

Pathways to Nursing Excellence: A Formal Mentoring of URM

High School Students into Nursing Careers

Gwen Woods, PhD, RN, LSUHSC SON

Background & Problem Statement

The nursing profession faces ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention, particularly among the underrepresented minority (URM) populations. According to the 2020 US census report, 40% of the population identify as people of color. URM nurses lag behind the US population as only 20% of the RN workforce are URM. Increasing URM nurses is integral to reducing health care disparity. Early engagement through mentorship fosters engagement and readiness for nursing careers. Pipeline programs initiated in high schools offer early career exploration. Currently, LSUHSC SON offers a week-long summer experience for high school students (PNI) that has grown exponentially. Yet, few PNI students have successfully been recruited as student nurses. To successfully recruit and retain URM HS students, barriers such as academic preparation inequality, stereotyping, lack of college preparation, and media misrepresentation must be overcome

Description of PNE High School Students Mentoring Program

Pathways to Nursing Excellence (PNE) will be the 2nd phase of LSUHSC School of Nursing's Pathways to Nursing Institute (PNI), a week-long program designed to introduce HS students to nursing profession. PNE students will explore topics such as health equity, health equity, leadership, patient care, and skill development while being mentored by faculty, student nurses, and professional nurses

Review of Literature

- Pipeline programs recommend recruitment and retention plan
 - High school students benefitted the most.
 - Mentorship, academic support and application assistance are commonly included in pipeline programs (Tombers, et al., 2023)
- Minority local public middle & high schools should be targeted
 - Share benefits of nursing through workshops, summer camps, campus tours, help sessions for completing financial aid and application
 - Mock Interviews
 - Shadowing experiences (White, 2025)
- Lack of mentorship and role models
 - Contributes to higher attrition rates among vulnerable students
 - Many often struggle to find mentors and role models who understand their unique challenges (Djukic et al., 2026)
 - Shortage of nursing mentors/role models
 - Overabundance of sports figures, musical artists, and actors/celebrities
 - Nurses often misrepresented in media, portrayed as white, sex objects, harsh, or doctor's handmaid (Dawkins, 2021)

