Holistic Admissions Script

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Holistic admissions review is a process that looks at multiple applicant qualities, including experiences, attributes, and metrics. It goes beyond test scores and grade point average as the sole indicators of a student's potential. Holistic admission processes are used in many health professions programs and are recommended by national nursing associations. The process is driven by the school's mission and values and can be flexibly applied to meet the needs of each program. A 2021 report from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine highlights the notion that nursing schools need to expand their efforts to recruit, support, and mentor diverse students. This will increase access to care and increase satisfaction for racial minority patients, as well as help bring much needed health care to vulnerable populations to help address health disparities.

Admission to nursing programs is often based on competitive metrics, such as grade point average (GPA), American College Test Program (ACT) scores or Test of Essential Academic Skill (TEAS) scores. Although these scores may be reliable, they do not necessarily reflect a complete picture of the applicants and may also lead to decreased diversity among the nursing workforce. In order to increase the diversity among practicing nurses, it is imperative that we first increase the diversity of the nursing student population. With this in mind, four colleges in Washington State worked together to implement a holistic admissions process for admission to four newly created LPN to BSN programs across the state.

Development of the process was guided by holistic admission consultants, college-based workgroups, and utilization of national nursing association HA toolkits. Applicants were evaluated on a variety of attributes, experiences, and metrics. These included, but were not limited to, leadership experience, prior nursing experience, linguistic abilities, veteran status, first-generation college status, and GPA in select pre-nursing courses. Applicants were further evaluated based on video essays and live interviews.

At this point, 9 separate cohorts have been admitted among the 4 schools and each school has seen an increase in student diversity while maintaining excellent retention rates. Across cohorts, 61% of students are BIPoC, 63% are first-generation, nearly 44% are multilingual, and 7% are military veterans. To date, one cohort has graduated with a 92% NCLEX pass rate.

Our findings indicate that holistic admissions increase access to the nursing profession for non-traditional students, increase the diversity among nursing cohorts, and result in students who are rich in life experience and perspective. Nursing programs have a responsibility to become more holistic in admission practices to ensure they admit applicants who are best able to attend to the health needs of the entire community. Our data provides evidence that we can successfully move beyond selection criteria that only looks at grades and test scores while still graduating competent, capable, culturally diverse nurses.