

# Developing a Structured Faculty Mentorship Program to Support Onboarding and Role Transition in Nursing Academia: A Quality Improvement Initiative



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## Introduction

New nursing faculty often experience challenges during onboarding as they transition into the academic environment and adapt to institutional expectations, teaching responsibilities, and professional role changes. Inadequate onboarding and limited mentorship support may contribute to stress, decreased confidence, and faculty dissatisfaction, ultimately impacting retention and program stability. Evidence supports structured mentorship as an effective strategy to promote professional development, engagement, and successful transition to academia among novice faculty. The purpose of this quality improvement project was to implement and evaluate a structured faculty mentorship process designed to enhance the onboarding experience for newly hired nursing faculty.



## Background

Schools of nursing across the United States continue to face challenges related to faculty recruitment, onboarding, and retention, particularly in rural communities where the pool of master's-prepared nurses is limited. Howard Payne University is located in a small rural community with limited access to experienced nurse educators, resulting in many newly hired faculty transitioning directly from clinical practice into academic roles. While these individuals bring valuable clinical expertise, many enter academia with limited formal preparation in teaching, curriculum development, student evaluation, and academic culture.

The transition from clinician to educator can be associated with increased stress, role ambiguity, and decreased confidence during the onboarding period. In addition, the BSN program has experienced challenges with faculty retention, highlighting the need for strategies that support faculty engagement, professional development, and long-term success within the academic environment. Evidence in nursing education literature supports structured mentorship and intentional onboarding processes as effective approaches to improve faculty satisfaction, promote professional socialization, and strengthen retention among novice educators.

## Aim Statement

The aim of this project was to foster a supportive onboarding culture by implementing a faculty mentorship initiative intended to improve transition, professional connectedness, and early faculty retention.

## Theoretical Foundations and Framework

**Transitions Theory**- understanding the challenges experienced by nurses transitioning into academic faculty roles

**PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act)** - guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of a structured faculty mentorship onboarding process

**Benner's Novice to Expert** - understanding that novice faculty transitioning from clinical practice to academia require guidance, support, and experiential development to build confidence and competence in the educator role.

## Intervention, Cont'd

Module topics include:

- (1) Program Overview and Organization
- (2) Scholarships
- (3) Simulation and Case Study Development
- (4) Promotion, Annual Goals, and Faculty Development
- (5) Active Learning Strategies
- (6) Challenging Student Encounters and Classroom Management
- (7) Experiential Learning
- (8) Student Evaluations and Faculty Course Evaluations.

Each module will incorporate guided self-reflection activities intended to promote professional growth, confidence building, and successful transition into academia. Scheduled mentor meetings and ongoing faculty support will occur throughout the onboarding process to encourage engagement and professional connectedness.

Implementation of the mentorship program is planned for the upcoming fall semester with a newly hired faculty member. Evaluation of the intervention will include feedback related to onboarding experiences, perceived preparedness, confidence in the educator role, and satisfaction with the mentorship process.

## Implications, Cont'd

Intentional mentorship may enhance the transition of novice faculty from clinical practice to the academic role by improving confidence, reducing role strain, and fostering professional connectedness during the onboarding period. Strengthening early faculty support may also contribute to improved retention and long-term stability within the BSN program.

In addition, implementing a standardized mentorship process promotes a more consistent and supportive onboarding experience, which can enhance faculty engagement and contribute to a positive organizational culture. This model may serve as a sustainable framework for faculty development and has the potential to be replicated or adapted by other nursing programs facing similar challenges in faculty recruitment and retention.