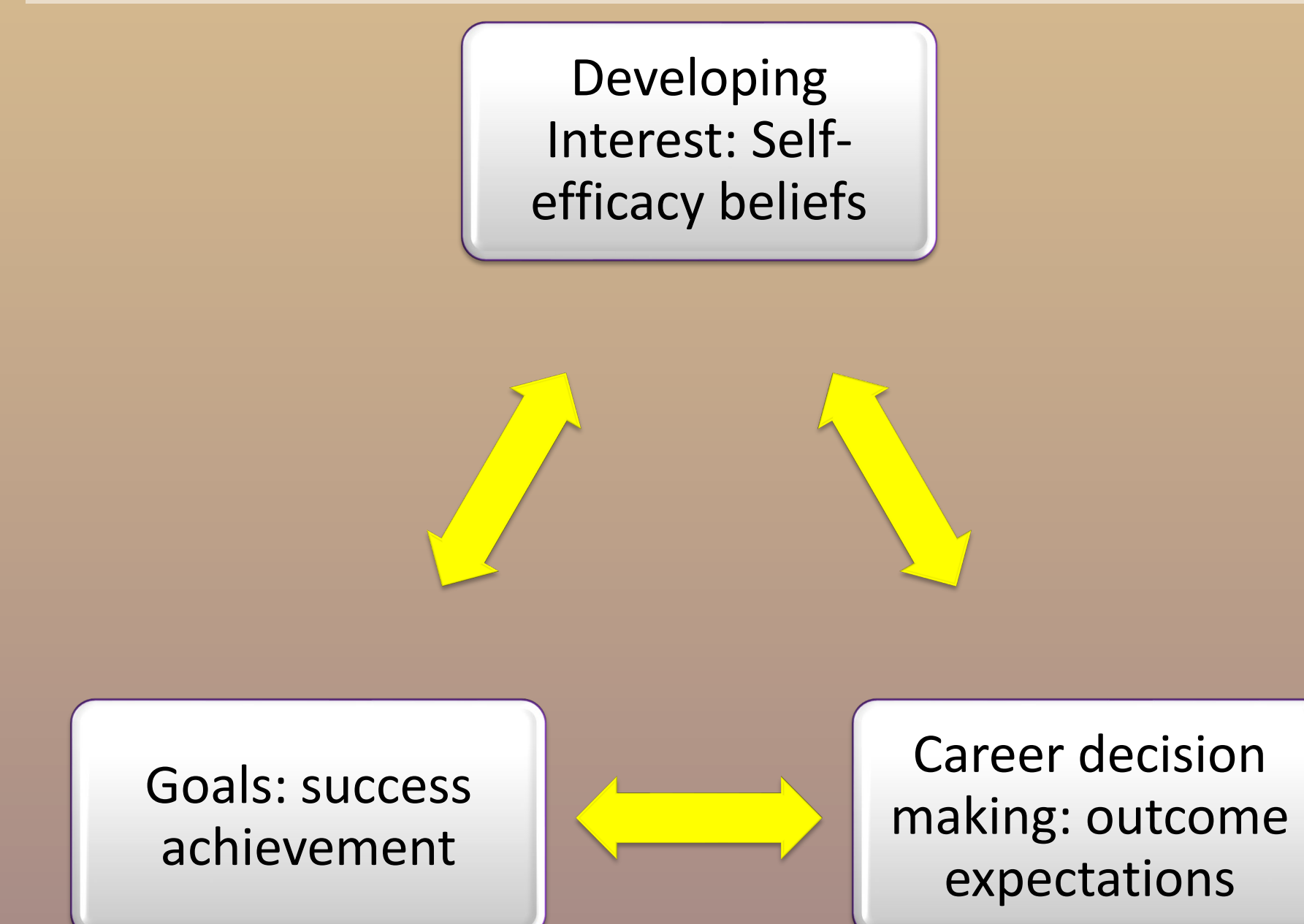
Project Aim

1. To increase awareness & interest in nursing as a career for high school students
2. To improve academic readiness of URM to enter college.
3. To retain HS students participating in PNI
4. To increase URM PNI participants' entry into LSUHSC - SON .

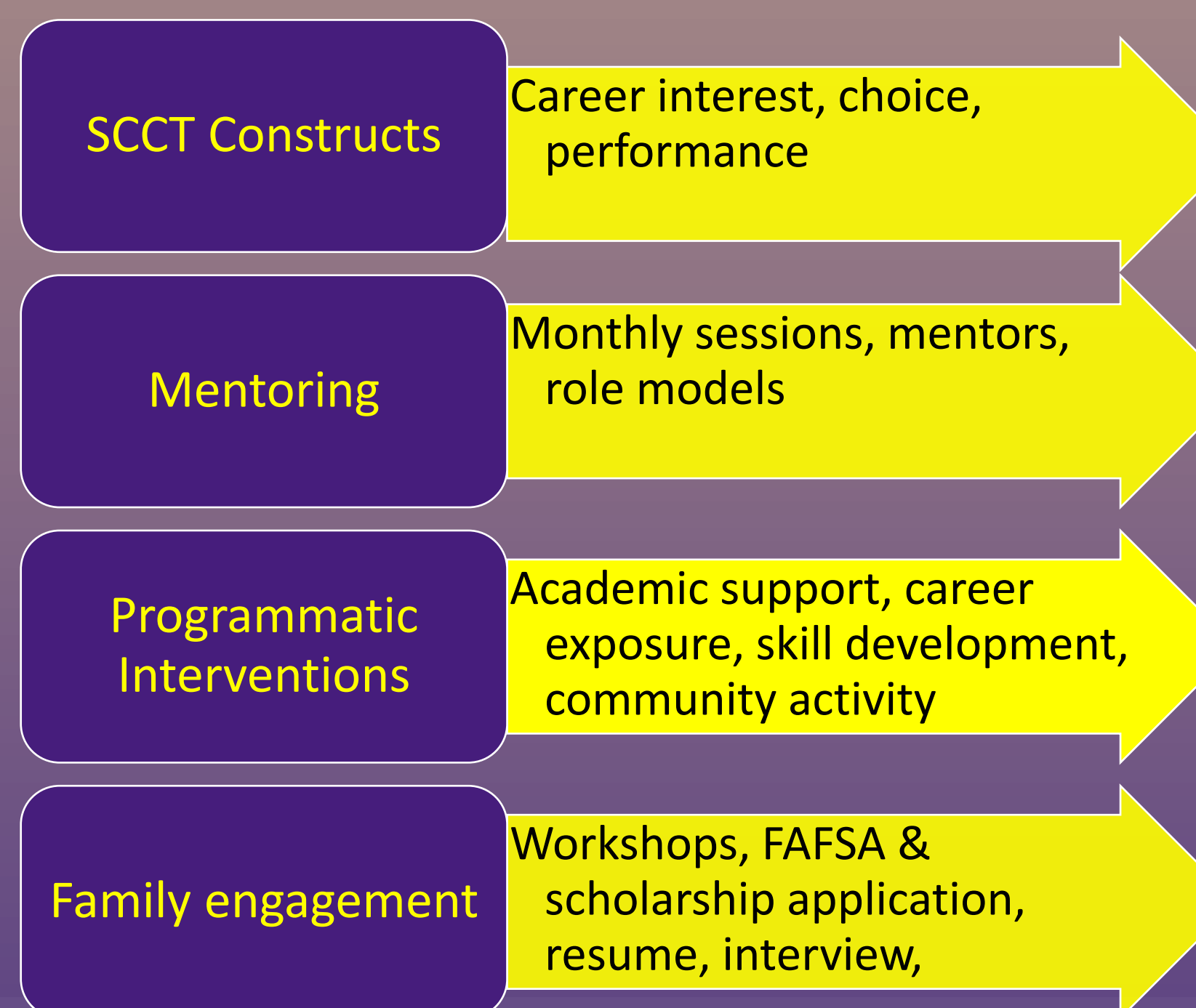
Framework: Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Rooted in social learning and behavioral conditioning theories, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) clarifies how high school students gain insight of career options and decisions and ultimately being guided towards a path that will yield successful outcomes (Dziak, 2023).

