

**Nurse Like Me Mentorship Program: A DNP Approach to Elevating Health Equity**

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## Notes from the Author

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### Statement of Dedication

My husband for being my *How*,

My son for being my *Why*,

My sisters for being my *Inspiration* and,

My mama for being my biggest *Cheerleader*.

I love you all so much. I did this for, because, and through us all.

### Abstract

The nursing profession is facing a growing shortage. Although diversity in the nursing profession is improving, unacceptable gaps remain. In addition, post-pandemic study findings show that younger nurses are at a higher risk for leaving the nursing profession, increasing the threats of shortage and diversity beyond what was previously predicted. Nurse shortages and diversity gaps impact our community's health and health equity. The *Nurse Like Me* (NLM) mentorship project sought to mitigate nurse shortage and improve nurse diversity through the mentoring of diverse high school students interested in nursing by diverse college nursing students with similar interests and or demographics. The project took place over eight weeks between September 2021 and November 2021. During those eight weeks, high school students from a local public school were paired with college nursing students from a NC Historically Black College/University (HBCU) for nurse mentoring. The mentee/mentor pairs met biweekly for a total of four meetings. During the meetings mentors provided general education on the nursing profession, discussed college nursing programs, reviewed nursing service scholarships, and answered mentee questions about nursing. At the end of the eight weeks, the high school mentees showed a significant increase in their interest in college nursing programs, increased awareness of nursing service scholarships, and were satisfied with the program. Feedback from the mentees and mentors all revealed a positive experience with the NLM project. The goals of the project aligned with the goals of Kannapolis City Schools' *2020-2025 Strategic Plan*, the North Carolina State Board of Education's *2025 Statewide Strategic Plan*, the North Carolina Institute of Medicine's *Healthy North Carolina 2030*, and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's *Enhancing Diversity in the Nursing Workforce* fact sheet.

*Keywords:* nurse shortage, nurse diversity, mentoring, health equity

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## Section I. Introduction

### Background

The Nurse Like Me Mentorship Program (NLM) is a North Carolina-based project that pairs high school students interested in nursing with nursing college students of similar backgrounds and an interest in mentoring. It is an evidence-based approach for priming young adults for nursing careers and is designed to address both a rising nursing shortage and a diversity gap within the nursing profession.

North Carolina (NC) had 145,014 registered nurses (RN) as of February 2021, according to the North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) (2021a). By 2030, North Carolina (NC) is projected to have a shortage of 5,152 nurses (Zhang et al., 2018). In addition to current projections for nursing shortages, Nickitas (2021) suggests that nursing supply may decline due to the strain and traumas experienced by nurses during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic.

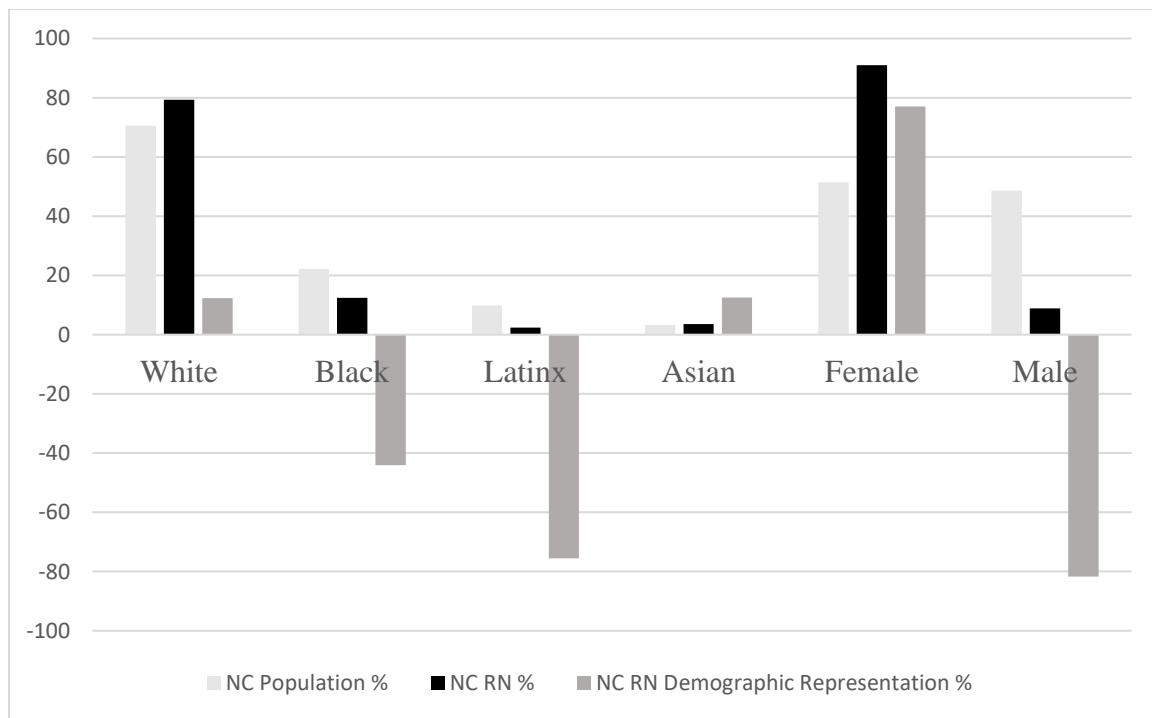
The project site is a public high school in Kannapolis, NC. The school's student population is majority-minority: 34% of students identify as Latinx, 32% as White, and 29%, Black (Kannapolis City Schools, 2020). The project site has a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program that admits five students per year to its Nursing Fundamentals program.

Compared to NC's general demographics, African Americans, Latinx, American Indians, and males are underrepresented in NC's nursing professions (see Figure 1). The most underrepresented ethnicities are Latinx and African Americans. NC's Latinx population is 75.5% underrepresented: whereas 9.8% of NC's population is Latinx, only 2.4% of its nurses are Latinx. NC's African American population is 44.1% underrepresented in nursing: they represent 22.2% of the general population but only 12.4% of nurses. Similarly, Asians represent 3.6% of the general population but only 3.2% of nurses and Native Americans represent 1.6% of the

population but only 1.1% of nurses. Those overrepresented in the nursing profession are Whites, who represent 70.6% of the population and 79.3% of nurses. The largest underrepresented demographic in the NC nursing profession, however, are males, who are 81.7% underrepresented: whereas 48.6% of the general population is male, only 8.9% of NC's nurses are male (NCBON, 2021b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b).

**Figure 1**

*Demographic Representation of NC Nurses*



*Note.* Percentages calculated based on statistics from the NCBON (2021a); NCBON (2021b); and the U.S. Census Bureau (2019b). Registered nurse (RN) demographic representation is the ratio of RN to general population demographics.

Nursing diversity and nursing shortages have both direct and indirect negative impacts on nurses, the quality of healthcare, and the overall health equity in North Carolina. The NLM

responds to these issues by priming diverse high school students for nursing careers and promoting leadership skills among nursing college students.

### **Organizational Needs Statement**

As an upstream workforce development initiative that aspires to improve North Carolinians' overall health equity, the NLM aligns its goals with needs defined by leading local, state, and national organizations. These organizations and their needs statements include

- the Kannapolis City Schools' (KCS) (2020) *2020-2025 Strategic Plan*,
- the North Carolina State Board of Education's (NCSBE) (2019) *2025 Statewide Strategic Plan*,
- the North Carolina Institute of Medicine's (NCIOM) (2020) *Healthy North Carolina 2030*, and
- the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's (AACN) (2019) *Enhancing Diversity in the Nursing Workforce* fact sheet.

