



BACK TO SCHOOL

# How to Become Involved: Engaging Your Faculty in Chapter and Association Activities

By Barbara Chamberlain

After teaching in nursing schools for many years and being involved with the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) for as many years, I thought I had heard all the stories students tell about why they can't get involved in leadership activities. The one that struck me the most was about a student whose faculty member refused to sign the necessary paperwork to allow her - an excellent student - to run for office and develop leadership skills.\*

As I thought about this situation, I began to think about faculty members in general and how they perceive NSNA, state, and school activities. Was there a reason the faculty member mentioned above did not want this student to get involved? How do students engage faculty to be supportive of their activities and involvement with NSNA? After all, support of activities and involvement isn't just about signing paperwork: students look to advisors and consultants for guidance, support, and mentorship.

## The Problem

Some reasons that faculty may not be involved:

- **Not having experience with NSNA or knowing about the organization.** This was the case when I was approached by the chair of my department to be the school advisor. I had never heard of NSNA, its vision and mission, or what it represented, but with some research, I learned quickly.
- **Faculty are aware of NSNA but consider it a drain of time to already busy students.** Perhaps these faculty are unaware of the leadership opportunities and career development tools that NSNA makes available to its membership and to faculty and advisors alike.
- **With so much content to deliver in a short period of time, faculty are concerned about allowing students to take time off to attend state and national conventions.** State and national conventions are a great opportunity for students to make contacts with potential employers, explore specialty possibilities, and pursue other leadership opportunities. In many ways, they supplement a student's education. Non-supportive faculty can add more stress to already exhausted students. One student I met had to leave a state convention to attend a clinical and then drive back to the convention that same evening. The student was fearful of missing a clinical day because it would have to be made up at an inconvenient time and perceived having to return for clinical as punishment for attending the convention.

## What You Can Do to Involve Your Faculty

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2003), the national nursing faculty vacancy rate is 8.6 %. Faculty time is a precious commodity; they may be too busy to be aware of, or supportive of, NSNA activities. The school faculty advisor may turn over every few years and the

new advisor may not know what to do. Some ideas on how to involve faculty include:

- **Approaching new advisors and giving them the opportunity to learn about NSNA,** and all it has to offer: the networking potential in attending a meeting, the opportunity to learn about different specialty options, and the chance to learn from students at the state and national levels.
- **Inform faculty about the NSNA Leadership University and opportunities to utilize NSNA leadership expenses to fulfill academic requirements.** Both students and faculty receive a beautiful certificate for participation. For details go to [www.nsnaleadership.org](http://www.nsnaleadership.org).
- **Passing on NSNA publications or videos to faculty.** NSNA's publications, including *Getting the Pieces to Fit*, *Imprint*, and *Dean's Notes*, provide information about association activities, programs, and learning opportunities for both students and faculty. Videos, including *Mentoring: The Experience of a Lifetime*, highlight the importance of role modeling and the need to embrace a strong professional ethic. Continuing education credits are also available to faculty and advisors who attend NSNA's annual MidYear and Convention meetings.
- **Speak with your faculty member** and ask whether you can give a presentation on various convention(s) topics to your leadership class, at a faculty meeting, or write a paper about what you've learned through your participation in association activities. Perhaps you can exchange the presentation for the opportunity to attend your state convention or NSNA's Convention.
- **Find a mentor!** Every student body has a faculty person who is a champion for the students. This is the person to seek out! This person can arrange to have students attend a faculty meeting where a group of interested students can provide a Power Point

presentation about NSNA, for example. The presentation could cover the leadership opportunities available through the organization, its professional growth activities, and other ways to become involved. Discuss the possibility of starting a chapter if you don't have one. Faculty may need to digest what you've presented — follow up with a second meeting at a later date.

- **Faculty and advisors may change, but a dean's position is usually longer term.** Ask the dean to speak to students and faculty about leadership opportunities or how he or she became a nurse. Chances are very good that deans were involved with NSNA at some point in their lives. And if your school is small, combine with another school to hold a reception where faculty from both schools can hear about NSNA!

## Remember

Engaging faculty can be challenging but it certainly can also be rewarding! When you've convinced a faculty member that NSNA is a worthwhile organization, there will be positive changes in store for both of you! ☺

*\*NSNA respects the rights of deans/directors and faculty who are unwilling to support students running for office who, in their judgment, do not meet academic and/or professional standards as per the school/program policies.*

## References

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2003). Media Relations. Retrieved from <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Publications/pdf/TFFFWP.pdf> on June 29, 2006.



**Barbara Chamberlain, MSN, APRN, BC, CCRN,** is the National League for Nursing Appointed Consultant to NSNA.