

Developing and Implementing the Start of a Student Organization:

Senior Project

UNCG Lloyd Honors College

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## **Introduction**

My Senior Honors project's goal was to partner with Hannah Hartzog, a fellow nursing student, to develop and implement the start of a student membership for a nursing professional organization. We worked alongside my faculty member, Mrs. Lori Hubbard, who is currently on the North Carolina Perinatal Association (NCPA) Board of Directors. This initiative will ultimately spark a spirit of continuing education by encouraging students from other nursing schools to join (Mata, 2010). My part of this project was to designate student involvement at the national conference and to propose how this will impact marketing and networking of interest among other universities, not just nursing students. We presented our preliminary ideas for the student part of the organization during their October board meeting. In addition, we have planned to present our project next year in 2021 at both the Annual NC Perinatal Association Conference scheduled and the UNCG Annual Undergraduate Honors Symposium.

## **Purpose**

The North Carolina Perinatal Association is a coalition to promote the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies. The Association is able to advance its purpose through leadership, education and advocacy. The mission is to improve the health for childbearing families throughout the state of North Carolina. Leaders and members of the Association work heavily to advocate and educate others to build a collaborative effort to improve perinatal health. The current board consists of various nurses who specialize in different multidisciplinary fields. The purpose of our project was to create a student membership that would potentially increase the organization's visibility and participation among the younger subset of perinatal nurses. As mentioned above, this would spark a spirit of continuing education for nursing students to stay involved even after their graduation. We will discuss amongst the current members how getting

the students involved could assist with the association's marketing and communication and how students as members of the Association could benefit from their membership including strengthening their professional experience and resume.

### **Significance of the Topic**

Being part of a professional organization has many benefits aligning with the ANA Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice, including professional development, career growth, networking, mentorship, service to the profession, and advocacy (Echevarria, 2018). For nursing students, being affiliated with a professional association can help them with career development (Hopkins, 2016). Students can network with intradisciplinary members, the members of the board, and possibly discover some points of professional commonality. Not only will this encourage me to incorporate my ideas but it is an opportunity for me to learn, share, and grow as an individual. Being a part of this Association will encourage the students to explore concerns related to nursing outside of the classroom and be able to exchange ideas with other partners. We will be able to refer to the experienced health care providers as part of a mentorship and gain knowledge to apply in our everyday lives and professional practice.

### **Project Ideas and Timeline**

The first part of this project was to figure out how to market and network with other universities to get more student involvement. The start of the project was to initiate what student involvement would look like. Then we would need to initiate a student organization registration membership fee. Secondly, we would have the senior leaders of the Association conduct an interest meeting presenting information about the association including its mission, services, and annual and long-term aims. We would want to create an awareness and monetary value of membership and hope that the students can make an informed decision and become members of

the Association. Students can then start by networking horizontally across their team, reaching out to other nursing students from local nursing schools. Using social media as a way of marketing the association is also considered.

Once we have reached out among interested prospects at the university, we know we could then expand our search and invite others from cross functional organizations. We want the student involvement to be more than just nursing students because nursing includes more than just the nurse. The association has members from other disciplines so for nursing students to be members it would help them to network amongst various interdisciplinary teams. The health care team could include social workers, lactation specialists and even potential medical students. The NC Perinatal Association works to improve perinatal health for childbearing families. Anyone that could potentially bring any great ideas to increase the health of individuals during this time is greatly appreciated. We could even survey people and ask their specific needs and wants out of the membership.

The next step would be to see how students could possibly be included in the annual conference. We would want the students to be involved as much as possible so one idea would include getting them to conduct the check in process. We could also think of a creative brochure and include information about the association and have the students hand them out to prospects who attend the conference. Organizations must have leadership so we could organize a student E-board that could catch the student perspective during the conference. For example, have a secretary to take note of important takeaways from the conference. We could invite student prospects who are interested in joining membership and hold information sessions throughout the day. I'm excited to be working on this project and can't wait to see how it will all unfold.

