

# A commentary on: building a successful nursing organization

## Editorial

When I attended a career fair at Kent State University during the Spring of 2016, I was just a sophomore in the nursing program, without any professional experience. While I thought the career fair would mainly link me up with potential employers, I came across two peers from a Kent State regional campus who introduced me to the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA). NSNA is a professional nursing organization with the goal of developing future nursing leaders. By preparing students with additional experiences, they can further advance their nursing education beyond the classroom. The students explained that the Kent State Main Campus was the only campus without a local chapter of this professional organization. Given Kent's outstanding reputation for nursing education, the fact that this organization was not where most of the nursing students attended classes seemed incongruous. Therefore these students were trying to recruit leaders to begin a chapter at the Main Campus to fill this clear void. At first, I was hesitant to sign-up as an officer of a brand new group because it seemed like a huge undertaking. However, a part of me was screaming, "This will be a great opportunity for you to get involved and make a difference for other nursing students." After a few minutes, I became convinced that this experience would work out, so I put my name down on the sign-up sheet. About a week later, the work began for KSU-Student Nurses' Association (KSU-SNA).

## How it all began

Initially, I accepted the role of Vice President and was delegated multiple tasks. It seemed that there was a lot of work going into this organization without any visible benefits. For example, we had no more than ten nursing students attend our meetings. To me, this was frustrating, and it never seemed like the organization would have the impact that it was originally intended to have. When the two students who recruited me graduated, I became even more passionate about the group. My other peers did not want to take on the role of President, but I knew that if nobody did, the organization would not continue. After taking on the responsibility of being the group's President, I knew I had to continue building the organization while leading it down the path of success.

Although previous students had given us tools to help continue the organization, my peers and I decided to start most everything from scratch. In the Fall 2016 semester, we successfully recruited students to serve as the remaining officers on our executive board, creating a fully functioning board for the first time. It was with this new board in place that Kent State's NSNA chapter really took off. While there could be a very long list of everything we did to grow our chapter, the following were the most important factors.

## Recruiting efforts

An organization cannot be successful without members, so the first thing we concentrated on was growing membership. We spoke at all nursing freshman year experience courses, displayed the organization at campus recruiting events, posted flyers, created social media, and spread the word the best we could. Our initial efforts resulted in nearly five times as many students showing up at our first meeting in Fall

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2016. The fifty people who attended that meeting dwarfed the ten that were at the first meeting of the group. That boost really energized the group. However, as expected, the attendance numbers dropped to about thirty after our first meeting. While not the overwhelming increase of our initial meeting, tripling our active members was quite an achievement. Throughout 2016, we maintained stable attendance.

Since the start of the Fall 2017 semester, KSU-SNA membership has jumped from 30 to about 130 members. While I am not sure we can effectively quadruple our membership every year, I believe that our continued recruiting efforts, positive morale, and involvement within the campus and community will keep this membership number in excess of one-hundred students per year.

## Meetings and events

Next, we had to plan our meetings and events. Every month, we decided we would host a meeting with a professional theme that would benefit our members. Some topics included: resume building, self-care, and a nursing experience panel.

As membership grew, the organization attended multiple volunteer events such as the Cleveland Heart Walk, Black Male Summit, Disaster Preparedness Simulation, Flash-A-Thon, and the Akron-Canton Food Bank. In addition, we have created social events for our members to attend such as nursing organization mixers, yoga nights, Love a Nurse Run, and the Kent State Homecoming Parade. These events have allowed KSU-SNA to have a positive impact on the community by helping others. Also, these experiences have allowed nursing students to build their own resumes so they can grow in their professions.

Our useful and engaging programming is what led directly to our exponential growth this school year. Word of mouth about our group's effectiveness, leadership on campus, and unique events has led to our growing reputation among students as an organization that can help them improve their nursing education experiences.

## Moving beyond local chapter material: involvement at the national level

In April, some officers, including myself, attended the NSNA Convention in Dallas where we learned about state board exams with an NCLEX review session, attended different focus groups, and heard the voices of powerful nurses and leaders. However, one specific

experience motivated me the most. This was, hearing the success of leaders from other NSNA chapters, and the positive impact they have had on students. It was this experience that motivated me to set the standards of KSU-SNA to a higher level, with increased participation in campus and community events, as well as empowering members more than ever. I decided then that KSU-SNA would become the nation's model chapter.

### **Fundraising: oh, that money thing!**

After It took more than a year, but we finally created a bank account. In order to get funds in our bank account, we raised money with membership dues and t-shirt sales. With this money, we are able to provide a partial scholarship to an outstanding KSU-SNA member who wants to attend the national convention. In addition, we are able to provide engaging speakers and free food at our meetings and events. Few things attract college students more than free food, I have found.

One of our biggest fundraising efforts that I believe had the largest impact on campus, as well as the community, was our participation in Kent State's Flash-A-Thon. This 12-hour dance marathon raises money for Akron Children's Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Unit. With the help of the other two nursing groups on campus, the Student Nurses team raised over \$4,000 to contribute to the total funds raised by the campus. Our original fundraising goal was only \$500, but we had to keep setting the bar higher with increased participation of individual members. We held mixers, sold raffle tickets, and asked for donations from family and friends to raise these funds. Fundraising is not an easy task, but it pays off by benefiting our members and those in need with resources to improve their education and lives.

### **Looking ahead: planning for success and growth in the future**

Now that the other officers and I are graduating in the Spring,

we found a fresh and excited new executive board to train. We will provide them with the necessary resources they need in order to continue the presence of this professional organization on campus and in the community. It is difficult to condense all the hard work that has gone into making this organization a success, but it is simple to list the benefits that have been reaped from making an impact on others. As a leader of this organization, I have seen strong connections made between members, positive change from campus and community service, education outside of the classroom, and empowerment of each individual member.

My goal for KSU-SNA is to continue the positive presence of a professional organization, not just within the population of KSU student nurses, but also within surrounding communities. Also, I want students to continue to attend the NSNA Convention to understand that it is possible to make an impact on others. We can share our success with other chapters around the country, growing Kent State's national reputation. Finally, I want KSU-SNA to empower all nursing students to build the best career they can while still in school, whether it is educational meetings or attending different volunteer events. Until graduation, I will continue to pave the way for current and future nursing students, so they can have the most fulfilling experience in and out of the classroom while they are at Kent State University.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.