The NLM added these organizations' needs and goals to its plan to foster synergistic impacts that might produce collective advancement on these issues.

In addition to increasing the nursing supply and improving health equity of North Carolinians, the NLM also aims to satisfy existing community needs. For example, the NLM program is designed to promote the NCIOM's (2020) goals to dismantle structural racism and enlarge economic security in NC by increasing cultural representation among college nursing students, leading diverse young adults toward economically stable careers, and supporting health equity in NC. The NLM also contributes to the NC School Board of Education's (2019) goals to expand culturally-applicable and equity-centered resources for NC's educators and increase mentorship opportunities by connecting high school students with nursing college students of



like demographic backgrounds and/or professional interests. Finally, at its core, the NLM rises to the AACN's (2019) call to recruit more underrepresented nurses to promote community health equity and address the nursing shortage.

Since the students at the high school project site serve as upstream building blocks for NLM's efforts to improve nursing workforce diversity and numbers in NC, the NLM also incorporates the Kannapolis City Schools' (2020) *2020-2025 Strategic Plan* into its framework. Specifically, the NLM is designed to incorporate four of KCS's 12 strategic goals, including growing equitable practices, promoting social and emotional learning, supporting programs and partnerships that illuminate every student, and expanding the Career and Technical Education program. The NLM also reinforces specific KCS strategies such as focusing on culture, providing support, and conducting interventions. Overall, through culturally appropriate mentoring, the NLM supports the KCS mission "to promote an environment that ensures safety, community, equity, and growth" (KCS, 2020, p. 7).

### **Problem Statement**

NC has unacceptable diversity gaps within the nursing field. NC also faces a growing nurse shortage. These circumstances harm the nurses, the quality of healthcare, and the overall health equity in NC, both directly and indirectly.

### **Purpose Statement**

The NLM mission statement is to improve community health equities by closing diversity gaps in the nursing profession and mitigating severe nursing shortages through the culturally-appropriate nurse mentoring of diverse North Carolina high school students by nursing college students. The program aspires to improve the lives of young adults, the nursing profession, healthcare systems, and the communities they serve.

## Section II. Evidence

### Literature Review

Three databases were used to search for literature related to nursing shortages, nursing diversity, and nurse mentoring. These were the Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PubMed, and One Search. For all three databases, key search terms were cultural diversity, diversity, representation, nursing shortage, nurses, nursing workforce, mentoring, high school students, and nursing students. Inclusion criteria for the searches, which took place in June 2021, were a publication date of "2016 through the present" (i.e., a 5-year period), "full-text articles," and "published in the English language." The search produced 158 articles. Based on an examination of the articles, 149 were excluded for either a) having a topic that was either too general or focused on areas outside the scope of this study (namely, advanced nursing roles or second educational degrees), b) focusing on a non-US population, c) consisting of opinion pieces with limited or no references, d) duplicating another article, and/or e) being not yet published as a full article. Of the 158 articles produced by the initial search, nine were retained, two of which were dissertations.

The articles' final themes were

- nursing,
- diversity,
- nursing shortage,
- mentorship,
- high school students,
- first-degree college nursing students, and
- nursing diversity program reports (see Table 1).

All nine articles addressed the nursing profession, diversity, and mentorship geared towards students entering the nursing profession and entry-level nursing degrees. Two articles focused on reducing the nursing shortage. Three articles concentrated on mentoring high school students towards nursing careers, six focused on mentoring college nursing students or pre-nursing students, and four were reports from programs implementing strategies such as mentoring to improve nursing workforce diversity.

Levels of evidence provided in the articles were determined based on Melnyk and & Fineout-Overholt's (2015) *Rating system for the hierarchy of evidence for intervention/treatment questions*. One article provided level II evidence, two had level IV, three had level V, two had level VI, and one had level VII. The Articles were also evaluated utilizing a literature matrix.

**Table 1**  
*Article Themes*

	Nursing	Diversity	Nursing Shortage	Mentorship	High School Students	Entry-Level Nursing Students	Program Report
McCue, 2017	x	x	x	x	x		
Nadder, 2018	x	x	x	x		x	
Cary et al., 2020	x	x		x		x	x
Noone et al., 2020	x	x		x		x	
Bundy, 2020	x	x		x	x		x
Zamora & Rogers, 2020	x	x		x		x	x
Powers et al., 2018	x	x		x		x	
Kirui & McGee, 2021	x	x		x		x	
Murray et al., 2016	x	x		x	x		x

*Note.* All articles included the theme of nursing, diversity, and mentorship.

### ***Current State of Knowledge***

The literature on mentoring diverse high school students towards college nursing programs to increase nursing diversity and mitigate the nursing shortage is limited. McCue (2017) came to the same conclusion in an earlier literature review. Only four of the nine articles

were reports of programs aimed at increasing nursing diversity. Although these reports documented what is currently being done, they do not provide a substantial review of the literature. McCue's (2017) dissertation was the only document that was not a program report about increasing diverse pre-college students' success in entering college nursing programs. It was for this reason that articles focused on strategies such as mentoring pre-nursing and first-degree college nursing students to improve nursing workforce diversity and the nursing shortage, and program implementation reports were also included in this literature review.

### ***Current Approaches to Solving Population Problem(s)***

The literature identifies various methods for increasing nursing workforce diversity and mitigating nursing shortages. Among the four program implementation reports, Carey et al. (2020) reported developing a strategic plan to increase diversity and inclusion at a nursing school by recruiting, retaining, and mentoring diverse faculty and students. Bundy (2020) described providing Black high school students with a nurse mentor of similar interests. The program resulted in 83% of the high school participants enrolling in a BSN program after graduation. Zamora & Rogers (2020) reported on a college nursing program geared towards increasing diversity through student-student mentoring, tutoring, and academic coaching. Murray et al. (2016) summarized a federally-funded program that provided financial, educational, and coaching services (such as mentoring) to high school students interested in nursing; this program resulted in 79% of participants showing interest in healthcare careers.

McCue (2017) and Nadder (2018) were both well-designed dissertations. McCue explored pre-college efforts to increase a minority student's decision to pursue college nursing programs. The study concluded that initiatives started in high school promote the recruitment of minority students into college nursing programs. The most significant determinants of minority

high school students entering college nursing programs identified by the study were a student's concentration on math and sciences, confidence in their abilities, and confidence in their ability to attend college. The study also found that mentoring played a positive role in building students' confidence in their academic abilities and ability to attend college. Nadder (2018) studied college nursing instructors who acted as mentors to their students and related that the mentoring of nursing students can impact the nursing shortage.

Noone et al. (2020), Powers et al. (2018) and Kirui and McGee (2021) all focused on interventions for nursing college students to improve nursing workforce diversity. Through literature review, Noone et al. (2020) concluded that mentoring, financial assistance and academic support in nursing college programs are vital interventions for improving nursing workforce diversity. Powers et al. (2018) surveyed male BSN graduates and found that being mentored by male nurses helped them find the confidence to enter the nursing profession. Kirui and McGee (2021) reviewed four college programs geared towards recruiting and retaining diverse nursing students and found that mentoring, student support, academic support, and financial assistance all have positive impacts on diversifying the nursing workforce.

