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Carolyn B. Yucha

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, carolyn.yucha@unlv.edu

Rosemary Witt

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Leveraging Higher Salaries for Nursing Faculty

Carolyn B. Yucha, RN, PhD, FAAN
Professor and Dean, School of Nursing
Interim Dean, School of Allied Health Sciences
Editor, Biological Research for Nursing
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89154-3018
Phone 702 895-5307
Fax 702 895-5050
carolyn.yucha@unlv.edu

and

Rosemary Witt, RN, PhD
Associate Professor, School of Nursing
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89154-3018
Phone 702 895-53414
Fax 702 895-5050
rosemary.witt@unlv.edu

Abstract

The nursing faculty pay scale at the University of Nevada Las Vegas has increased significantly over the past 5 years. This increase was driven by a number of factors: (1) The nursing shortage and the Nevada legislative mandate to double nursing enrollment in state schools; (2) The national nursing faculty shortage; and (3) The opening of three private nursing schools in Nevada. This article describes how, given these factors, the faculty were able to leverage a pay scale that is competitive with clinical appointments.

Keywords: Nursing, Faculty, Salaries, Shortage

A major issue facing nursing education is the severe shortage of qualified faculty. Over the last 15-20 years, schools of nursing had generally stopped preparing nurse educators because of greater student interest in nurse practitioner (NP) programs. This program change could have occurred for two reasons; either nurses preferred NP roles or nurses knew that the pay in NP roles was substantially higher than that in educator roles. In either case, the outcome is that today there are fewer nurses with graduate nursing education who are prepared for the teaching role.

A major reason given by practicing nurses for not considering academic positions is the wide discrepancy in pay. In Las Vegas, a nurse practitioner (MS-prepared) earns \$100,000-\$120,000 for 40 hours per week. In contrast, according to AACN's faculty salary survey, an NP faculty member at the instructor level (typically MS-prepared) on a 12-month appointment earns \$70,055 ± \$11,790 (2006-07, Table 93). It, therefore, becomes very difficult to convince someone to give up 40% of their salary to assume a faculty role.

UNLV has one of the highest pay scales for its nursing faculty in the country. Many find this surprising and have asked us how we managed to negotiate these salaries. The purpose of this paper is to describe the factors involved in leveraging higher nursing faculty salaries in southern Nevada.

Currently UNLV nursing faculty are hired on 12-month appointments and are expected to teach 3 full semesters each year. The starting salary for each rank is shown in Table 1. The pay scale for Faculty-in-Residence is identical. A comparison of UNLV salaries to those reported in Table 7 (12-Month Appointments in Schools with Doctoral Programs) of the 2006-2007 AACN faculty salary report reveals that UNLV nursing faculty salaries are well above the 75th percentile nationwide. Only Assistant Professors and above are eligible for the tenure track. UNLV also has a Faculty-in-Residence track for those with doctoral degrees whose focus is primarily teaching, rather than teaching and research.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Background

The rapid increase in Nevada's population, as measured by housing units, has been well documented by the U.S. Census Bureau. Nevada has been the fastest growing state from 2000-06 (U.S. Census, Table 2); Clark County (the county in which Las Vegas resides) has had the largest increase in the number of housing units for 2000-06 (U.S. Census, Table 5) and for 7/1/05-7/1/06 (U.S. Census, Table 6). Coupled with this rapid population growth is a shortage of nurses. For the past five years, Nevada has ranked 49th or 50th in its number of nurses per 100,000 persons. In 2004 there were about 825 nurses per 100,000 persons nationwide; in Nevada, it was 604 per 100,000 persons (Registered Nurse Population: Findings from the 2004 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses, HRSA website). Together, the increasing population and low nurse: population ratio predict a crisis in nursing and subsequent crisis in health care in Nevada if we don't intervene quickly.

