



Building Nursing Pathways

Bellingham Technical College Nursing Program Student Services Review

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Introduction

In fall of 2013, the Nursing Program at Bellingham Technical College (BTC) received a \$2.7 million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The goals of the grant project, called *Building Nursing Pathways* (BNP), were to enhance and expand the BTC Nursing Program to meet increasing demand in the region for Registered Nurses. The project included a substantial curriculum revision to create a streamlined Associate Degree in Nursing program, as well as an overhaul of clinical curriculum to better align with industry and educational partners. In conjunction with these program changes, grants funds were allocated to enhance services to support student recruitment, retention, and career services. This introduction provides brief overviews of the college and the program. The report continues to discuss existing services in the areas of recruitment, retention, and career support, before detailing the implementation of enhanced services in each of these areas for students in the Nursing Program.

Bellingham Technical College

Bellingham Technical College is one of 34 colleges that are part of the Washington State Community and Technical College system. BTC is a state-funded, two-year college with educational programs in professional technical education, direct transfer with a workforce focus, basic education for adults, and continuing education. Members of the community turn to BTC seeking opportunities in many fields, from advanced manufacturing to accounting; process technology to pastry; registered nursing to radiologic technology.

Nursing Program

The Nursing Program at Bellingham Technical College has been in operation since 1958, and has evolved since that time to meet the changing needs of industry. In recent years, the college has experienced an overwhelming increase in applicants for the Nursing program. In 2013, the college received funding for the Building Nursing Pathways project, intended to enhance and expanded Nursing Program offerings to meet demand and respond to emerging trends in nursing education and the healthcare industry.



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Existing Services

Recruitment

Continued interest in the Nursing Program is critical to its success. Fortunately, the program continues to be highly popular among prospective BTC students. As of 2015-2016, there were approximately 220 enrolled students pursuing pre-requisite coursework to gain entry into the Nursing Program, which admits approximately 60 students annually. Due to high demand for the program, recruitment has been considered a low priority. However, the program receives the benefit of existing recruitment services in place at BTC, which are summarized below.

Outreach

Throughout the year, the Admissions Recruiters from BTC attend community events to recruit for BTC programs, in addition to hosting community members on campus for tours and events. Admissions staff provide prospective students with general information about BTC admissions, as well as specific information about the Nursing Program.

Entry

Prior to the program expansion made possible by the Building Nursing Pathways grant, the program offered two entry points annually, during fall and spring quarters. These entry points were promoted each quarter in the college calendar and catalog.

Media

The Marketing Department at BTC manages three social media platforms on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Facebook and Twitter are used to advertise program offerings at BTC, while Instagram is used to highlight campus life and promote events. The Nursing Program has benefitted from the use of these technologies to promote its offerings.



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Website

The BTC website features a separate page for each of its programs, which provides an overview of the program, entry requirements, course descriptions and sequencing, program outcomes, employment prospects, and faculty and staff contact information. The Nursing Program has a dedicated page for current and prospective students to find this information.

Retention

Retention is a key performance indicator at BTC and a high priority of the Nursing Program. The college has a variety of existing services in place to promote retention, including:

Academic Advising

Prospective and pre-program BTC students have an assigned Academic and Career Advisor to assist with admissions, enrollment, and registration, in addition to academic planning. Once a BTC student has been admitted to a program, he or she no longer receives support from an Academic and Career Advisor, and is instead assigned a faculty advisor, who provides support with academic planning and registration.

Counseling

The Counseling Department at BTC provides personal counseling services for students experiencing difficulties which may interfere with learning.

Early Alerts

BTC maintains an electronic early alert system which allows faculty to notify the Advising Department of any difficulties students might experience in the classroom. This allows for Academic and Career Advisors to intervene and provide targeted support to struggling students.



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Tutoring

BTC offers free tutoring services to help students increase their understanding and achieve success in math, accounting, chemistry, biology, writing, and other subjects. As these are critical areas of study for prerequisite coursework for the Nursing Program, tutoring services have been important to the retention of prospective program students.

Career Support

Career support is another important area of support for students at BTC, and existing services are in place to support career success. Career counseling is offered through the Advising Department at BTC, and is available to new students upon enrollment. Upon program completion, Academic and Career Advisors provide students with assistance in finding available positions, preparing application materials, practicing interview skills, etc.

Enhanced Services

Recruitment

As noted above, due to high demand for the Nursing Program, recruitment has been considered a low priority. However, recruitment services for the program have been enhanced through the Building Nursing Pathways project. These enhancements are summarized below.

