NLN Biennial Survey of Schools of Nursing Academic Year 2015-2016

Executive Summary

Policy-makers, planners, governmental agencies, regulators, and others use National League for Nursing workforce data as they design legislation, approve budgets, and formulate long-range educational goals. The 2016 NLN Biennial Survey of Schools of Nursing was conducted to provide such data.

This report is compiled from data provided by 655 schools of nursing, 55 percent of 1,197 NLN member schools; 44 percent of the responding institutions offer baccalaureate or higher degrees in nursing and 56 percent offer associate degree, diploma, and PN/VN programs.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The percentage of racial-ethnic minority students enrolled in prelicensure RN programs increased slightly from 26 percent in 2012 to 27 percent in 2016. Specifically, African American enrollment dipped, from 12.9 percent to 10.8 percent, while Hispanic enrollment increased, from 6.8 to 8.1 percent. Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian enrollment decreased slightly by 0.1 percent.

Enrollment of men in basic RN programs decreased by 1 percent in 2016 compared to 2012; men represented 14 percent of the total enrollment. BSN programs had the highest percentage of men enrolled (15 percent), an increase from 13 percent in 2012; PN/VN programs had the lowest percentage of men enrolled (9 percent), down from 12 percent in 2012.

The age of doctoral students in nursing programs continues to fall. The proportion of doctoral students over age 30 declined by 5 percent, from 87 percent in 2011 to 82 percent in 2016. Findings indicate that the trend toward late entry into doctoral programs in nursing may be reversing.

PROGRAMS THAT TURNED AWAY QUALIFIED APPLICANTS

Significant numbers of applicants to prelicensure programs continue to be turned away. As US nursing schools work to maintain the RN workforce supply, these findings are troublesome (Figure 1).

The most dramatic findings occurred in PN/VN and diploma programs where qualified applicants declined 13 percent and 24 percent, respectively. BSRN program rejections increased from 3 percent in 2014 to 6 percent in 2016. This result has implications for RNs pursuing baccalaureate degrees in light of the Institute of Medicine's recommendation that at least 80 percent of registered nurses (RNs) be BSN-prepared by 2020 (IOM, 2011).

QUALIFIED APPLICATIONS NOT GRANTED ADMISSION

Although a significant number of applicants are rejected from nursing programs nationally, the trend in rejections for PN/VN programs and ADN programs has decreased from 2012. ADN programs had the highest percentage of rejected qualified applications at 35 percent in 2016, down from 37 percent in 2014 and 45 percent in 2012 while BSN and BSRN programs experienced slight increases of 2 percent and 3 percent, respectively. The most striking increase in rejected applications occurred with diploma programs. Doctoral program rejections show a slight increase though doctorally prepared faculty are still needed for nursing programs nationally, (Figure 2).

MAIN OBSTACLES TO ADMITTING QUALIFIED APPLICANTS

For prelicensure programs, the demand for nursing education continues to outstrip supply as lack of clinical placements and the faculty shortage impede expansion. Lack of clinical placement settings was cited by 43 percent of prelicensure nursing programs as the primary impediment to admitting qualified applicants, followed by lack of faculty (Figure 3).

CONCLUSION

Interestingly, these NLN-generated data have not changed over the past six years; issues related to the movement away from acute, institutional care to a community-based approach and the persistent nursing faculty shortage continue to be impediments to increased enrollment.

To overcome the obstacles to increased enrollment and address the faculty shortage, continued support for legislation for Title VIII funding is critical. In addition, since the 2014 landmark NCSBN study (Hayden, Smiley, Alexander, Kardong-Edgren, & Jeffries, 2014), simulation has been utilized by many nursing programs as an alternative to traditional clinical settings as the sole opportunity for students to experience the complexities of delivering patient care.