### ***Evidence to Support the Intervention***

All nine articles concluded that mentoring improves diverse pre-college and first-degree college nursing students' success in entering college nursing programs, graduating from nursing college, and entering the nursing workforce. McCue (2017) illustrated how health disparities are perpetuated by a lack of diversity in the nursing workforce and concluded that interventions should be started before college entry. McCue also strongly advocated, based on the study's findings, for the need to mitigate the growing nursing shortage. The American Nurses Association (ANA) (2017) identified diversifying the nursing workforce as a key strategy for

eliminating health disparities and nursing shortages. Bundy (2020) and Murray et al. (2016) both described two pre-college programs designed to diversify the nursing profession, with interventions that included mentoring. Both programs increased the percent of diverse students entering college nursing programs. In one program, mentoring and other strategies resulted in five of six students being accepted into college nursing programs (Bundy, 2020).

### **Evidence-Based Practice Framework**

Nurse theorist Imogene King's 1992 *Theory of Goal Attainment* was used for the framework of the NLM (King, 1992). In her work, King succinctly defined nurse and patient transaction concepts (see Appendix A). King wrote about technologies being the future of nursing and summarized a framework for obtaining goals in a table titled "Nursing Process: Theory and Method." Although King's work began in the 1960s, McQueen et al. (2017) found it was still a robust framework for mentoring a new generation of nurses. King's process is geared towards the nurse-patient transaction; and was used in the NLM mentorship program framework to guide the student-mentor transaction.

King's "Nursing Process: Theory and Method" framework for goal obtainment begins with "A system of interrelated actions" (p. 5), where the nurse organizes his or her concepts. The next step is to "Assess" (p. 5), where the nurse and the patient's perceptions, communications, and interactions are examined. The third step is to "Plan" (p. 5). Here the nurse and patients make decisions about the goals and how to achieve them. In the next step of the framework, "Implement" (p.5), the nurse and patient make their transaction. The final step is to "Evaluate" (p.5). During this step, the nurse and patient determine if the goal was attained and if not, why.

The NLM mentorship program adopted King's (1992) framework, changing the focus from nurse-patient to mentor-mentee (see Appendix A). The process and methods otherwise

remained the same. The first two steps of the framework were achieved primarily through the literature review. The project team defined the key concepts (nursing workforce, diversity, nursing shortage, mentoring, and high school students) and assessed methods for achieving the project's goals. Based on this foundation, the team planned the intervention. High schools and colleges were recruited to participate in the program, and the East Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the plans. The program was then implemented. Prior to and immediately after implementation, the team conducted surveys of the participants to guide project operations and evaluate the effectiveness of the program (see Appendices D-G).

### **Ethical Consideration & Protection of Human Subjects**

The Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of East Carolina University (ECU) and the project site High School reviewed and approved plans for the *Nurse Like Me* study prior to implementation. Prior to the IRB process, all study personnel completed ethical training through the Collaborative Institute Training Initiative (CITI). Because the study involved minor-aged participants, signed parental permission forms were also obtained.

A number of standard procedures were followed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Information obtained in the pre-program survey about the participants' ethnicity and gender was optional. Any additional demographic information obtained was placed on a secure ECU Drive and held for one year after project completion before being destroyed. No participant names were recorded in the final DNP paper.

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were told they could remove themselves from the study at any time. Mentors and mentees met virtually, rather than in person, so there was no risk of physical harm. Mentors and mentees were also provided training on

appropriate behaviors as well as with contact information for their advisors to report any inappropriate behaviors they experienced. There were minimal risks identified with participation.



### **Section III. Project Design**

#### **Project Site and Population**

The NLM mentorship program targeted NC high school students and college nursing students. The project was facilitated by support from the community, colleges of nursing, and the public schools. Barriers to the project included a more rigorous IRB process due to the involvement of minors and difficulty obtaining cooperation from some community colleges.

#### ***Project Setting***

Mentoring took place virtually between the high school project site mentees and their college nursing mentors, using a virtual platform of their choosing. The recommended platform was Google Meet because the students of the high school project site all have school Google accounts and laptop access. Participants were encouraged to select audio-video platforms rather than audio-only platforms.

The high school project site is in Cabarrus County, NC and serves students of Cabarrus and nearby Rowan Counties. The mentors were from a college nursing program located in Winston-Salem in Forsyth County and is the top historically black college and university (HBCU) in NC (Winston-Salem State University [WSSU], 2021).

Cabarrus County is located in the southern piedmont of NC and had 216,453 residents in 2019, the most recent data available (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). Persons under the age of 18 make up 25.4% of the county's population. Cabarrus County is 72.4% White, 19.6% Black, and 11.1% Latinx. Kannapolis is a younger and more diverse city than Cabarrus County as a whole, with 27.9% of residents under the age of 18 and a population makeup of 66.0% White, 21.8% Black, and 14.2% Latinx. Once the largest producer of towel and linen textiles in the world, Cannon Mills gave the city of Kannapolis its start (Cabarrus County Convention & Visitors

Bureau, 2021). Pillowtext, the company that bought Cannon Mills, closed in 2003. The Pillowtext closure was the largest layoff in NC history; over 4,000 of the 6,450 people who lost their jobs were residents of Kannapolis (Barbaro, 2003). Despite the massive layoff, the city of Kannapolis is currently undergoing revitalization (Cabarrus County Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2021); the population grew by 19.3% between 2010 and 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b).

Forsyth County, home of the college nursing mentors, is located in the northern piedmont of NC. The population of the county was 66.6% White, 27.5% Black, and 13.3% Latinx in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c). The college is a diverse HBCU. In 2020, the undergraduate student population was 75.0% Black, 6.5% White, and 4.2% Latinx (WSSU, 2020). The graduate student population of the college in 2020 was 40.4% black, 30.0% white, and 5% Latinx (WSSU, 2020).

### ***Study Population***

The target population for this project were high school students interested in nursing and college nursing students interested in mentoring. The high school project site population consisted of junior-year students who had expressed an interest in nursing. All the high school students were under the age of 18 at time of participation. All the college nursing students were above the age of 18 at time of participation. The college nursing student population were senior nursing students interested in mentoring. The students from the high school and college both demonstrate excellent demographic diversity. The short-term goals of the project target the local high school and college student populations. By increasing diversity and numbers in nursing in the state of NC, the project's long-term goals target the entire NC population.

## **Project Team**

The project team consisted of the high school project site champion, the high school assistant principal, the college project organizers, and ECU DNP project leader. The high school project site champion was the Career Development Coordinator of the high school. The Career Development Coordinator offered the NLM program to senior students interested in nursing and then coordinated student information with the project leader. Assisting the high school Career Development Coordinator was the assistant principal of the high school who helped the project leader with the IRB process. The college project organizers included the program chair of nursing at the college. The college Program Chair approved the college's participation in the NLM program. The nursing advisor at the college assisted the Program Chair in finding senior nursing student mentors for the NLM program.

The project NLM mentorship program was conducted in 2021 at three NC locations, including Cabarrus, Gaston, and Orange Counties. Each county had a unique project leader. The three student project leaders developed the project, presented it to local public high schools and colleges, completed the IRB process, carried out the project, and then analyzed and disseminated the findings.

## **Project Goals and Outcome Measures**

There were four short-term goals of the NLM mentorship program (see Appendix B):

1. To increase diverse high school students' interest in college nursing programs.
2. To increase awareness of opportunities within the nursing profession among diverse high school students.
3. To raise high school students' awareness of national, state, and private nursing scholarship opportunities.

4. To enhance early nurse leadership qualities among college nursing students.

As an upstream project, the long-term goals of the NLM mentorship project were vast. A few of the project's long-term goals included increasing the diversity of college nursing students, specifically:

1. increasing the number of nursing college students,
2. increasing the diversity of NC's nursing workforce,
3. decreasing NC's nursing shortage, and
4. dismantling structural racism within the NC nursing profession (see Appendix C).

