

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

Holly E. Brown, DNP, RN, PMHNP-BC and Jane Tobias, DNP, CRNP, CPNP-PC

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



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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.

Survey Questions

Knowledge

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

Attitude/Beliefs

- Providing classroom and testing accommodations to neurodivergent students is unfair to neurotypical students.
- I believe that neurodivergent nurses make excellent contributions to the profession.
- 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.

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.

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

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

Contact Information



References



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Jane Tobias, DNP, CRNP, CPNP-PC

Biography

Jane Tobias, DNP, CRNP, CPNP-PC, is an Associate Professor at Thomas Jefferson University's Jefferson College of Nursing. She serves as a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner at the Jefferson Center for Autism and Neurodiversity and is a Golisano Fellow in Developmental Disability Nursing. Dr. Tobias holds a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree from Thomas Jefferson University and brings over two decades of experience in pediatric primary care.

Dr. Tobias has held various academic roles, with a focus on graduate nursing education. Her clinical expertise lies in caring for children and adolescents with neurodevelopmental disabilities. She is actively involved in nursing research, particularly in the area of intellectual and developmental disorders, and serves as Program Director for the Golisano Institute of Developmental Disability Nursing Fellowship. Additionally, Dr. Tobias is a member of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners.

Contact Information



Jane Tobias, DNP, CRNP, CPNP-PC
Associate Professor
Thomas Jefferson University
jane.tobias@jefferson.edu