REFERENCES

Institute of Medicine (2011). The future of nursing: Leading change, advancing health. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Hayden, J. K., Smiley, R. A., Alexander, M., Kardong-Edgren, S., & Jeffries, P. R. (2014). The NCSBN national simulation study: A longitudinal, randomized, controlled study replacing clinical hours with simulation in pre-licensure nursing education. Journal of Nursing Regulation, 5(2) (Suppl.), S3-S40. doi:10.1016/S2155-8256(15)30062-4

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Figure 1:
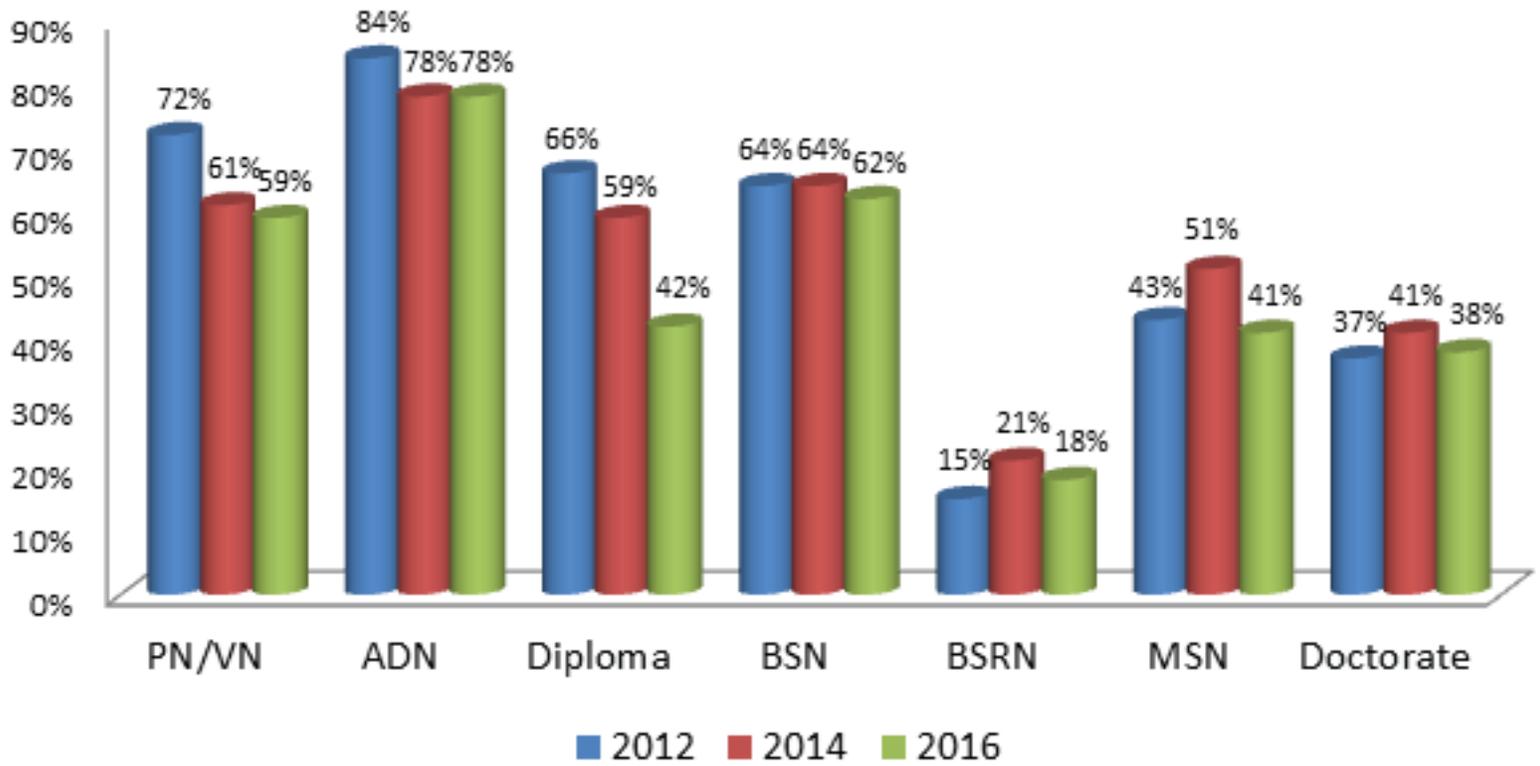PERCENT OF PROGRAMS THAT TURNED AWAY QUALIFIED APPLICANTS BY PROGRAM TYPE, 2012-2016

