with emotional support.

4. Communicate often. Keep your instructors in the loop about special events, meetings, and activities you are involved in. Provide them with a list of dates, times, and locations of all the SNA meetings. A personal invitation to special events is a nice touch. You may even invite them to speak on their area of expertise. Near the end of the semester, make an attractive brochure of all of the goals your SNA has accomplished, and send it to all the faculty.

5. Ask for support. Request faculty support of student participation in school, state, and national student nurse organization events. Explain how involvement benefits students and offer

ideas on how students can make up absences from classroom and clinicals. There are many valuable incentives faculty can offer, such as time off and point incentives. One instructor offered "bonus time": that is, extra time in exchange for time off from clinicals. To improve attendance at our monthly SNA meetings, a professor added one percentage point to the final grade for all students who attended all four meetings each semester. Another point incentive is to provide a few bonus

questions on an exam that could only be answered correctly by attending meetings. Some programs offer awards for attending state student nurse conventions and conferences and NSNA conventions and conferences.

6. Offer constructive criticism. If you have feedback on the curriculum, or a particular course, provide faculty with input on how to strengthen programs by offering constructive criticism, keeping in mind that change

doesn't happen overnight. You may be more successful by choosing a few key areas to focus on, rather than trying to make major changes. Identify the correct channels for communication within the school's administration and find out how to make suggestions for change. Also, don't hesitate to highlight a particular course or program which you enjoyed or found beneficial.

7. Say "Thank You." Let faculty know that you appreciate them. Send them thank you notes for support they have given, such as attending events, excusing you to go to conventions, or providing resources for your program. You can send a copy to the dean too. Acknowledge those who go out of their way to help you with a card, flowers, or other appropriate forms of appreciation.

8. Stay informed. Encourage faculty advisors to read *Faculty Focus*, NSNA's newsletter devoted solely to faculty news and issues. All faculty advisors listed in NSNA's database automatically receive this publication twice a year. If you are a faculty advisor and have not received it, e-mail cathy@nsna.org.

9. Visit www.nсна.org. Encourage faculty and faculty advisors to visit www.nсна.org, NSNA's web site. Updated weekly, it offers a great deal of content on NSNA's upcoming meetings, publications, press releases, items for sale, and more. There is also an area on the home page specifically for faculty and consultants.

10. NSNA Leadership U. Encourage faculty support of NSNA's Leadership U, a new program in which students can earn academic credit for participation in NSNA. (See p. 55)

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