In response to this severe nursing shortage, in the early 2000s the Nevada legislature mandated that the public nursing schools in Nevada double their nursing enrollments and suggested that future funding might be affected for those public institutions that were unable to do so. This mandate was seen as both a challenge and an opportunity by our nursing faculty.

Doubling the nursing enrollment at UNLV was not a simple process for a number of reasons. First, classroom space and skills laboratory space were limited. Typical classrooms at UNLV have a capacity of 60 students and the skills lab was able to accommodate only 16 students at a time. Therefore, additional space would be required to expand nursing enrollment. Second, the Nevada State Board of Nursing requires one faculty member for eight students in the clinical setting. Therefore, expansion of the nursing program required either additional faculty or asking current faculty to do more. At the same time, we had a number of faculty openings. In

fact, nursing had not had all faculty slots filled for the past 10 years. This made it unlikely that UNLV would be able to hire sufficient new faculty to double enrollment.

Summer Nursing Courses

In 2003, nursing faculty were appointed for 9-months and UNLV School of Nursing was admitting 40 students in the fall and 40 students in the spring, for a total of 80 students a year. The program was five semesters long and did not include summers. In response to the dire need to produce nurses more rapidly, the curriculum was reduced to a four-semester year-round program. In this model, 48 students were admitted three times a year, for a total of 144 undergraduate students per year. (We also increased graduate enrollment to accommodate the doubling mandate). Fall and Spring semesters were 16 weeks each and the summer was 12 weeks. This plan did not require additional space and decreased the need for new faculty if the current faculty would agree to teach during the summer for extra pay.

Summer Faculty Pay

At UNLV summer pay is typically \$2,000-2,500 per credit. Nursing faculty realized that they would be expected to teach 12 credits (with approximately 36 hours contact hours each week to accommodate the shortened 12-week semester) and receive only \$24,000 - \$30,000 for this commitment. Although the work requirements would be the same during the shortened summer semester, as in fall and spring semesters, the pay would be less. In response, the faculty proposed that they be paid the equivalent of one semester's pay for teaching full time in the summer. In other words, if they were paid \$72,000 on a 9-month appointment, the expectation was that they be paid \$36,000 more to teach the same amount during the summer. Unlike other departments and schools at UNLV where only teaching occurred during the summer, other non-teaching activities continued in the School of Nursing all summer. For the year round commitment to work, students had to be admitted and advised, and faculty meetings and

committees/councils needed to continue. While hesitant, due to cost, the administration agreed to try this payment system for two years.

Opening of Private Nursing Programs

Prior to 2005, the only nursing programs in Nevada were seven publicly-funded programs, housed at two universities, one state college and four community colleges. The nursing shortage led to the development of privately-funded schools in Nevada. This worsened the faculty shortage to some extent as these new nursing programs began to recruit their faculty from the state schools.

Change in Calendar

Summer 2005 was the first summer that the faculty attempted to offer the 16-week curriculum in the 12-week compacted format. Compressing 16 weeks of didactic and clinical experiences into 12 weeks created enormous stress for the faculty and students. Faculty were exhausted and more students failed courses or dropped out of the program. The compacted semester led to student complaints and concerns by the surrounding community. The fall was then spent working with student affairs, the registrar, financial aid, and numerous other university departments to evaluate the feasibility of the School of Nursing using a different calendar. The eventual outcome was three, 15-week semesters, with one vacation week and one planning week between semesters. Coupled with 1 week for spring break, this comes to 52 weeks and provided the students with 2 weeks off between semesters.

Change in Faculty Contracts

With the above changes in process, we realized that multiple versions of faculty contracts were required. Faculty who were employed on a typical 9-month contract, but agreed to work over the summer semester, were required to sign two more contracts. One contract was required for the first half of the summer – covering the period between the end of Spring semester and

June 30th (the end of the fiscal year) and one contract for the second half of the summer from July 1st (the beginning of the next fiscal year) until the beginning of the regular 9-month contract. Because the summer salary was identified as “additional” money and the state system does not pay retirement benefits on “additional” work, money earned during the summer contracts was not calculated into retirement benefits. In addition, participation in the year round semester system was voluntary, making it difficult to plan for summer staffing. It was also difficult to entice some faculty, who were used to the 9-month appointments, to give up research time and relaxation time. Yet, the School was committed to offering our undergraduate and doctoral programs full time each summer.

