



VILLANOVA
UNIVERSITY

M. Louise Fitzpatrick
College of Nursing

June 1, 2022

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
Membership Committee
655 K Street, NW, Suite 750
Washington, DC 20001W

Dear Membership Committee,

I am writing to recommend the Villanova University M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing's LEAD Professional Development Program for the Innovations in Professional Nursing Award. The program meets all the criteria for the award as outlined below.

The LEAD Professional Development Program is a required co-curriculum for students to increase skill and confidence in establishing a professional nursing identity, engaging in professional communication and behaviors, and strategically mapping and pursuing their professional career in the business environment of healthcare. Through experiential learning activities and assignments, the LEAD ("Learn, Engage, Advance, Develop") program prepares students to be accountable, increases proficiency and confidence to attain their goals, and to advance in their careers.

Content examples include professional attitude, image, communication, etiquette, job searching, personal finance, "adulting," strategic career mapping, continuing education, and certification. During networking events, students interact with interdisciplinary leaders while learning to speak about themselves and their career aspirations. Content is tailored to differing needs of undergraduate, MSN, DNP and PhD students. For example, nurse practitioner (NP) students learn to incorporate the role and benefits of a NP in their elevator speeches about themselves. PhD students learn how to negotiate timelines, engage in scholarly dialogue, and how to disagree professionally. DNP students receive individualized leadership coaching to facilitate the transition to the role of the DNP in the workplace.

Content within the program enhances what is provided within the standard curriculum and, in some instances, freed content space within the curriculum for other content to be included. Business etiquette, soft skills, and career mapping are standard content within in schools of

business and in other disciplines, but application of this content to nursing is innovative and helps to equalize the preparation of nursing students with that of graduates in other fields.

This donor-supported initiative is free to all. Begun in 2017, the sustainable program has been successfully running to the present day. Its creation involved a team of faculty, staff, alumni, employers, and parents who formulated overall and leveled program objectives for this new co-curriculum. Experts from other disciplines were consulted to determine best practices. A director was appointed to analyze the gaps within the nursing curriculum, coordinate resources needed to meet program objectives, and establish teaching strategies required to achieve outcomes. A systematic plan for program evaluation was established and data were collected as the program was implemented.

Over two thousand students have completed the LEAD program and are now located across the nation. Since the program's inception, student participation in nursing externship experiences increased by 21% with 94.1% of students seeking one. Graduates obtaining their first position in nursing from the externship increased 19%. Employment placement in nursing within 6 months of graduation rose to 99%. Student ratings of skill and confidence increased between program mid-point and end-point surveys in the areas of personal brand, interview skills, professional communication and behavior, and knowledge of career development resources. Students who participated in the program demonstrated an increase from 31% to 90% confidence in rating the statement, "I know what I want for my career, and I know how to get there." Early in the program, 25% of nursing students felt very to extremely confident in obtaining a competitive position in nursing which increased to 91% by program completion. Professional engagement also increased. At program completion, 88% of participants indicated they were "Likely to serve as a mentor to other students and nursing colleagues." In a career outcomes survey, 100% of nursing students agreed with the statements, "Villanova equipped me with the knowledge and tools to successfully navigate my career" and "Villanova prepared me for the next steps in my career." Employer feedback has been positive. In a recruiter survey, 100% of recruiters responded that they would recommend graduates to other employers and rated graduates 9.8/10 for professionalism.

Benefits of the program to the institution include a competitive recruiting advantage of new students into all nursing programs and tracks. The program raised almost \$500,000 in donor funding since inception. The quality of the program has led the university's School of Business to reach out to partner on initiatives and other colleges on campus to attend program events.

The program has been replicated. Due to the successful outcomes of the program, other colleges and universities are partnering with Villanova University to provide this content to their students or created a program like the LEAD Program within their own schools. For example, Carthage College in Wisconsin created a similar program after working with the LEAD Program Director. A pilot offering of LEAD Program content was provided this year to one historically Black university to improve student retention. Ongoing data will be collected to evaluate the program's effectiveness with this population and possible program expansion to other HBCUs with the aim to improve retention, enhance career readiness, and ultimately increase the number of underrepresented nurses in practice. This is consistent with the mission and vision of the AACN.

The Villanova University M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing's LEAD Professional Development Program is a sustainable, replicable, and innovative professional program with demonstrated positive outcomes related to nursing career development and professional identity formation. The knowledge and skills the program provides to students are consistent with those identified in the AACN Essentials and the program is advancing both professional nursing education as well as future practice.

I highly recommend the LEAD Professional Development Program for the AACN Innovations in Professional Nursing Award. I am happy to support my letter of nomination with additional information if required. My contact information is below and attached.

Sincerely,



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