### **Initiation of Student Organization**

Many may think “what is a student organization?” and “how can I benefit from joining?” Many professional organizations provide services such as continuing education, professional development, networking, and mentorship programs (Clark, 2020). There are many steps to begin the initiation of the student organization. There is currently no active NCPA student society chapter at any university in North Carolina. To improve the quality and involvement among individuals, it's important to include various populations. We have constructed a detailed plan of what we want the students to focus on as being a part of the organization. My partner and I presented our ideas to the NCPA Board of Directors at their quarterly meeting in October. We received positive feedback and the members were receptive of initiating a student membership for their existing organization. There is an advantage to being an addition to an organization that already exists as they have already created their mission and focus for the group.

First, we must begin with the annual fee and marketing aspect. The greatest perceived obstacle is cost when it comes to joining organizations (Clark, 2020). We will offer the student membership at a discounted rate of \$20 annually. The benefits must outweigh the cost of the organization, so we want to keep it reasonable for the college students.

### **Strategies**

It is important to assess the need and interest of all involved parties to ensure a higher rate of participation. With all things considered, we want to address all obstacles and benefits to attract more students in the long run. Some potential strategies to attract more involvement would be to lower cost allowing the organization to still fulfill its functions but be efficient for the students. Another potential strategy to increase participation would be to offer resources and continuing education opportunities. The organization will need to increase their social media presence and work to increase their marketing strategies to capture these students' attention.

Many students have a lot on their plates and their time may go to other priorities, so it's important to highlight these benefits. There is more work and additional encouragement needed to continue to increase the number of participants and new interest. Although, there are many existing organizations on campus which ensures that it is obtainable to those who have the desire to complete this project.

The National Perinatal Association is a good example of some of the things we would like to accomplish at the local level. The NPA serves as the parent organization and the NPASS serves as the student sublet. They provide membership at \$45 and have their own section on the website describing things they are involved in. They have newsletter, sponsoring, and new chapter opportunities. It brings together a unique blend of passionate people who come from different disciplinary backgrounds and strive to address the same population.

### **Marketing**

Marketing is an essential part of developing a student organization and recruitment through social media is crucial as the largest marketing platform in today's world is social media platforms. Using social media has many benefits such as recruitment, visibility, increasing engagement and increased quality. Social media can increase recruitment; the organization will be able to use many different platforms such as Facebook and Instagram as these platforms host billions of users. The organization will be able to reach other organizations and attract students from various disciplines across the state. Social media also helps to increase visibility by making the organization more detectable. It would be more accessible beyond the actual website and more people can investigate the things being done to increase interest. All of these help increase engagement. The current members and ones that are interested can connect through social media by interacting and sharing stories related to the organization.

Overall, incorporating social media can help increase the comprehensive quality of the organization as a whole. We could include a social marketing competition among students with a 1-year membership or scholarship to the conference as a prize to try to promote engagement. The NCPA already distributes two annual scholarships on behalf of Ann Wofle, a former member, to cover registration and traveling expenses. In addition, another way to promote marketing would be to print flyers and distribute them around the university as a way of catching the attention of nursing students and other majors.

The main source of marketing would be the NCPA website; that is the first thing people would see when they research the organization. Inserting a short 3-5 minute video on the website's main page would help create a picture that people could relate too. The video would include the president of NCPA welcoming all interested prospects and explaining some of the great works the organization has done over the years. The video would also highlight some of the benefits of joining. We could include a live testament from someone who attended the conference and all that they enjoyed. Also, listing testimonials under the video on the website would give interested individuals inspiration and desire to join.

While social media creates a marketing platform, using email is a simple way to market the organization as well. The organization would send out a welcome email and continue to send annual notices to universities and community colleges to keep people informed of what new programs and ideas are taking place. Word of mouth is the simplest way to market your organization so student leaders would be willing to travel to other schools to discuss the works of the organization and that way individuals receive the information at hand.