The ultimate long-term goal of the NLM mentorship program was to elevate the health equity of North Carolinians.

### ***Methods and Measurement***

#### **Measurement**

The program's progress and effectiveness were measured via pre- and post-program surveys asking the students to rate their interest in college nursing programs. There were items about their general demographic characteristics, personal interests, and areas of interest in nursing post-graduation in both pre-project questionnaires. The questionnaire for the college students also asked them to rate their mentoring and leadership confidence. The questionnaire for the high school students also asked about their interest in attending a nursing college program after they completed high school.

In the post-project survey, college students were asked to rate their satisfaction with the NLM program and their mentoring and leadership confidence, all via a Likert scale. The high school students were asked to rate their interest in attending college nursing programs via the

Likert scale. The college and high school students were both offered the opportunity to provide any other free text feedback about the program on the post-survey.

The questionnaires, which consist of multiple-choice, Likert-style questions, and free-text responses, are provided in Appendices E, F, G, and H.

### ***Data Collection Process***

The pre-project surveys were administered to the college and high school students at the beginning of the Fall 2021 semester in September, prior to the beginning of the mentoring meetings. The post-project surveys were administered to the college and high school students the week after the final mentoring meeting.

Both surveys were conducted via email. For the high school students, the surveys were administered via a Google Form and delivered via their student Gmail account. For the college students, the surveys were administered via Microsoft Form and delivered via their school Microsoft email account.

### **Implementation Plan**

#### ***Participant recruitment***

To enlist high school students in the study, a recruitment flyer was sent to junior students by the Career Development Coordinator of the high school. Students who were interested in the NLM then communicated their interest to the high school Career Development Coordinator via email. The high school Career Development Coordinator then provided the NLM project leader with the email contact information for students interested in the NLM program. The college students were recruited via email communication with their college nursing advisor. The college nursing advisor then provided the NLM project leader with the email contact information for students interested in mentoring. Both the high school and college students had between

August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, and September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021, to express their interest in the program. Once the college and high school students expressed interest, they had until September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, to complete and submit their consent and pre-program survey to be eligible to participate.

Neither the high school nor college students were offered money to participate. Both the high school and college students were offered a certificate of completion for students that completed all four mentorship meetings, pre-program survey, and post-program survey (see Appendices F & G).

The informed parental consent and student assent were emailed to the high school site champion for review and approval. After approval, the consents were emailed to the high school students. The students and parents completed and emailed the signed to the project leader via email. The same method was used to obtain consent from the college students. The project leader's email and phone number were provided to all students and parents to discuss the program, answer questions, provide clarification, and provide informed consent. All participant questions were received and answered via email.

### ***Matching mentors and mentees***

The pre-program surveys were used to match the college students with a high school student mentee. The project leader reviewed the data and identified suitable pairings based on shared interests and demographics. For example, one pair was made based on their shared interests in team sports, and another pair was made based on their shared interest in the arts, etc.

### ***Mentor education***

To prepare mentors for their participation, the project team, the participating college students were asked to read an informational PowerPoint from the project leader describing the project's goals, required meeting topics, and professional standards. During the program, the

mentors emailed the project leader requesting education on nursing services loans. Follow-up was provided via a PowerPoint presentation with voice-over. Further assistance was offered via email and or phone.

### ***Mentoring sessions***

Once paired, the college and high school student's contact information was emailed to them, and participants scheduled their first meeting for the week of September 20, 2021. Each pair was asked to conduct a total of four sessions, one approximately every other week. Four sessions were conducted every other week. The final meeting was to take place no later than November 5, 2021.

The topics of the four virtual mentorship meetings included:

1. Personal introductions, general questions and answers related to college nursing programs, and identifying commonalities between mentor and mentee.
2. Review of the breadth of the nursing profession.
3. Review of service scholarship opportunities, including but not limited to the North Carolina Forgivable Education Loans for Service and the Health Resources and Services Administration Nursing Corps Scholarship Program.
4. Conclusion with general questions and answers.

### ***Monitoring progress and problem solving***

#### **Timeline**

The NLM project took place over a 16-month period (see Appendix J). Project planning and pre-approval from ECU, the high school, and the college took place between January and May 2021. Additional project planning and the IRB review process occurred between May and July 2021. During August 2021, the college students received education about the program, the

high school students were recruited, and the pre-program surveys were administered. The mentorship meetings began in September 2021 and concluded in November 2021. Post-program surveys were distributed in November 2021. Between November 2021-May 2022, the results of the project were analyzed and disseminated.



## Section IV. Results and Findings

### Data Collection Process

Data were collected from the students at the high school and college via pre- and post-program surveys, which included both quantitative and qualitative questions (see Appendices E-H). The high school students received electronic Google Forms surveys, emailed to their school Gmail account. The college students received electronic Microsoft Office Forms surveys, emailed to their student Microsoft Office email account. The project leader accessed and analyzed all survey data received from the high school and college students.

### Results

#### *High School Students*

**Pre-Program Survey.** The high school students completed pre- and post-program surveys. The pre-program survey collected demographic information. Questions about gender and ethnicity were optional, but in the survey all six participants disclosed their gender and ethnicity.

All six participants ( $n=6$ ) were female high school juniors who were enrolled in either nursing or health sciences courses and were under the age of 18 (see Table 2). Fifty percent of the student participants identified as Latinx, 16.7% as Black, 16.7% as White, and 16.7% as Icelandic (see Table 2). It is unknown if the student who self-identified as Icelandic intended to be identified as foreign born, non-white, or both. Follow up to the specifics of her Icelandic ethnicity was deferred secondary due to her minor age status.

**Table 2**  
*High School Student Mentee Demographics*

Demographic	Number	Percent
White	1	16.7
Black	1	16.7
Latinx	3	50
Icelandic	1	16.7
Female	6	100
Junior	6	100
Under 18 years of age	6	100

*Note.* Percentages are based on the pre-program survey.

High school participants were asked to rate their interest in applying to college nursing programs on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "0, no interest" to "5, very interested." The average rating of the students was 4.5. Students were also asked if they planned to apply for a service scholarship loan for a college nursing program. Fifty percent of the students said yes; the other 50% said they were unaware of service scholarships.

Students were also asked about their level of knowledge regarding the requirements for the college nursing program. Response options ranged along a 4-point scale from "no knowledge" to "very knowledgeable." While 50% of the participants stated they had "some knowledge" of college nursing program requirements, the other 50% said they only had "no knowledge" of college nursing program requirements.

**Post-Program Survey.** In the post-program survey, students were asked how interested they were in applying to a college nursing program. Response options ranged from "no interest" to "very interested." All six students reported they were interested in applying college nursing programs.

Students were also asked in a yes/no question whether they felt their knowledge about their desired college/nursing program increased as a result of the NLM program. All participants answered that their knowledge had increased (see Figure 3).

