

Abstract

Title of the Project: Caring for Our Own: A Reservation/University Partnership

Grantee Institution: Montana State University–Bozeman

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Project Period: July 1, 1999–June 30, 2002 FAX: (406) 994-6020

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Educational Level of Students Served: Baccalaureate Nursing Students

Diversity of Students Served: American Indian

Need: American Indian nurses are seriously under-represented in the professional nursing workforce and only 21% of Native graduates held BSN degrees in 1996. In Montana, the number of American Indian students enrolled in baccalaureate education in Montana has dropped sharply over the last 10 years, and this summer we will award the first master's degree to an American Indian nurse since 1993. At the same time, the population of American Indian people is increasing nationwide, a population that faces serious and persistent chronic health problems as well as problems related to chronic poverty. The most prevalent health problems are complex and in some cases significantly greater than rates for the United States as a whole as are unemployment and homelessness. There is a critical need for more Native graduates of baccalaureate and graduate programs who will provide stable leadership in the delivery of professional and culturally sensitive care, particularly on isolated Reservations in the rural West.

Description of the Project: The College of Nursing received a “Nursing Workforce Diversity Program” to increase nursing education opportunities for American Indian students. The grant provides support to recruit, retain and graduate increased numbers of enrolled tribal members. To this end the College has formed partnerships with three Montana Indian tribes and enlisted the help of groups of Native nurses, public school and tribal college leaders, Indian Health Service personnel and other community stakeholders. The partnerships are helping support a network for Native students pursuing professional nursing education and practice, or considering nursing as a career. Students who enter the BSN program become members of a “learning community” and actively participate in academic enrichment activities, financial aid and personal counseling as needed. Faculty involvement with the program is fostered through increased student contact, supportive academic policies, culturally sensitive teaching methods and effective advising.

Results: At this time there is evidence of increased success in 1) promoting interest in nursing careers among Native students; 2) facilitating transition into the BSN program 3) providing services that enable students to complete their nursing education and 4) developing a pool of prospective American Indian middle and high school students on or near Reservations, thus

enhancing recruitment possibilities into the future. Continued success will result in a substantial increase in the shrinking pool of Native nurses prepared through their education for practice in community based care settings; for more effective and independent management of the care of patients in hospitals; for leadership positions in a changing system of health care; and for entry into graduate programs for advanced practice nursing, research, teaching and administration.