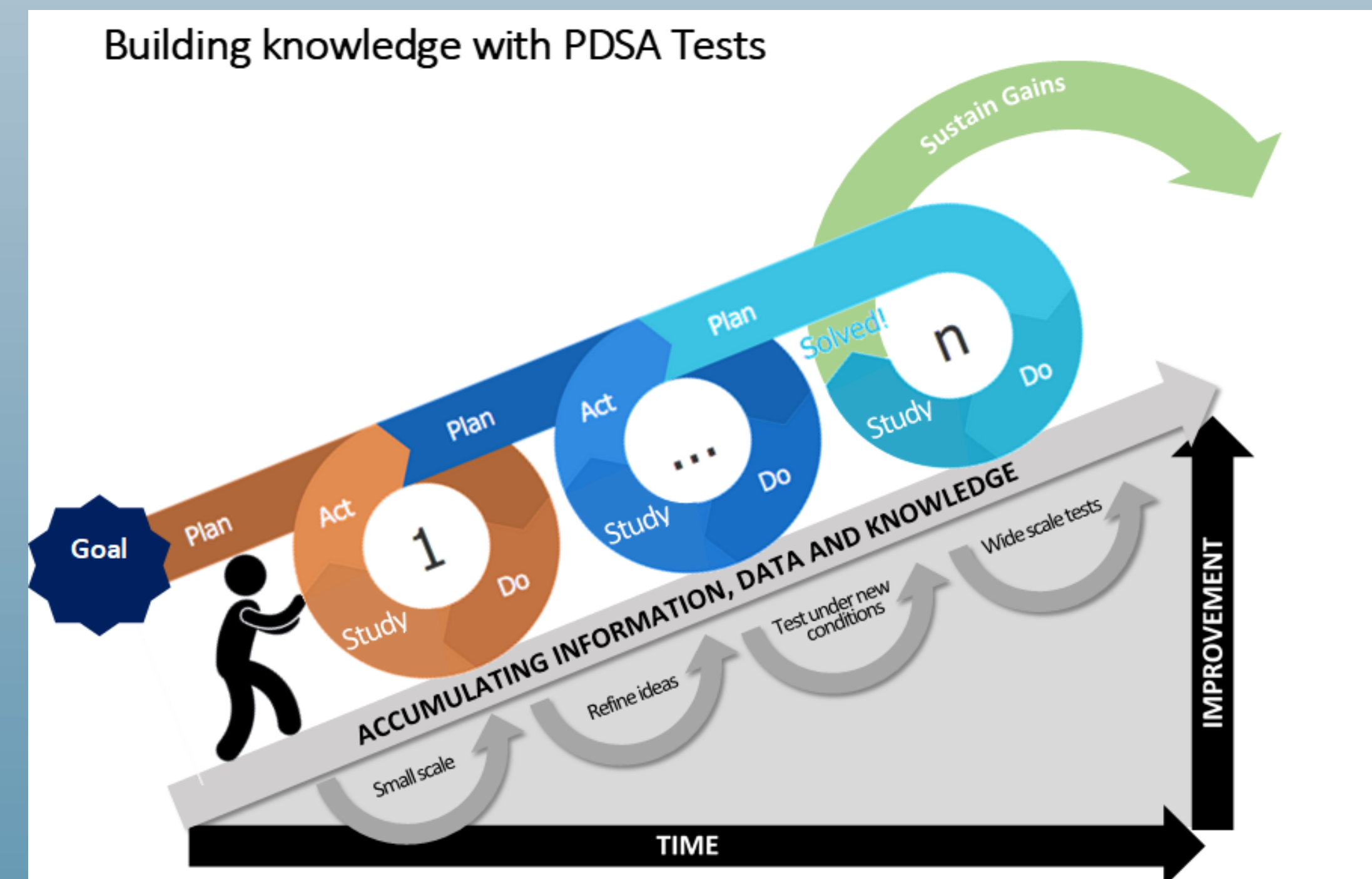
## Evaluation Plan

Evaluation measures will include perceived preparedness for the educator role, confidence in academic responsibilities, satisfaction with the onboarding experience, and perceived support from the faculty mentor relationship. Guided self-reflection activities embedded within each module will also provide qualitative insight into the faculty member's transition from clinical practice to academia.

Additional evaluation measures may include mentor feedback, participation in scheduled mentorship activities, and ongoing assessment of faculty engagement and retention within the nursing program. Findings from the evaluation process will be used to refine the mentorship modules and support future implementation and sustainability of the onboarding program.

