

Strategy 5

Enhance the preparation of nursing students through more inclusive educational environments and curriculum

Strategy 5.2 The collaborative of North Carolina’s community college and university nursing programs [see Strategy 2.1] should identify evidence-based holistic admissions practices that have been shown to be effective at enrolling a diverse student body and share experiences and lessons learned with each other to support admission of diverse nursing student cohorts.

Desired Result

North Carolina’s nursing education programs will graduate cohorts of new nurses who represent the diversity of the communities they serve.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

Incorporating holistic admissions processes for nursing programs can help to cultivate a diverse nursing workforce. This approach evaluates applicants based on their experiences, attributes, and academic metrics, rather than solely on grades and test scores. It recognizes the value of a variety of perspectives in enhancing health care delivery, promoting cultural humility, and addressing health disparities. This not only enriches the profession but also contributes to improving the overall quality of patient care.

Context

Holistic admissions, also called holistic review, in higher education considers various factors beyond GPA and test scores, including “experiences, attributes, potential contributions, and the fit between the applicant and the institutional mission.”⁴⁹ The goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the applicant to foster a diverse and inclusive student body that can benefit from and contribute to the educational environment in unique ways. Schools that have implemented holistic admissions have seen an increase in the diversity of their student body, kept academic standards steady or improved (e.g., graduation and exam pass rates), and reported increases in student engagement, cooperation and teamwork, and openness to different perspectives⁵⁰

Recommended practice for holistic admissions is to include components that evaluate experiences, attributes, and metrics that are traditionally considered part of admissions criteria. This is known as an E-A-M model, and examples include:

- Experiences – “health care or leadership experiences or experiences with adversity or barriers to educational opportunity”
- Attributes – “oral and written communication skills, resiliency, race/ethnicity, first generation college student and gender”
- Metrics – “grade point averages, SAT scores, and/or the Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS®).”⁵¹

North Carolina’s 2021–2022 academic year nursing school enrollment by gender and race/ethnicity are presented in Figures 11 and 12. Although academic diversity can often be thought of strictly in terms of race and ethnicity, a wide variety of characteristics should be considered part of developing a diverse student body (see text box, “Examples of Holistic Review and Diversity Considerations”).

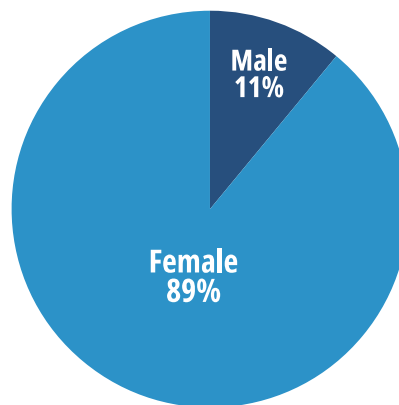
Is holistic review legal?

“In general, the use of holistic review is legal under federal and state law. However, when race or ethnicity is used as a consideration in the holistic review process (or other enrollment decisions such as financial aid that provide tangible benefits), federal legal requirements will apply. In some cases, state law may place additional requirements upon the school. In essence, federal legal requirements for nursing schools using race or ethnicity-conscious admission policies are:

1. The policy must be grounded in the nursing school’s evidence-based “compelling interest” in the educational benefits of diversity; and
2. The policy must be “narrowly tailored” to achieve that interest. In order to do so, policies must be necessary and flexible, and must not place an undue burden on students who do not benefit from the consideration of race or ethnicity. To meet this requirement, policies must also be subject to periodic review.”

-American Association of Colleges of Nursing. <https://www.aacnursing.org/our-initiatives/diversity-equity-inclusion/holistic-admissions/holistic-admissions-tool-kit/legality-of-holistic-review>

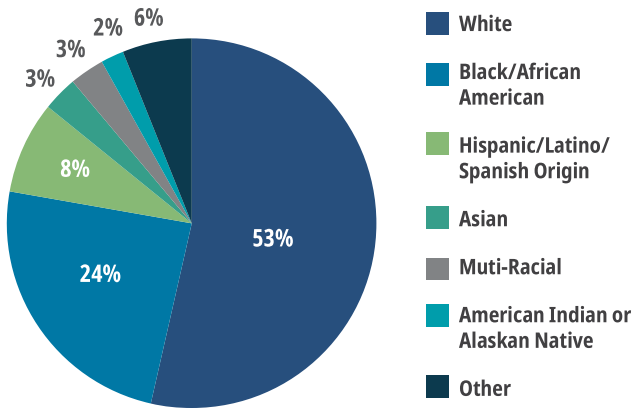
Figure 11. Percent of Student Enrollment by Gender in North Carolina Pre-Licensure Nursing Programs by Program Type, Academic Year 2022-2023.



Source: North Carolina Board of Nursing. 2022-2023 Nursing Education Summary report.



Figure 12. Percent of Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity in North Carolina Pre-Licensure Nursing Programs by Program Type, Academic Year 2022-2023



Source: North Carolina Board of Nursing. 2022-2023 Nursing Education Summary report.

Examples of Holistic Review and Diversity Considerations

“Examples of holistic review practices that schools are using and that other institutions might consider include:

- Developing a mission statement for admissions that includes a commitment to diversity and inclusion;
- Providing admissions committees with training related to the school’s mission, including diversity;
- Including non-academic as well as academic criteria such as GPA and test scores in the initial screening process;
- Balancing the weight of non-academic and academic criteria during the initial screening process;
- Adding essay questions to the admission application that address the school’s mission and goals, and desired experiences and attributes including diversity;
- Evaluating additional criteria related to the school’s mission and goals and values (e.g., global health, research mission).

-Artinian NT, Drees BM, Glazer G, Harris K, Kaufman LS, Lopez N, Danek JC, Michaels J. Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions: Strategies for Leaders. *Coll Univ.* 2017 Spring;92(2):65-68. Epub 2017 Jun 12. PMID: 29200468; PMCID: PMC5708588.

KEY RESOURCE NEEDS



Implementation of holistic review requires additional investment in resources like training and systems change, as well as staff support and time.