Marketing Weekend College for Women Nursing Students

The student body in nursing is changing. Associate degree programs have traditionally served adult learners. Baccalaureate programs have an increasing number of adult learners who are or have been married and have children. Most students need to work to help finance their education. With the economic decline, parents are paying less of new high school graduates educational expenses. There is an increase in the number of adult learners who need to support themselves and perhaps their families. Large numbers of diploma and associate degree prepared nurses want to get baccalaureate degrees. Nurse educators must be responsive to the changes in society and the needs of the changing student body.

As nurse educators design programs to be responsive to the changes, they must identify the group their program is to reach, identify the special problems of that group, plan solutions to overcome the problems, and plan promotion strategies to attract students to their programs.

Many nurses have diplomas or associate degrees and would like to obtain baccalaureate or higher degrees to upgrade their skills. Mid career changes are common. Many women who have degrees in other areas such as psychology and sociology want to develop more marketable skills. There is an increasing number of displaced homemakers who are divorced or widowed. They may need career preparation to help support themselves and their families.

While there are some differences among these groups of women, they have several common problems that can be addressed by scheduling courses and the nursing curriculum on weekends. Most of these women need to work so they need classes scheduled around their work schedules. If they work straight or rotating shifts during the week, they may be available for classes during the weekend.

Most of these women have some responsibilities. If classes are scheduled on Saturdays as well as during the week, they may be able to spread their classes over more days to regulate their work flow. If they work outside the home in addition to their home responsibilities, they may prefer to do their housework on days that they work and go to school on their "days off." They will be more refreshed students. Fatigue is a major problem for women who deal with housework, work outside the home, and in addition, take an evening class. Time pressure results. It can be difficult to get from work to a day or evening class on time. If the woman takes two or more classes, she can save commuting time and gas money by going to the class site once a week instead of two or more times during the week. If babysitting is a problem, the husband or school-age girls may be available on weekends.

Going back to school can be a very threatening experience. Weekend college may be a less hectic way to return to school. Finances are frequently a problem. Through weekend college, students may be able to take more credit hours per semester while working than otherwise.

Weekend college utilizes facilities to a fuller capacity. Classrooms would otherwise be setting empty on the weekends. It provides greater flexibility in faculty schedules. Faculty who teach on the weekend have more opportunity to attend weekday classes to advance their own education, for clinical practice, and for consultation. Weekend college teaching assignments may be part of a regular work load or an overload. Well-qualified nursing service personnel may be used on a part-time basis. Support staff are needed. Resources such as library, food dispensers, photocopy equipment, and parking spaces are needed. A budget must be provided. Students pay regular tuition.

Once a weekend option is planned, marketing is important. The target market can be reached by advertising on television, radio, in magazines and newspapers. Public service announcements are useful. Direct mailings, flyers, brochures, or an announcement with paychecks may be used. Displays in hospitals and shopping centers are appropriate. Representatives may speak to nursing service administrators, hospital education departments, to groups of nurses, and at public and/or professional meetings.

Once a weekend option is in place, it should be evaluated. In addition to the usual course evaluations, data regarding age, sex, marital status, number of children, ages of children, educational background, academic status, credit hours this semester, place of employment, how much tuition and/or expenses is paid by the employer, how many hours per week are worked for pay, and could the student take the course if it weren't scheduled on the weekend helps plan and market the weekend option.

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