## **Networking**

Networking is an essential piece to an organization as it takes more than one person to organize and implement all the shared ideas. Networking can be considered a rewarding experience as you get to meet other nurses and broaden your professional circle. One way to incorporate peer networking into the organization would be to create student chapters and outreach. I believe that it is critical to personal growth and development as you're able to build relationships and take collaborative action for community service and other projects. It is beneficial to be able to work alongside individuals who may have the same drive and ambition as you that could lead the organization to success. Being able to network with other universities and majors allows space for feedback and access to different points of view. For example, Rhonda Lanning who is a current member on the board suggested UNCG could collaborate with the Women's Health Interest Group (WHIG) at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Collaborating with other majors at the various colleges increases interprofessional networking. Interprofessional care includes networking and teamwork to increase the quality of care for the mothers and their babies. Not only do we get to network outside of the organization, but we can network amongst the people inside of the organization. In addition, it increases the opportunity to learn from someone who may be more advanced in the field. This will naturally lead to many opportunities for the undergraduate students whether it's for a job, internship, or simple referral. Most of all, networking creates a sense of support, knowledge, and insight that the student may not have had before joining the organization. Networking also creates a collaborative act in advocacy as the organization works to get involved.

Once moving through the initial steps of networking with other schools, it is important to keep them interested. Activities that serve such a purpose may include virtual interest meetings so the students can not only visually see the website but audibly hear and make connections



through personal experiences. Then, virtual networking meetings at the beginning or end of each education session should be held once or twice a semester. This promotes the idea of continuing to get these people to stay connected and network beyond what they know and what they are used to.

### **Annual Conference**

The next step to address is how the students can get involved in the annual conference. The next annual NC/SC Perinatal Partnership Conference is set for September 26-28, 2021. It is scheduled to take place at the Sheraton Convention Center in Myrtle Beach, SC. Not only would we provide a reduced rate for the annual fee, but students would be able to possibly attend the conference at a reduced rate. The students would want to make the best of the attendance cost so we would try to get them involved as much as possible. As far as service, the students could start by participating at the registration booth. The registration booth would include getting people signed up to attend and collecting fees. T-shirts or other welcome gifts are usually offered with registration, and student members could assist with distributing these items. Students could also participate at the NCPA marketing table in the vendor fair to possibly hand out brochures and provide a verbal explanation of what the organization is all about. This could potentially serve as a volunteer opportunity for some of the undergraduate students as they could participate as a committee task member, hold board positions, and help with the conferences and community events. Being a part of the conference would help create a professional presence and offer additional networking, exposure, and professional development opportunities.

We would also need to include an educational aspect that the students could be uniquely involved in. The conference consists of three days during the week. Ultimately, this may create some difficulties as many students would not be able to attend the whole conference due to class

and clinical schedules. The conference will include many educational sessions. For example, some topics covered include preventing maternal deaths, pain relief, preterm infant health and more. During the conference, the students could conduct live streams or recordings during the conference and post on the members-only section of the website for some who could not attend. In addition, we could incorporate 1-2 of the keynote or breakout sessions into our video on the website so they could get the truest experience. The organization could also use the key takeaways from each session within the conference and post it in the student listserv. The listserv would encourage participation for those who could not attend or just be an addition to the conference as it would allow for a continuum of discussion and interests.

Lastly, we could continue to incorporate networking in the conference. This would be a great time for the student members to be able to network and meet other students. There is a gap in between the online interface and being able to communicate ideas at hand in person. We will have a specific session for students where they can share ideas about some of the concerns they have. The younger members may bring different concerns about current issues in the perinatal world rather than the older members. In addition, each year the NCPA offers two conference scholarships to cover registration and travel expenses. We could potentially offer a student scholarship to recognize the achievements of an undergraduate student and involvement in the community.

## **Summary**

UNCG strives to support and advise over 250 student memberships on their university campus (Student Groups and Resources, 2020). Being a part of a student organization has many benefits that would carry for a lifetime within their career. We hope to be able to get this initiative started possibly at the beginning of the new year for the current NCPA organization so

that they can maximize their participation and involvement. Allowing the students to join as a subset of the current professional membership structure will bring diversity, young leadership, and new ideas to the table. They will be able to improve their presence in the community and worldwide exhibiting representation for mothers and their children. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to be a part of the start of the student membership program for the NCPA. The program can potentially nurture nursing students, the future of the nursing profession, so that they can learn and grow through hands-on professional networking and experience. Such benefits will not only directly benefit the students themselves but also result in the increased well-being and the quality of life of the perinatal populations they work with.

## References

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