Outreach

The Building Nursing Pathways project has allowed the Nursing Program to hire a dedicated Nursing Student Navigator. The Nursing Student Navigator has worked in conjunction with Admissions Recruiters at BTC to promote the Nursing Program at campus community events. A dedicated student support staff has proven invaluable to the program, especially for assisting pre-program students, due to the complex admissions requirements for the Nursing Program.



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Entry

The Building Nursing Pathways project expanded the capacity of the Nursing Program, allowing for an additional entry point each year, as well as periodic opportunities for former LPN students to return to earn ADN credentials. The new entry point added through the BNP project occurs during winter quarter, a time during which other nursing programs in the region do not enroll new students. BTC is also one of few colleges in the state to offer an LPN-ADN completion option. These enhancements have contributed significantly to increased interest in the Nursing Program at BTC.

Media

The Building Nursing Pathways project increased media coverage of the Nursing Program at BTC. Upon receiving the BNP grant, the college issued detailed press releases describing the extent of the project and planned program improvements. As program improvements have been implemented, advertising campaigns have been conducted to promote enhanced and expanded offerings.

Website

The Building Nursing Pathways project resulted in significant updates to the Nursing Program webpage, which was revised to include extensive information about the grant project, new program offerings, and details regarding new and enhanced services available to program students.

Retention

Retention has been an important performance outcome for the Building Nursing Pathways project. Many services have been enhanced through the project in order to increase retention of program students, including:



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Academic Advising

As mentioned above, the Building Nursing Pathways project has allowed the Nursing Program to hire a dedicated student support staff. In addition to supporting outreach efforts, the primary responsibility of the Nursing Student Navigator is to provide academic and career support to Nursing Program students. Rather than working with an Academic and Career Advisor as prospective and pre-program students, and working with faculty advisors as program students, Nursing Program students now have a single point-of-contact who provides support for the duration of their study at BTC. In addition to providing the same services as Academic and Career Advisors, the Nursing Student Navigator has been able to modify these services to meet the specific needs of Nursing Program students, including facilitating new student orientations and workshops, coordinating supplemental instruction services for students, and maintaining regular contact with individuals and groups of students.

Early Alerts

Through the Building Nursing Pathways project, the Nursing Program has developed its own, program-specific early alert system. Through this system, Nursing Program faculty are able to provide direct notification to the Nursing Student Navigator of academic and/or personal barriers students are facing. This allows for the Nursing Student Navigator to respond with targeted interventions, assuring that student needs are promptly addressed.

Tutoring

Whereas tutoring services at BTC have traditionally only benefitted students completing prerequisite coursework for the Nursing Program, the Building Nursing Pathways project has allowed for expansion of services to serve program students. The Nursing Program now offers supplemental instruction sessions for groups of students to review concepts and materials highlighted in program coursework, with the assistance of qualified and trained professionals.



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Career Support

Career support has been another significant areas of emphasis for the Building Nursing Pathways project. Through an agreement with the Northwest Workforce Council, BTC now contracts the services of a professional Employment Navigator to provide career support to Nursing Program students. The Employment Navigator offers the following services:

- Meeting with individual students at regularly scheduled times, and as specific situations arise, to assess career and job search needs, and provide support, encouragement, and resources
- Providing workshops on job search topics
- Referring students to campus and community services and resources
- Creating career development tools and resources for students
- Providing a full suite of career development services, including career development planning, identification of prospective employers and resources, and resume and cover letter development
- Working with employers to develop and strengthen relationships to enhance employment opportunities for students
- Maintaining a job board highlighting opportunities within the nursing field

Furthermore, the Nursing Student Navigator now provides support to students whose career goals include earning Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) credentials. In this capacity, the Nursing Student Navigator offers the following services:

- Providing transfer advising for students seeking BSN credentials
- Promoting transfer opportunities for students to earn BSN credentials
- Providing information to students regarding BSN programs
- Assisting students with transfer applications to enter BSN programs

These enhancements represent a significant expansion of the career support services available to Nursing Program students, and have contributed to increased employment outcomes among graduates.



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Conclusion

This report has summarized the ways in which the Nursing Program at BTC has enhanced student support services through funding from the Building Nursing Pathways grant. Grant funds have allowed the program to enhance capacity to expand recruitment of prospective students, to hire a dedicated support staff to improve retention of program students, and to contract an employment specialist to increase outcomes for program graduates. Initial data suggests that these measures have been effective in increasing the enrollment, retention, completion, and employment rates of Nursing Program students. Ongoing evaluation will confirm or deny the effectiveness of these measures – a final evaluation report for the project will be published in October 2017.