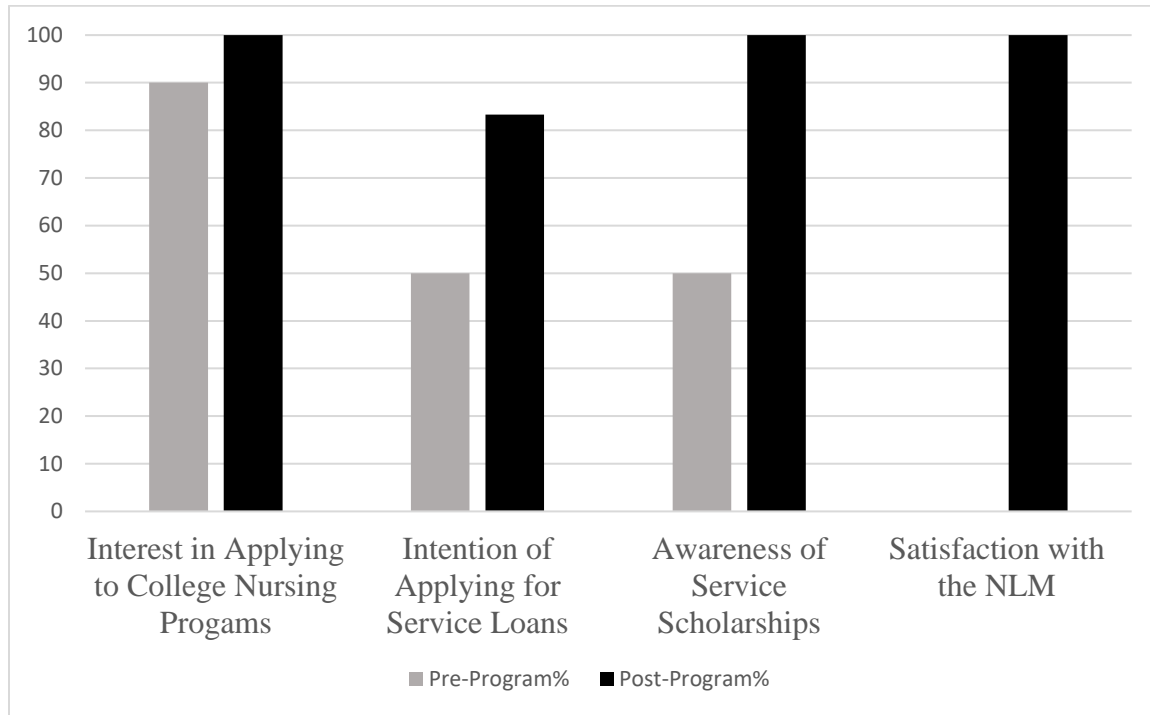
When asked whether they plan to apply for nursing service scholarships, 83.3% of participants responded "yes." No participants reported being unaware of service scholarships, which represents a 50% increase in the participant's awareness of nursing service scholarships compared with the pre-program survey results. Participants were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the Nurse Like Me mentorship program on a 5-point Likert scale from "not satisfied" to "very satisfied." All participants rated their satisfaction as 5, "very satisfied."

The students were also asked for suggestions on what can we do in the future to make the program better, using an open-ended response format. Three of the six participants gave feedback. Their comments were:

- 1) "I feel like if we were to have more meetings together to learn more and have more time together."
- 2) "Bring more amazing women in nursing school like the ones many of us had. She was amazing!"
- 3) "maybe make it longer or make it where we could ask real nurses questions".

**Figure 3**

*High School Student Mentees' Pre- and Post-Program Views on Nursing Programs, Service Scholarships, and NLM*



*Note.* Percentages based on a comparison of the high school student pre- and post-program survey results.

**College Student.**

**Pre-Program Survey.** All college student mentors ( $n=6$ ) were adult Bachelor of Science in Nursing students in their senior year (see Table 3). As with the high school survey, the college survey's questions about participant's gender and ethnicity were optional. One hundred percent of the college participants identified as Black females. The college students were asked to rate their confidence in nurse leadership skills such as mentoring other nursing students. Response options were a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from "0, no confidence" to "5, very confident." The average participant rating was 3.17.

**Table 3**  
*College School Student Mentor Demographics*

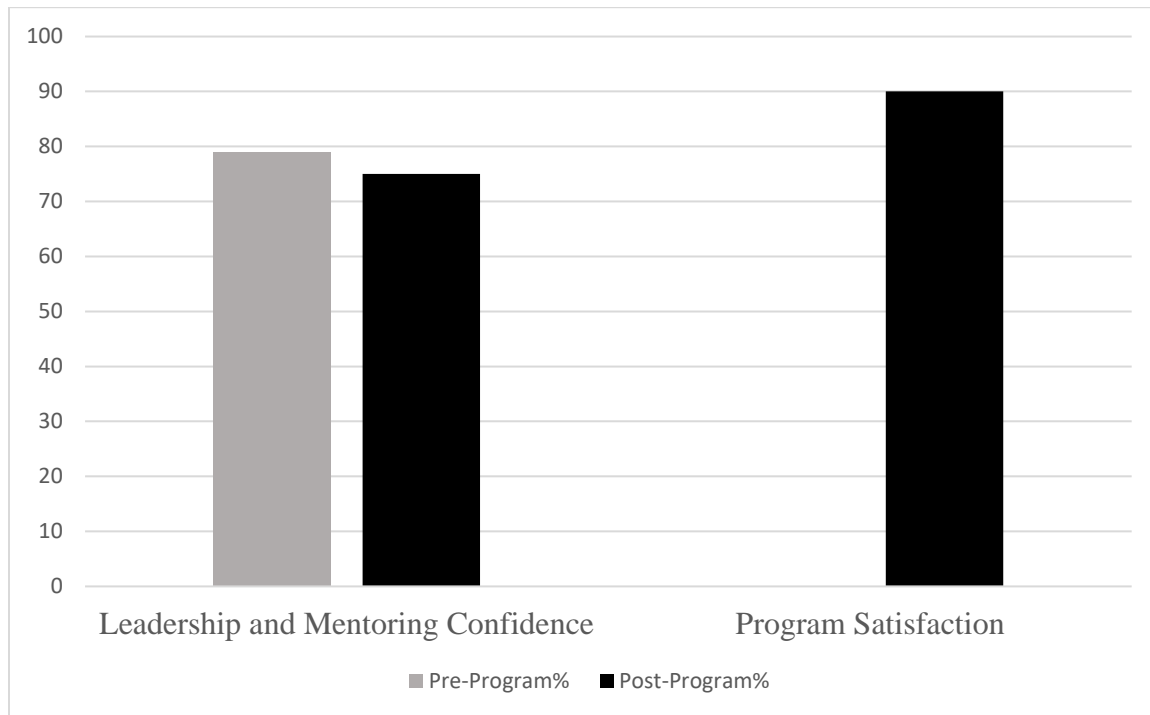
Demographic	Number	Percent
Black	6	100
Female	6	100
Senior	6	100
Over the age of 18	6	100

*Note.* Percentages are based on the pre-program survey.

**Post-Program Survey.** After participating in the NLM as mentors, the college students were asked to rate their satisfaction with the Nurse Like Me mentorship program. Response options ranged from "0, not satisfied" to "5, very satisfied" along a 5-point Likert scale. The average among the six college student mentors was 4.5. Another question asked students to rate their confidence in their nurse leadership skills such as mentoring other nursing students. Response options ranged from "0, no confidence" to "5, very confident" along a 5-point Likert scale. The average post-program response was 3.0 This represents a slight decrease compared with the pre-program responses to this question (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

*College Student Mentors' Leadership/Mentoring Confidence and Program Satisfaction*



*Note.* Percentages calculated based on statistical comparison of the college nursing student participant pre- and post-program survey results.

The post-program survey also asked the student mentors for feedback on the program, asking two open-ended questions: "What can we do in the future to make the program better?" and "Do you have any other suggestions or concerns about the program?" All six participants provided feedback. Their comments were:

1. "I really enjoyed the program. The only suggestion I would make is that it is longer because I feel that it takes some students a while to break their shyness and become comfortable with asking questions."
2. "More prompts to guide meetings."