## Conclusion

Supporting novice nursing faculty during the transition into academia is essential to building a resilient and sustainable nursing workforce. Intentional onboarding strategies that emphasize mentorship, professional growth, and reflective practice may strengthen faculty engagement and foster long-term success within academic nursing programs. This project highlights the importance of creating supportive educational environments that invest in faculty development early in the transition process. Continued evaluation of structured mentorship initiatives may provide valuable insight into effective approaches for strengthening nursing faculty recruitment, development, and retention in rural academic settings.



## Intervention

A structured faculty mentorship onboarding program was developed to support newly hired nursing faculty transitioning from clinical practice into academia within a rural BSN program. The intervention will pair a newly hired faculty member with a peer faculty mentor who will provide guidance, support, and professional socialization throughout the onboarding process. The mentorship program consists of eight structured modules designed to orient new faculty to the university environment, academic expectations, teaching responsibilities, and the nurse educator role.



## Implications

This structured faculty mentorship onboarding initiative has important implications for nursing education, particularly within rural academic settings where recruitment of experienced nurse educators is limited.



Contact Information and References



## **Developing a Structured Faculty Mentorship Program to Support Onboarding and Role Transition in Nursing Academia: A Quality Improvement Initiative**

Laci Sutton, DNP, MSN, RN, CCRN

### **Biography**

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**I am Laci Sutton, DNP, MSN, RN, CCRN, and I currently serve as the Dean and Assistant Professor of Nursing at Howard Payne University School of Nursing in Brownwood, Texas. In this role, I provide leadership for the nursing program through curriculum development, faculty support, and student success initiatives. I am committed to fostering an academic environment grounded in excellence, clinical competence, and Christian values while preparing future nurses to become skilled clinicians and compassionate leaders.**

**I earned my Bachelor of Science in Biology from Howard Payne University before completing a Diploma in Nursing from Covenant School of Nursing. I later earned a Master of Science in Nursing with a focus in Education and Administration from Lubbock Christian University, where I strengthened my foundation in nursing leadership, education, and organizational systems. I then completed my Doctor of Nursing Practice degree at Grand Canyon University, further developing expertise in evidence-based practice, systems improvement, and nursing leadership.**

**My professional nursing career spans more than a decade and includes experience in critical care, nursing education, and academic leadership. I began my clinical career in the Medical Intensive Care Unit at Covenant Medical Center, serving in progressive roles including Student Nurse Assistant, Nurse Tech, Registered Nurse, Relief Charge Nurse, and Clinical Examiner for Excelsior College. These experiences strengthened my skills in high-acuity patient care, interprofessional collaboration, and clinical decision-making.**

**I later transitioned into nursing education at Howard Payne University, where I served as a Nursing Instructor and Assistant Professor of Nursing before becoming Dean of the School of Nursing. I have also worked as an Adjunct Nursing Instructor for Excelsior College. Throughout my academic career, I have taught a variety of undergraduate nursing courses, including pharmacology, evidence-based practice, geriatric nursing, mental health nursing, clinical nursing courses, and the nursing capstone. My teaching philosophy emphasizes clinical reasoning, ethical practice, and the integration of a Christian worldview into nursing education.**

**My professional interests include nursing education innovation, curriculum development, student recruitment and retention, and strengthening academic-healthcare partnerships. I have participated in leadership initiatives, NSRP-funded projects, and student enrichment programs designed to support workforce development and expand opportunities for nursing students. My doctoral work focused on tobacco cessation and evidence-based strategies to improve population health outcomes.**

**I am a certified Critical Care Registered Nurse (CCRN) and an active member of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing and the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Beyond my professional responsibilities, I am actively involved in church ministry, community service, and youth sports. I am married to a nurse practitioner and am the proud mother of three boys. My family and faith are central to my life, and I enjoy spending time with my husband and sons participating in sports and other family activities.**

### **Contact Information**

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