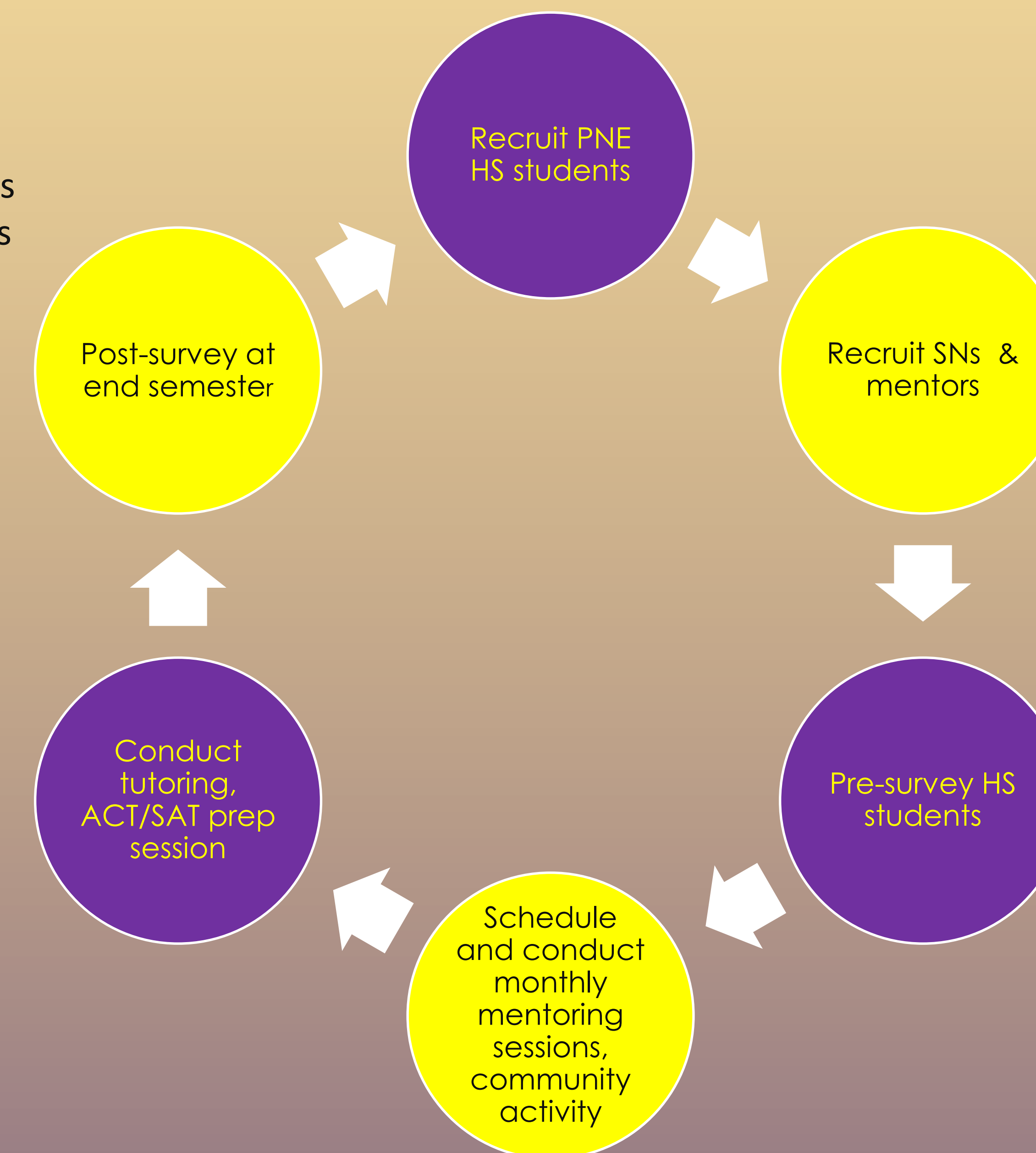
SCCT Mentoring Framework



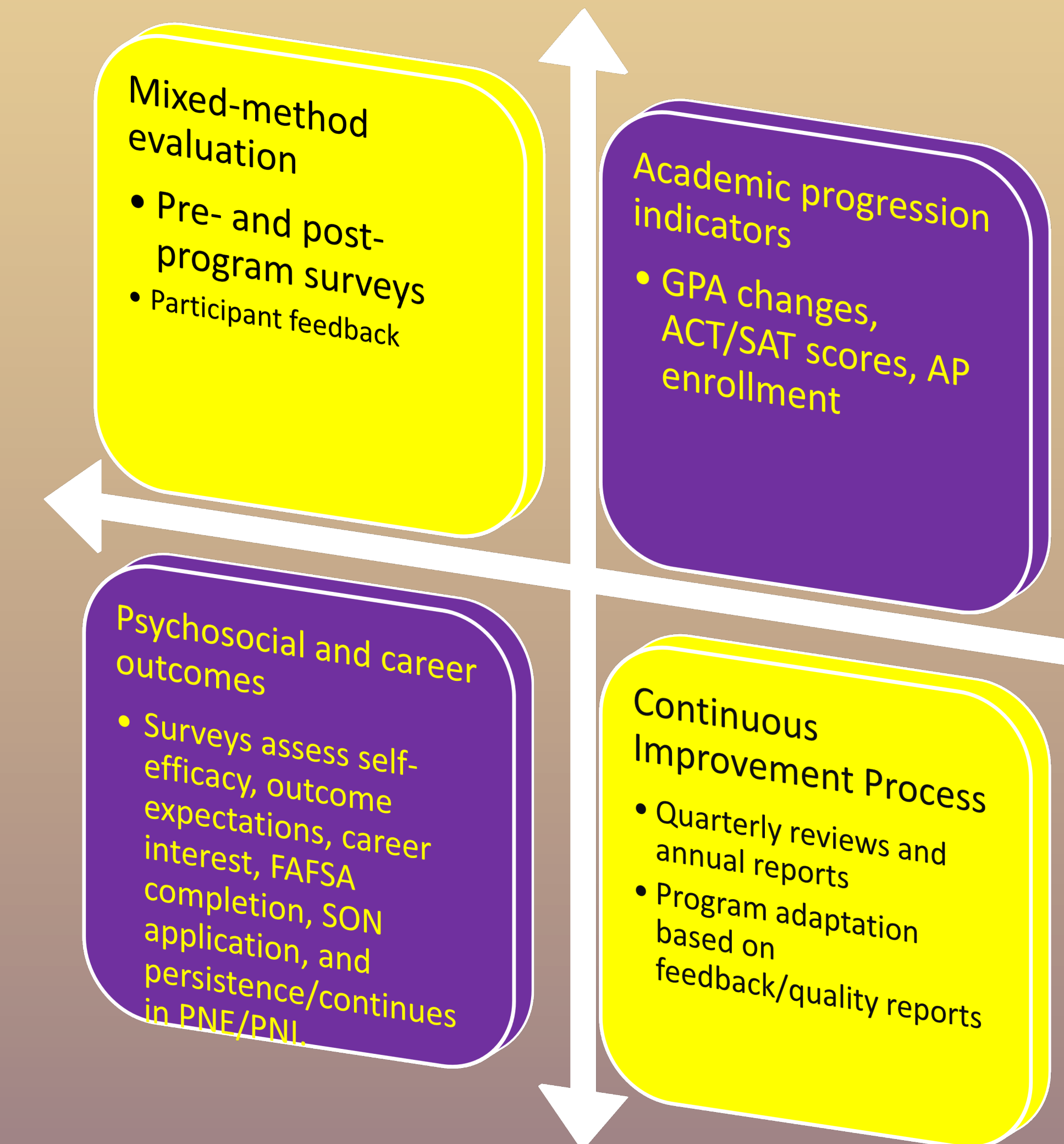
PNE Components



PNE Methods: Implementation Plan



Evaluation Plan



References

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4. Tombers, N., Bauer, J., Boraas, A. Lundberg, J., Pleifer, R., Reinartz, C. (2023). Effects of pipelines on enrollment of underrepresented students in healthcare: A systematic review. *Education in the Health Professions*. 6. 1-7. https://doi.org/10.4013/EHP_9_22
5. White, S. (2025). Increasing nursing student diversity with diversity, equity, and inclusion recruitment, admissions, and enrollment practices. *Journal of Professional Nursing*. 60,144-150. <https://doi.org/10/1016/j.prof Nurs.2025.08.001>



Pathways to Nursing Excellence: A Formal Mentoring of Undergraduate Minority High School Students into Nursing Careers

Gwen Stewart-Woods, PhD, MSN, RN

Biography

Dr. Gwendolyn D. Stewart Woods is an Instructor of Clinical Nursing and RN BSN Articulation Program Director at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center (LSUHSC) School of Nursing, where she has served on the faculty since 2006. She is a recent PhD graduate in Nursing, from Southern University A & M School of Nursing with her doctoral scholarship focused on the Relationships Among Self compassion, Emotional Intelligence, and Resilience in Baccalaureate Nursing Etudents. Her professional and scholarly work centers on strengthening the nursing workforce through education, mentorship, academic innovation, and culturally responsive student support.

Dr. Stewart Woods holds an Associate of Science in Biology from Jones County Junior College, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, and a Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Southern Mississippi. She brings more than three decades of clinical nursing experience, including long standing service at Touro Infirmary and St. Lukes’s Episcopal Hospital combined with extensive expertise in undergraduate nursing education. Her dual perspective as clinician and educator informs her commitment to preparing resilient, practice ready nurses equipped to meet the needs of diverse communities.