3. "Possible physical meet ups with the students and longer term mentor ship to build a relationship and bond. Coming together as a group first and establishing what will happen in the mentor ship and then breaking up into single groups."
4. "Everything was fine, I love the PowerPoint that broke down the information about the program and the expectations. I feel that the program was the best it could be given that we are in the middle of a pandemic."
5. "I don't think there is much that can be done because of COVID. By it was online maybe have some icebreakers for students and their mentors so it won't be awkward and to make the students more comfortable to ask questions and the mentors more comfortable to answer them. I think that this is a great program to get out awareness about scholarships that students can apply for as well as getting them in contact with someone who is already going through the process who is able to share their experiences, do's/dont's with the students so good job!!"
6. "I liked the format of the program especially because of flexibility. I felt that the program was great for the mentor. I felt that the program was great overall. I have enjoyed this experience. Thank you for this opportunity!".

### **Discussion of Major Findings**

The findings of the Nurse Like Me Mentorship Program are consistent with the findings of the prior research reviewed for this study and they further support the value of guiding high school students towards college nursing programs via mentoring. The NLM's short-term goals were to increase the interest of high school students in college nursing programs, increase their awareness of nursing service scholarships, and increase college students' leadership and mentoring confidence. The survey results demonstrate that high school students' interest in

applying to college nursing programs significantly increased as a result of the program. Additionally, the high school students' awareness of nursing service scholarships improved to 100%; 83.3% of them also said they intended to apply for nursing service scholarships. While the survey results did not show significant change in the college nursing students' confidence in their leadership and mentoring abilities, they reported being satisfied with the program and gratified by the mentoring experience.



## **Section V. Interpretation and Implications**

### **Costs and Resource Management**

Because the DNP student, site champions, and all the program participants had volunteered their time, the program did not entail financial costs for personnel. Furthermore, there were no costs for supplies because deliverables were all provided electronically, and the project was conducted on virtual platforms rather than in person. Ideally, the program would have provided a small compensation for the project participants and site champions (such as \$5 gift cards), but this was not possible due to a lack of financial support.

The DNP student spent an estimated 150 hours on project planning and 200 hours of DNP course work. In addition, roughly 20 hours were spent communicating with the high school and college site champions via email and virtual meetings. Around 25 hours were spent on the IRB process, and approximately 15 hours were used to create electronic deliverables for the mentors and mentees. Once the project began, around 30 hours were spent communicating via email with the mentors and mentees, preparing them for the project, delivering education and consent forms, ensuring the consent forms were signed, and following up periodically during the project. Once the project concluded, an additional 25 hours were spent conducting the post-project surveys, delivering participation certificates to participants, and meeting with the high school and college site champions to disseminate project information. Finally, 35 hours were spent organizing, analyzing, and disseminating project findings. In total, therefore, the DNP student spent about 500 hours on this project.

Had the project obtained funding and been able to pay the DNP student \$15.50/hr. (twice the current NC minimum wage) and provided \$5 gift cards to participants and site champions, the project budget would have been \$2,395. This amount would have been used to compensate

the organization and implement the project (see Appendix K). Seventy dollars of the total would have been allocated towards small gifts to participants and site champions.

## **Implications of the Findings**

### ***Implications for High School Students***

High school nursing career tracks are competitive, and seats are limited. The high school project site allows five students per year into their nursing career track. Per the high school project site champion, the NLM mentorship program was offered to all students interested in nursing, but especially to the students who applied to the nursing career track but did not make the cut (which was limited to the top five applicants.) One of the reasons the high school staff were interested in the NLM program was to provide opportunities for students that may otherwise not have been exposed to nursing courses and mentorship.

According to the feedback from the college nursing students, the high school students who participated had meaningful questions about entrance requirements to college nursing programs and the application process, as well as general questions about the nursing profession. Because these students may not have been accepted into the nursing career track at the high school project site, the NLM program provided a method to introduce them to nursing, give them confidence to apply to college nursing programs, and offer general peer support.

### ***Implications for College Nursing Students***

Although the college nursing students who participated as mentors exhibited leadership qualities beyond the expectations of a college student, they reported no increased ratings of their own leadership confidence. Furthermore, considering findings of nurse incivility, it is hoped that NLM mentorship participation will foster healthy nurse relationships early in their careers.

***Implications for Patients***

The NLM mentorship program is an upstream effort to improve health equity of North Carolinians. Considering that high school participation was majority-minority and focused on students who may otherwise not have been exposed to nursing, the long-term impacts to North Carolina have the potential to be substantially positive. Although we cannot measure the long-term goals at this time, based on current literature, it is inferred that increasing the diversity and numbers of the nursing workforce will lead to the closure of gaps in the health of North Carolinians.

***Implications for nursing practice.***

Although high school student participation was low ( $n = 6$ ), participant diversity was high with 66.66% of participants identifying as non-white; another was foreign-born (Icelandic). Furthermore, the program allowed students who may not have been accepted into their high school nursing career track the opportunity to be exposed to early nursing preparation. Considering that the high school project site only allows five students into their nursing track, the addition of the NLM more than doubled the early nursing exposure of the high school project site's students. The NLM staff are hopeful that continuation of similar programs will increase exposure to early nursing guidance for high school students and lead to increased nursing college enrollment and diverse nursing professionals.

***Impact for Healthcare System(s)***

The need to mitigate the nursing shortage and to diversify the nursing profession to improve health equity is well known. While healthcare systems are making efforts such as tuition reimbursement to improve the situation, the NLM team finds that further efforts are needed, and in a more upstream fashion. Community based efforts led by graduate nursing students and

supported by collaborations between local colleges and high schools can meaningfully contribute to improving the nursing workforce.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability of the NLM project will be challenging considering it is highly based on the volunteer efforts of graduate and undergraduate students. However, there are a few features that make sustainability promising. First, this project was conducted by three different DNP students and in three separate areas of NC, thus increasing the awareness of the project by stakeholders. Secondly, the project meets healthcare and public school needs, giving an opportunity for graduate nursing students to support community goals while completing their scholarly work. Lastly, although the project is based on volunteer work, it is fulfilling work for new nurses that will likely be working within their own community in an upstream approach. Furthermore, while nurses are increasingly aware of nursing shortages, racial disparities within the nursing profession, and health disparities within our communities, nurses are rarely presented with opportunities to help resolve these unacceptable healthcare problems. Therefore, the NLM project can achieve sustainability by providing nurses who long to combat some of healthcare's most pressing and challenging issues an outlet to do so.

At the time of this writing, the author is working towards project sustainability through a continued relationship with the high school and college project sites as well as ECU by mentoring and assisting other DNP students who are interested in maintaining the program at the current project sites as well as others.

### **Dissemination Plan**

The NLM project was disseminated to ECU, the high school and college project sites, and *The ScholarShip*. Poster presentation of the project occurred to ECU via live presentation

with attendance of DNP peers and DNP program professors on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The project was presented to the high school project site champion on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, via asynchronous PowerPoint presentation. The project was presented to the college project site champion on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022, via an asynchronous PowerPoint presentation. The high school and college project sites were also provided a link to the live ECU project presentation. The scholarly paper was uploaded to ECU's *The ScholarShip*, a repository for scholarly work of ECU graduates on April 21, 2022. A goal of this dissemination was continued collaboration with the high school and college project sites, as well as to attract future DNP students to complete similar projects that focus on the recruitment of high school students into college nursing programs.

