CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
President's Leadership Development Program

Evaluating the Impact of the Discovering Wellness Course on Nursing Student Stress and Coping

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Leadership Action Project Executive Summary

Submitted to the President's Leadership Development Program
at Case Western Reserve University

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Project Overview and The Social Issue

Nursing school can be stressful and demanding, particularly at a high-level institution like Case Western Reserve University. Nursing students often set high expectations for themselves and struggle accepting academic setbacks leading to increased levels of stress. Stress is often worsened by comparison of academic performance amongst peers. Intense clinical hour requirements, heavy workloads, and challenging course content contribute to the high levels of stress experienced in nursing school. Students experiencing high levels of stress and burnout are at increased risk for mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression, which can negatively impact the well-being of future healthcare workers.

Project Type and Approach

My Leadership Action Project is a research-based project designed to evaluate how the implementation of the *Discovering Wellness* class in the BSN curriculum impacted the stress, coping, and overall well-being of nursing students. I began my project by conducting a literature review to make myself aware of the data already out there and develop an informed plan to execute the project. Then, I drafted my interview guide using content from the course syllabus and scholarly articles. I completed my project by conducting 12 one-on-one interviews with nursing students from all years of the nursing program. After the interviews, I utilized NotebookLM, a CWRU approved AI program, to help me effectively analyze the themes and patterns across interviews. The student interviews revealed patterns of high stress throughout the program, specifically sophomore year due to challenging coursework and clustered exams. Across all years, students report difficulty balancing clinical hours and academic demands, often relying on personal coping strategies rather than utilizing university resources.

Deliverables and Impact

By completing this project, I was able to develop a comprehensive report to share with BSN administration and faculty about students experiences with stress and wellness. In this report, I included evidence-based recommendations for the BSN administration moving forward. One recommendation includes implementing an exam calendar to reduce exam clustering and improve student workload. Another recommendation is to dedicate time familiarizing students with the digital platforms used throughout the program (Pearson, Evolve, Canvas, McGraw Hill, etc.) This project was also a measurement of the impact that the *Discovering Wellness* course has had on the students.

Leadership Reflection

The four leadership assumptions strongly influenced my approach to this project. I began my project by reviewing relevant literature and meeting with a nurse scientist for advice that helped me demonstrate credibility. By completing one-on-one interviews and prompting the interviewees with a welcoming message, I hoped to develop a trusting relationship with the interviewees so they felt comfortable sharing their honest experiences. Through these interviews, I demonstrated non-positional leadership as I am an undergraduate student aiming to create change and make a meaningful impact to the BSN curriculum. For me, this project was highly value-driven as I prioritize mental health and emphasize the importance of developing a healthy work-life balance. These are important habits to develop at the beginning of a nursing education to ensure nurses are caring for themselves, so they can provide high quality patient care.