

# PATH to PCNP: Supporting Students' Sense of Belonging and Nursing Identity

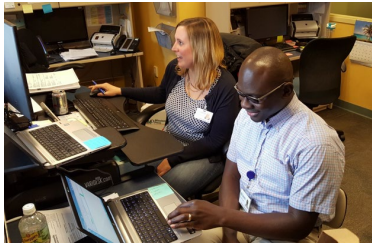
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## Introduction

An innovative clinical-academic partnership between the UConn School of Nursing (SON) and Community Health Center, Inc. was designed to increase the academic sense of belonging for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (SDBs).

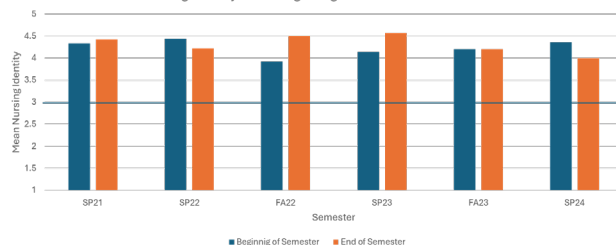
The program **Provides Academic Transformational Help** for disadvantaged nursing students **to become Primary Care Nurse Practitioners (PATH to PCNP)**.



## Purpose & Significance

The goal of this partnership is to increase diversity among primary care (PC) providers in medically underserved communities (MUCs) in Connecticut. The purpose is to support the progression of BS nursing SDBs to graduate on time in a "fast track" program to become PCNPs. PATH to PCNP aims to (1) increase educational support for SDBs; (2) foster a sense of belonging and ability for positive self-care to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression; and (3) infuse PC curriculum and experiences in PC with integrated behavioral health in MUCs across junior and senior years.

Nursing Identity at the Beginning and End of the Semester



## Procedure

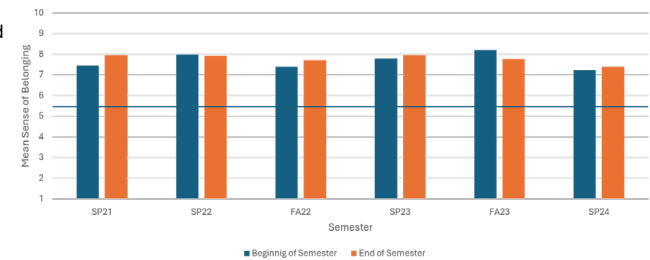
- Student participants in the PATH to PCNP program numbered 29-38 annually. Eligibility included having high financial need and being either economically or educationally/environmentally disadvantaged.
- 6-10 participating students per cohort, represented each class of the 4-year BSN program.
- Participants engaged in weekly/bi-weekly workshops to discuss three main concepts: the science of learning (SoL), belonging/mindfulness/self-care, and PC nursing.
- Each workshop included a brief presentation on one of the three concepts and opportunities for peer-to-peer and peer-to-project team interaction related to the concept.
- Quantitative and qualitative data related to academic belonging and nursing identity were collected via anonymous online surveys at the beginning and end of each semester, comments during workshops and focus groups, and email communications to project team members.



## Preliminary Findings

- Data across six semesters from students in the PATH to PCNP program generally reported a positive sense of university belonging and nursing identity. Mean scores across all time points were significantly higher than the mid-point scores possible on survey response scales ( $p < .05$ ).
- Although insufficiently powered for statistical comparison, sense of belonging and nursing identity scores generally increased slightly at the end of each semester from the beginning of that same semester.
- Content analysis focus group responses and survey questions indicated students valued the open, compassionate, supportive peer community and caring advisors.
- Central themes emphasized an appreciation for program flexibility, open communication, helpfulness, and supportive interactions.
- Students conveyed these elements and fostered strong feelings of connectedness and a sense of belonging within the PATH to PCNP community, peer cohort, and the SON overall.

Sense of Belonging at the Beginning and End of the Semester



## Recommendations for Teaching and Practice

- Showing care for prelicensure students through active engagement, open communication, personalized interactions, and empathetic feedback helps facilitate a supportive environment.
- Implementing these strategies while also offering resources to facilitate student success (SoL skills, beneficial self-care habits, facilitating mentorship and peer-to-peer support, incorporating university resources into classroom learning) nurtures a more positive educational experience of connectedness.

## Limitations

- The PATH to PCNP program budget went entirely to scholarships to support SDBs, thereby limiting quantitative and qualitative analyses.
- The partnership findings are primarily descriptive in nature based on collective observations, albeit reflecting careful documentation.



## Acknowledgement

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