## **Section VI. Conclusion**

### **Limitations and Facilitators**

The project was not limited by focusing on minors, although the IRB process was longer and more challenging due to the age of the target population. There were also timeline limitations given that the project required the cooperation of three different schools (ECU, the high school project site, and the college project site). Fortunately, the schedules of all three schools aligned well enough to allow the project to take place. The busy schedules of the three schools were difficult to navigate, particularly within the challenges and constraints created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was difficulty in finding college nursing programs willing to participate. However, the college project site went above and beyond to facilitate the project. The project was also facilitated by the eagerness of the college and high school student participants. All college and high school students met the project with enthusiasm, meaningful curiosity, and a professionalism beyond their academic years. The program also received considerable support from the ECU College of Nursing, particularly the project faculty.

While the participation of the college (an HBCU) was profoundly valuable for its representation of nurses of color, it was concerning that at a time when issues of health disparities are coming to the forefront, no majority white college nursing program that was invited to participate in the NLM agreed to do so. For the purposes of representation within the mentor – mentee relationship, the project would have benefited from the addition of other ethnicities, especially Latinx mentors.

**Recommendations for Others**

A great deal of volunteer hours go into a mentoring-type project. However, this work needs to be done and done well. The state of nursing, healthcare, and community health depends on upstream efforts. Recommendations for future students who want to continue the work of the NLM project include considering group mentoring as a method to reach more high school students.

Considering the possible concerns for bias and systemic racism among NC college nursing programs, college leaders and scholars should explore participating in projects such as the NLM that seek to represent nursing professionals beyond its current white majority. Given that the nursing shortage is projected to continue and that nursing diversity has been found to reduce health disparities, more efforts are needed to broaden the cultural diversity of the nursing profession.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

While the short-term goals of the NLM project were met, the work of organizing and facilitating the project were substantial and the number of participant enrollment was modest. Recommendations to decrease the workload on the project leader and attract more participants include group-style mentoring, possibly through high school college nursing fairs where a higher volume of high school students can be targeted. Inviting groups of college nursing students to speak with high school students interested in nursing during school hour luncheons could also be considered. These luncheons would reach more high school students but would also require a budget to cover luncheon expenses and would require the college nursing students' time and travel; volunteer hours could potentially offset this burden. The author strongly recommends the implementation of nursing mentorship programs in all NC high schools.

**Final Thoughts**

The Nurse Like Me Mentorship Program set out with the short-term goal of increasing interest in college nursing programs among diverse NC high school students and the long-term goals of increasing the number of NC nursing professionals and their diversity within the field of nursing. The method was mentoring high school students who had an interest in nursing by a college nursing student of similar interests and demographics. The project is needed as NC faces growing nursing shortages and disparities in the diversity of the NC nurse workforce.

Although the long-term goals of the project cannot be readily measured, the information gained from the pre- and post-program surveys show promise that nursing forward mentoring at the high school level may lead more young and diverse people to careers in nursing. Furthermore, this community-based project elicits early ownership and leadership of the nursing profession by new nurses.



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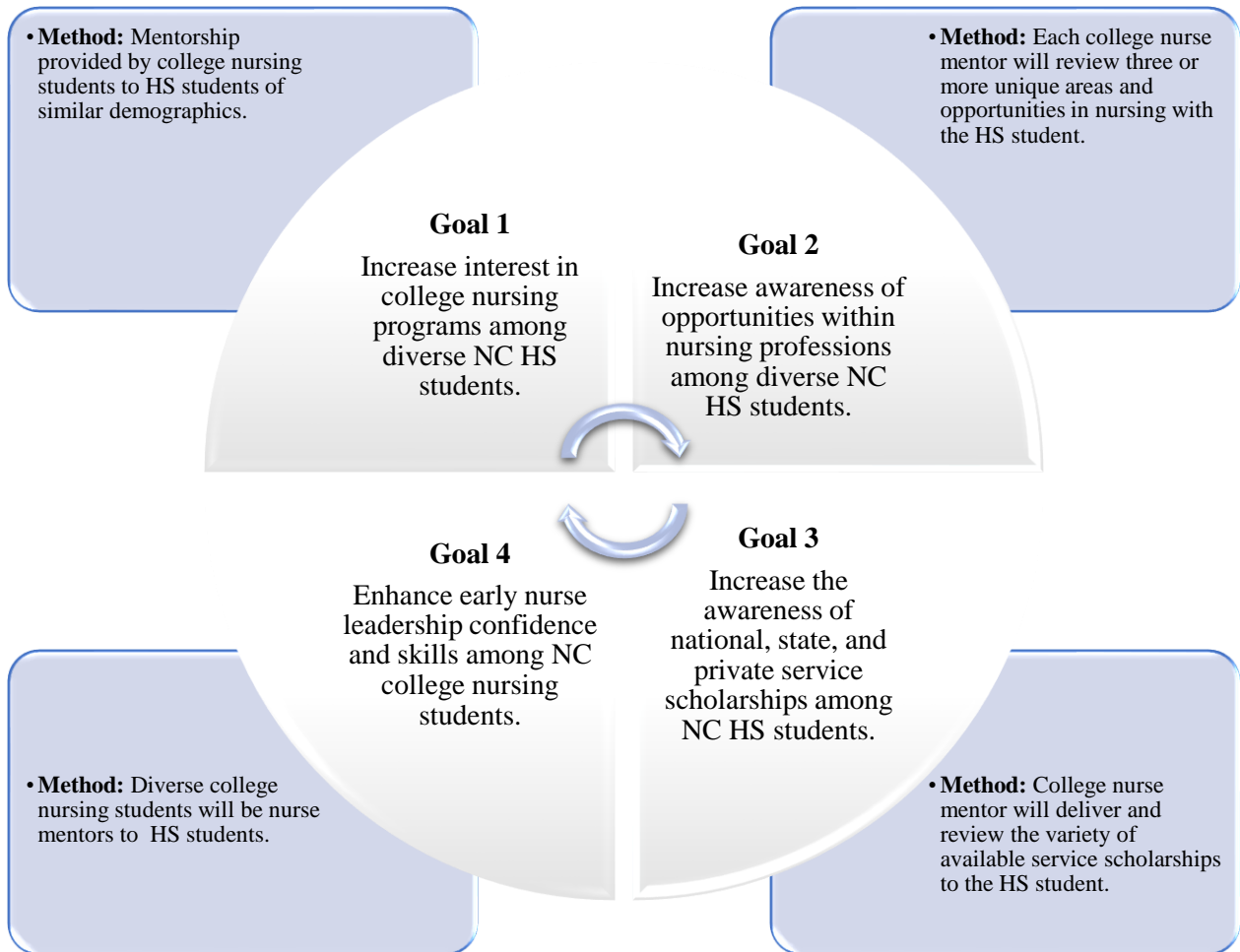
### Appendix A