To address these issues, faculty were individually asked to make a choice between remaining on their 9-month contract and changing to a 12-month contract. It was understood that faculty could not move back and forth between these contracts based on personal preference at any given time. There had been changes in the administration of the University at the time, and there was some attempt to renegotiate the formula related to converting 9-month salaries to 12-month salaries, but eventually the university agreed to continue the 50% additional funding for summer work.

We seriously doubt that salaries could have been raised to the level they were without a progression of changes. These are summarized in Table 2. We believe that these factors together created the “perfect storm” in southern Nevada for leveraging higher salaries.

[Insert table 2 about here]

While these salaries are very good and have allowed us to attract and retain some very good faculty members, there are also some disadvantages to our model of faculty employment. Specific areas that faculty express dissatisfaction with are our faculty leave policy and workload policy.

Although faculty receive 24 days annual leave per year, 20 of these days are mandated leave. This means that faculty MUST use annual leave during spring break and during the first week of the 2-week break between semesters. The remaining days are floating days that can be taken at any time as long as arrangements have been made to cover work assignments. This arrangement interferes with break times with local school systems and can cause conflicts for parents with school-aged children.

The timing of the 15-week semesters in relation to the university calendar is constantly changing. Therefore vacation times do not meet the typical schedules associated with universities. Nursing faculty start and stop teaching at times different from the rest of the university. For example, in 2008 faculty returned for planning week on January 2. Students complete their spring coursework two weeks before university commencement. Despite these challenges, our faculty structure has enabled us to fill all of our positions, which is critical to educating future nurses.

One other issue that should be mentioned related to faculty appointments at UNLV is the heavy workload policy. Each semester, faculty are expected to teach 12 credits. There are numerous opportunities for reassignment for faculty within the tenure track (typically 3 credits per semester) or for such activities as writing grants/manuscripts, for developing new courses, and for faculty governance. Each clinical credit (3 hours of clinical time) is valued at 1 credit. In actuality none of our faculty teach 12 clinical credits. The contributions of coordinating clinical courses, developing new courses, mentoring or supervising new clinical faculty are recognized with the assignment of reassigned time.

In summary, we believe that a variety of factors came together in southern Nevada that provided the leverage to obtain higher salaries for nursing faculty. Our appointment and salary model have allowed us to double our enrollment without doubling our faculty. We can enroll and

graduate students three times a year without substantially increasing class size and exceeding our space resources. And, we are now able to fill our positions and retain those faculty who would otherwise be enticed to leave academia by higher clinical salaries.

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Table 1. Starting Salaries for UNLV Nursing Faculty (12-month appointment)

Rank	Minimal Education	Salary Range
Lecturer	MS in Nursing or Related Field	\$ 90,000 - \$100,000
Assistant Professor	PhD, EdD, DNP, DrPH	\$102,000 - \$110,000
Associate Professor	PhD, EdD, DNP, DrPH	\$112,000 - \$124,000
Professor	PhD, EdD, DNP, DrPH	\$120,000+

Table 2. Highlights of the Progression to Higher Salaries

Date	Status	Faculty Appointments
Before 2003	Curriculum Fall & Spring	9 month
Summer 2004	Added 12-week summer semester	9 month + summer (50% more salary)
Summer 2005	Calendar changed to three 15-week semesters Private schools open in Nevada	9 month + summer (50% more salary)
Summer 2006	Faculty given the option to change to 12-month appointments. New faculty hired only on 12-month appointments	12 month (1.5 x 9 month salary)