

# Exploring Faculty Readiness to Educate Neurodiverse Nursing Students: A Comparative Study

## Problem Statement

Neurodiverse individuals face systemic barriers in accessing post-secondary education, limiting entry into licensed professions like nursing. These barriers—rooted in ableism and stigma—lead to inadequate support and reduced workforce diversity. Nursing faculty are key to fostering inclusion but often lack training awareness and institutional backing. Addressing these issues is vital to building a diverse, patient-centered nursing workforce.

## Purpose

Assess faculty knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and confidence in supporting neurodiverse nursing students. Expanding on Arbor et al. (2024), while examining two distinct university nursing programs with diverse student populations and academic environments.

Evaluate faculty preparedness and resource needs to support neurodivergent student success, informing best practices to advance inclusive nursing education.

## Method

### Survey Design and Deployment

Pending IRB approval, a modified survey combining items from two validated tools—the Faculty Preparedness Questionnaire-Neurodiversity (FPQ-N) (Arbour et al., 2025) and the Beliefs Survey (Melnik et al., 2021)—will be used to assess nursing faculty's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and confidence in supporting neurodivergent students.

This anonymous Qualtrics survey will target faculty across undergraduate and graduate nursing programs (BS, MS, CRNA, DNP, PhD) at two diverse universities. The survey will remain open for two weeks and can be completed in approximately 20 minutes.

### Survey Content

The survey encompasses several areas:

- Demographic Information:** Participants will provide basic demographic data, including age, total years of teaching experience, and years of teaching in their current assignment.
- Formal Education:** Queries will be made regarding any formal education the participants have received that specifically focused on working with neurodiverse individuals/students.
- Training in Current Role:** The survey will ask the extent of training participants have received in their current roles to support neurodivergent students.
- Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes, Beliefs and Confidence:**

### Participants will also be asked about current teaching role:

- Setting
- Nursing degree program type
- Faculty highest degree obtained
- Do they consider themselves neurodivergent

## Review of Literature

| Themes                  | Key Points  | Sources      |
|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| Barriers to Education   | Neurodiverse individuals experience barriers to accessing post-secondary education, resulting in fewer individuals with disabilities entering licensed professions such as nursing.   | Geyer, 2021  |
| Systemic Ableism        | Access issues are often linked to systemic ableism and stigma, which can manifest in inadequate academic support and accommodations.  | Geyer, 2021  |
| Inclusive Workforce     | As neurodiverse children grow up and consider careers, including nursing, it becomes essential to create an inclusive and diverse nursing workforce equipped to meet the complex needs of patients presenting for care.   |              |
| Role of Nursing Faculty | Nursing faculty play a pivotal role in supporting neurodiverse nursing students and providing an inclusive environment that effectively meets diverse student needs. However, educators often struggle due to biases, faculty shortages, demands on faculty time, and a lack of awareness, policies, and training to adapt to various learners' needs. Additionally, nursing faculty frequently lack the education and confidence necessary to support neurodiverse students effectively. | Pigato, 2024 |



Figure 1. A group of nursing students in blue scrubs.

## Evaluation Plan

Anonymous responses will ensure participant confidentiality. Descriptive statistics will be utilized to examine demographic data and survey results.

## Potential Implications

- **Proactive** faculty development regarding neurodivergent students
- **Holistic Institutional Change** – Addressing faculty biases and structural barriers will encourage **system-wide improvements** in accessibility, ensuring **inclusive policies** are embedded in nursing education at a foundational level.
- Identifying screening tools to identify at-risk students--**prevention**
- **Assessing internal faculty capacity** to support neurodivergent students
- Creation of faculty interpersonal support resources
- Effective **communication and collaboration:** students and faculty

## Universal Design

- **Fostering** resiliency and coping strategies for neurodivergent students.
- **Reducing Systemic Barriers** – Addressing faculty biases, training gaps, and institutional challenges to **promote equitable access** to education for neurodivergent students.
- **Scalability & Sustainability** – Findings will contribute to best practices that can be **adapted across institutions**, reinforcing a sustainable model for inclusive education across all disciplines.

## Survey Questions

### Knowledge

1. I understand the term “neurodiversity.”
2. I include a statement on my syllabus that encourages students to meet with me to discuss their accommodation and learning needs.
3. I have attended specialized training to acquire knowledge about neurodivergent students and/or how to teach them.

### Attitude/Beliefs

1. Providing classroom and testing accommodations to neurodivergent students is unfair to neurotypical students.
2. I believe that neurodivergent nurses make excellent contributions to the profession.
3. Having neurodiverse students in the classroom reduces the quality of the education that other students receive.

*We sincerely thank the AACN Diversity Leadership Institute for their invaluable support. Special appreciation to our mentors, faculty, and peers for their guidance. Their dedication continues to inspire progress in academic diversity.*

Holly E. Brown, DNP, RN, PMHNP-BC  
hbrown@sjfc.edu

Jane Tobias, DNP, CRNP, CPNP-PC  
Jane.tobias@jefferson.edu

Contact Information

References





## Exploring Faculty Readiness to Educate Neurodiverse Nursing Students: A Comparative Study

Holly Brown, DNP, RN, PMHNP-BC, PMHCS

### Biography

---

Dr. Holly Brown, DNP, RN, PMHNP-BC, PMHCS, serves as Associate Professor at the Wegmans School of Nursing and Executive Director of the Golisano Institute for Developmental Disability Nursing (GIDDN). She teaches in the Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner and DNP programs and leads GIDDN's mission to educate nurses, pre and post licensure on the physical and mental health care of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). This initiative also promotes advocacy and leadership for a population often underserved due to systemic inclusion barriers.

Dr. Brown and her team are integrating specialized curriculum into undergraduate and graduate programs at St. John Fisher University, including clinical placements that build student competence and confidence in working with individuals with IDD. She has led several grant-funded projects, including the Special Olympics International Inclusive Health Innovation Grant and the Mother Cabrini Foundation's initiative to improve outcomes for hospitalized patients with IDD and most recently is a co-investigator with Dr. Sarah Ailey on the NIH funded project: Ending Diagnostic Overshadowing: Addressing Manifestations of Ableism in the Healthcare Context.

In addition to her academic and leadership roles, Dr. Brown practices as the Senior Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner at Hillside in Rochester, NY, where she specializes in treating children and adolescents with co-occurring IDD and psychiatric conditions. She provides care in community and school-based settings and contributes to Hillside's Medical Executive Workgroup, helping shape care policies and guiding providers across the agency.

Dr. Brown is board-certified as a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner and a Child and Adolescent Clinical Specialist. She earned her DNP from the University of Rochester in 2013, with a project focused on enhancing staff self-efficacy in residential treatment settings.

### Contact Information

---



Holly Brown, DNP, RN, PMHNP-BC, PMHCS  
Executive Director/Associate Professor  
Golisano Institute for Developmental Disability Nursing/Wegmans School of  
Nursing, St. John Fisher University  
hbrown@sjf.edu