In her current role as RN BSN Articulation Program Director, Dr. Stewart Woods provides academic and administrative leadership for program evaluation, curriculum revision, and competency based education initiatives. She has led efforts to align undergraduate curricula with AACN Essentials, support transitions to online program delivery, and enhance pathways for student progression and retention. Over the course of her career, she has coordinated and taught a wide range of undergraduate and RN BSN courses, including critical care nursing, leadership and management, population focused nursing, gerontology, and professional role development.

Dr. Stewart Woods is recognized for her innovative instructional design and creation of enduring teaching resources. She developed widely used EKG rhythm analysis videos, interactive case based learning modules, and simulation enhanced activities that promote critical thinking, delegation, conflict resolution, and leadership skills. Her excellence in teaching has been acknowledged through multiple honors, including the LSUHSC Faculty Caring and Teaching Excellence Award, repeated DAISY Faculty recognitions, and designation as a New Orleans Great 100 Nurse.

Her scholarship and service reflect a strong commitment to workforce development and health equity. Dr. Stewart Woods has served as Project Coordinator on a \$1.1 million Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)–funded grant focused on promoting academic success among nursing students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds and has led grant development efforts aimed at sustaining and expanding these initiatives. Her research interests include nursing student resilience and well being, nursing workforce enhancement, mentoring and pipeline programs, and peripartum cardiomyopathy with a focus on improving maternal outcomes.

A dedicated mentor, Dr. Stewart Woods has guided junior faculty, nursing students, and emerging leaders throughout her career and remains deeply engaged in institutional governance, professional organizations, and community service. Her work reflects a sustained commitment to advancing nursing education, cultivating the next generation of nurses, and building inclusive, resilient pathways into the nursing profession.

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