#### King's Theory for Nursing vs NLM Framework

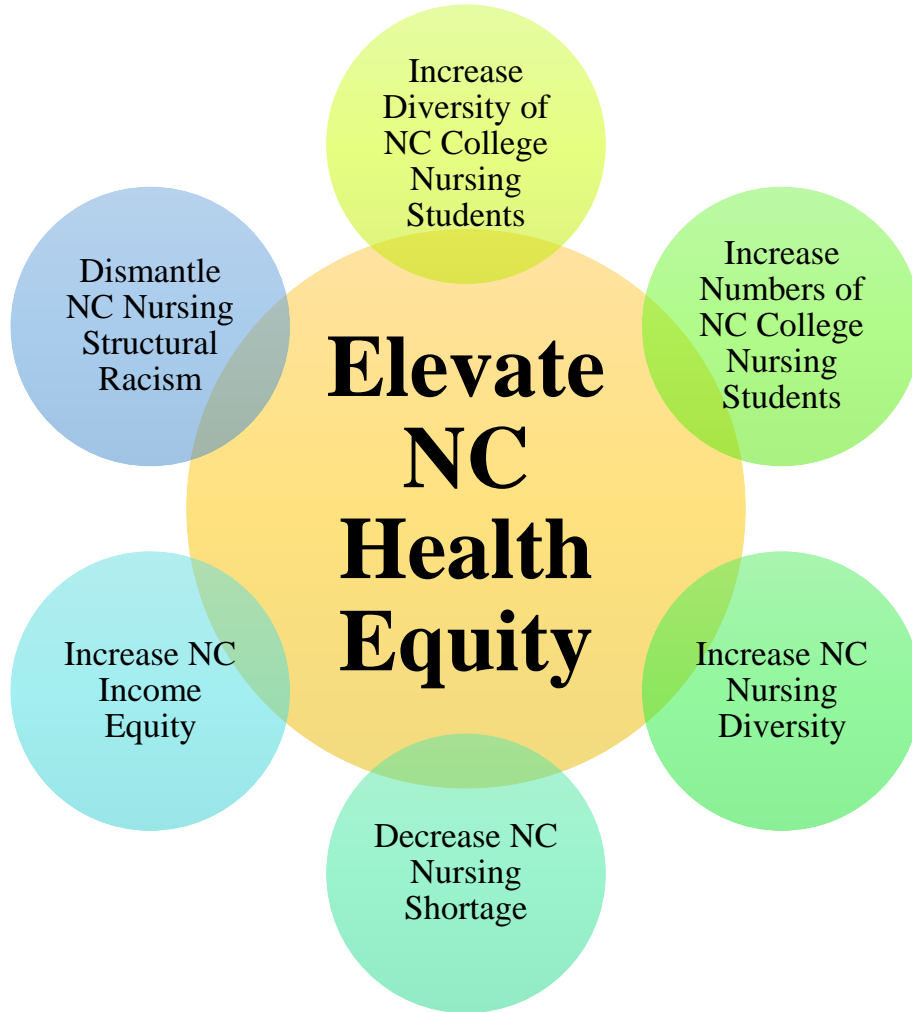
<b>Nursing Process: Theory and Method</b> (King, 1992)		<b>NLM Framework</b>	
A system of interrelated actions	A system of interrelated concepts	A system of interrelated actions	A system of interrelated concepts
Assess	Perception of nurse and client Communication of nurse and client Interaction of nurse and client	Assess	Perception of mentor and mentee Communication of mentor and mentee Interaction of mentor and mentee
Plan	Decision making about goals	Plan	Decision making about goals
Implement	Transactions made	Implement	Transactions made
Evaluate	Goal Attained (if not, why not)	Evaluate	Goal Attained (if not, why not)

## Appendix B

### NLM Short-Term Goals



**Appendix C**  
**NLM Long-Term Goals**



**Appendix D**

**High School Pre-Project Survey**

**Nurse Like Me Mentorship Program Pre-Survey**

Please provide contact information for communication with mentor:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Are you currently enrolled in nursing or health sciences courses? (Circle One)

Yes

No

2. How interested are you in applying to a college nursing program? (Circle one)

0

1

2

3

4

5

No interest

Very interested

3. What area of nursing is most interesting to you? (Circle One)

Medical-surgical/hospital

Mother-baby

Critical Care

Primary  
care/Doctor's  
office

Education

Skilled  
Nursing  
Facility

Home  
Care

4. Do you plan on applying for service scholarships for a college nursing program? (Circle one)

Yes

No

Not sure what that is.

5. How knowledgeable are you regarding requirements for your desired college/nursing program? (Circle one)

No knowledge

Little knowledge

Some knowledge

Very knowledgeable

The following questions are not required and can be left blank. However, answering them will assist us in pairing you with a nurse mentor similar to yourself. The Nurse Like Me mentorship program will record participants' answers, excluding your name.

1. Gender

Male

Female

Trans male

Trans female

Non-binary

Other:

2. Ethnicity

Latinx

Black

White

Asian

American Indian

Other:

3. What kind of music do you like?

4. What types of sports or hobbies do you like?

5. What specific topics would you like your mentor to address regarding nursing/college programs or careers?





**Appendix F**

**College Student Nurse Like Me Mentorship Program Pre-Survey**

Please provide contact information for communication with mentee:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

6. What area of nursing is most interesting to you? (Circle One)

- |                           |             |                  |                                    |           |                                |              |
|---------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Medical-surgical/hospital | Mother-baby | Critical<br>Care | Primary<br>care/Doctor's<br>office | Education | Skilled<br>Nursing<br>Facility | Home<br>Care |
|---------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------|

7. Rate your confidence in nurse leadership skills such as mentoring other nursing students. (Circle One)

- |               |   |   |   |   |                |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| 0             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5              |
| No confidence |   |   |   |   | Very confident |

The following questions are not required and can be left blank. However, answering them will assist us in pairing you with a high school mentee similar to yourself. The Nurse Like Me mentorship program will record participants' answers, excluding your name.

6. Gender

- |      |        |            |              |            |        |
|------|--------|------------|--------------|------------|--------|
| Male | Female | Trans male | Trans female | Non-binary | Other: |
|------|--------|------------|--------------|------------|--------|

7. Ethnicity

- |        |       |       |       |                 |        |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-----------------|--------|
| Latinx | Black | White | Asian | American Indian | Other: |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-----------------|--------|

8. What kind of music do you like?

9. What types of sports or hobbies do you like?

**Appendix G**

**College Student Nurse Like Me Mentorship Program Post-Survey**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please rate your satisfaction with the Nurse Like Me mentorship program.

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not satisfied					Very satisfied

7. Rate your confidence in nurse leadership skills such as mentoring other nursing students.  
(Circle One)

0	1	2	3	4	5
No confidence					Very confident

8. What can we do in the future to make the program better?

Do you have any other suggestions or concerns about the program?

Appendix H

NLM Mentee Certificate of Completion



Appendix I

NLM Mentor Certificate of Completion



Nurse Like Me Mentorship Program

Certificate of Completion

*This Certificate is Proudly Awarded to*

Student Name Here

*for being a Nurse Mentor during the Fall 2021 semester*

*On behalf of the ECU College of Nursing, Thank You for your service*

*Metta Burris*

Metta Burris, RN, BSN, CDP, CHPN  
Doctor of Nursing Practice Student  
East Carolina University



**Appendix J**  
**Project Timeline**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Task</u>
January 2021 – May 2021	Project planning and pre-approval
May 2021- July 2021	Project planning and IRB
August 2021	Education of college mentors, program offered to high school students, pre-program survey administration
September 2021- November 2021	Mentorship meetings and post-program surveys
November 2021-May 2022	Analyzing and dissemination of project results

**Appendix K**  
**NLM Projected Budget**

Expense Items	Quantity	Unit Cost	Total Cost
DNP Student/Project Leader Pay	150 hours	\$15.50/hour	\$2,325.00
College Mentor Gift Cards	6	\$5.00	\$30.00
High School Mentee Gift Cards	6	\$5.00	\$30.00
Project Site Champion Gift Cards	2	\$5.00	\$10.00
			\$2,395.00