Innovation Center

Lessons Learned From Pairing Education-Intensive and Research-Intensive Faculty to Increase Scholarship in Nursing

Ricketta Clark and Ansley Grimes Stanfill

Abstract

Many nurse faculty find scholarship goals difficult to achieve while also maintaining education, practice, and service duties. This article describes a partnership between education-intensive and research-intensive faculty members that increased scholarly output. Challenges included conflicting schedules and responsibilities and an increasing desire to accomplish more than was possible in the allotted time. Differences in educational preparation and experiences were found to be a facilitator that enabled the team to be more productive. An equally felt commitment to the process and dedicated meetings also helped this team to be successful.

KEY WORDS Faculty Workload – Nursing Faculty – Research Productivity – Scholarship

As nursing education is redefined and standardized at a national level (Carter et al., 2016; Hendricks & Wangerin, 2017), scholarship must also be redefined as part of faculty workload and promotion (Hartjes, 2018). The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2018) defines nursing scholarship as "the generation, synthesis, translation, application, and dissemination of knowledge that aims to improve health and transform health care." Although clinical and education doctorates include preparation for scholarly inquiry, these programs do not fully prepare nurses for data-driven research that would be required for tenure or promotion at most institutions (Booth et al., 2016). Many nurse faculty find the required scholarship goals difficult to achieve while also maintaining education, practice, and service duties.

Boyer defined scholarship as falling into four categories: discovery, integration, application, and teaching (Johnston, 1998). Within nursing, scholarship can be categorized into the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of practice, and the scholarship of teaching (Hartjes, 2018). Although faculty may incorporate innovative teaching techniques or clinical trends into their practice, they often do not disseminate the information to be recognized as scholarship and may not know where to begin when seeking such recognition (Honig et al., 2013). Collaborative solutions are needed. This article describes a partnership between education-intensive and research-intensive faculty members that resulted in increased scholarly output. We report on the benefits, challenges, and solutions that were used by this team.

FORMING A COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP

At a strategic planning meeting focused on challenges related to scholarship, an advanced practice nurse with substantial teaching efforts (>85 percent education-intensive) expressed concerns about her ability to meet scholarship and service criteria for promotion and tenure given her other responsibilities and commitments. At the same meeting, a nurse scientist with heavy efforts in research (>80 percent research-intensive) as well as teaching and service commitments expressed concern about outstanding projects to be completed within limited time frames and deadlines. The education-intensive faculty member approached the research-intensive faculty member about the possibility of partnering for mutual benefit.

In their first meeting, the partners identified the goal of producing a manuscript for publication, with the research-intensive faculty member mentoring the education-intensive faculty member in scholarly writing. Because of their busy schedules, the partners developed concrete goals and structured their work to fit within the boundaries of a normal workday. This was done by "chunking" writing sessions into hour-long weekly meetings, writing less frequently but for longer periods of time. Using this one hour solely for work on the project forced the two parties to be accountable to one another. Although mentoring can be successful outside a face-to-face context, these face-to-face meetings increased collegiality and supported the working relationship through personal presence.

About the Authors *Ricketta Clark, DNP, APRN-BC, is assistant professor, Department of Acute and Tertiary Care, College of Nursing, The University of Tennessee Health Science Center, Memphis, Tennessee. Ansley Grimes Stanfill, PhD, RN, FAAN, is associate professor and associate dean of research, Department of Acute and Tertiary Care, College of Nursing, The University of Tennessee Health Science Center. The authors are grateful to Curtis Roby for his editorial assistance with this article. For more information, contact Dr. Stanfill at astanfi4@uthsc.edu.*
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The two parties engaged in an early discussion about authorship order for the resulting publication. Because the work was being done only during the context of regular meetings, both parties were equally vested in time and energy. After discussion, it was agreed that, because the research-intensive faculty member was acting as mentor and given this individual's career stage, she would be placed in the senior author position. A note was placed in the final manuscript to denote the equal contributions of the two authors.

At the next meeting, a research question relevant to both was identified, and work began on the shared project, a systematic review of the literature. The two parties worked through all steps of developing a systematic review in the context of these hourly meetings, from defining the question to developing search terms and limits, to reviewing the literature for inclusion and exclusion criteria, to synthesizing information across articles, to writing the resultant manuscript. This manuscript was submitted for peer review nine months later and published shortly thereafter (Clark & Stanfill, 2019).

LESSONS LEARNED

It was noted by this team that a sense of shared responsibility increased personal commitment to the project. At the end of the work, the accomplishment of the project within a discrete and scheduled time frame increased each member's satisfaction with her job responsibilities. Such accomplishments may help reduce burnout common to the faculty role.

Another benefit came in the form of increased collegiality. At many institutions, education-intensive and research-intensive faculty cross paths infrequently and may not realize the benefits of working together toward a common goal. Pairing these faculty members served to increase collegiality and scholarly output concurrently. Both faculty members gained an understanding and appreciation for the other's role and the importance of the alternate mission for which they may have dedicated little effort.

Because of the differences in terminal degrees, this partnership also afforded an opportunity to bring different perspectives on a shared topic. This not only made the experience rich for the partners, but it also added a multidisciplinary depth to the published product. The depth of the effort led the greater interest in research for the education-intensive faculty member and formed the background of a new shared project.

This faculty member further benefitted from the mentorship of the research-intensive faculty member in developing strategies for writing for publication, including strategies to maximize productivity when time was limited. For example, this included the building of outlines to allow for short bursts of writing and the "chunking" of writing efforts into dedicated blocks of time for focused effort. As a result of these experiences, the education-intensive faculty member began to develop a skill set that will transfer to other scholarly activities.

CHALLENGES AND DISCUSSION

Managing conflicting schedules and the responsibilities associated with each partner's faculty role presented challenges, for example, there were grant deadlines, laboratory concerns, teaching requirements, and student needs. The partnership led to a greater desire to accomplish more than was possible in the allotted time, and the partners decided to increase the length of their meetings.

Overall, the partnership was successful in meeting the goal of increasing scholarly activity and collegiality. Smeltzer et al. (2014) discuss placing the scientist and educator as peers to address the common issue of nurse-faculty scholarship, noting that such partnerships can provide feasible research opportunities within the context of a normal workload. Smeltzer and colleagues also note that this method allows those in an advanced practice nursing/clinical role to maintain those duties while simultaneously meeting the scholarship demands crucial to the faculty role.

Before implementing this strategy, it is wise to review promotion and tenure guidelines and discuss the implementation of collaboration with administrators or rank and tenure committee chairs. Collaborative scholarship approaches are infrequently used by schools of nursing, perhaps because of the limited number of in-house mentors as senior faculty members retire (Clochesy et al., 2019; Smeltzer et al., 2014). Some nursing schools reach out for external mentorship opportunities (such as those offered by the National League for Nursing and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, among others), but such partnerships are time-intensive with limited opportunities available. In addition, smaller institutions will sometimes partner with larger institutions for mentorship, often using web-based conferencing, which can work for some teams.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mentorship is a skill that needs to be practiced. We recommend that schools have formal efforts in place to allow this skill to be honed. The development of such skills can happen in many ways, from established role modeling to informal meetings or discussions on strategy.

Educationally and clinically intensive nursing faculty should be given opportunities to match with researchers, with support from administration for such comingling. Partnerships such as the one we describe can be successful and sustainable for increasing scholarly output. The shared responsibility of informal mentorship has other benefits, such as developing new skill sets and interests and increasing collegiality among participating faculty members.

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