Figure 2:
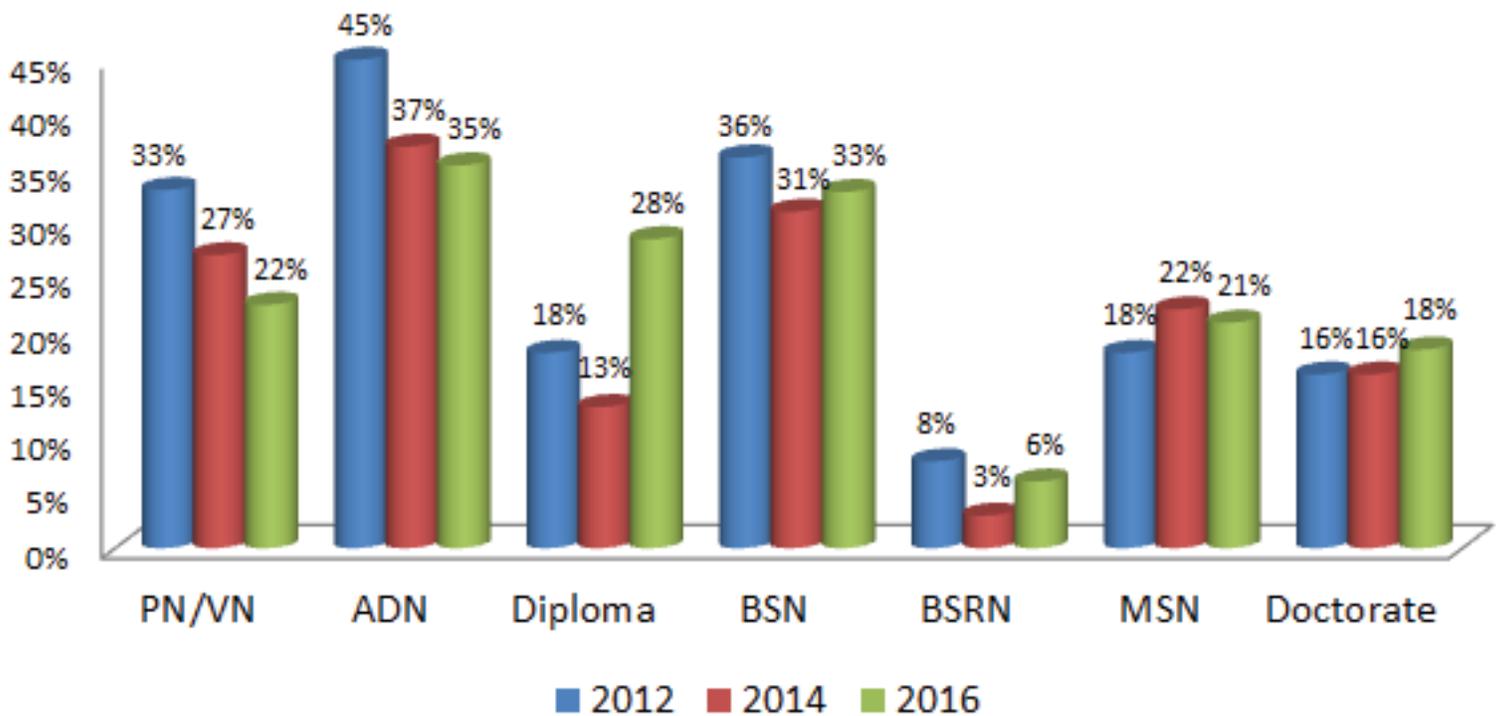PERCENT OF QUALIFIED APPLICATIONS TURNED AWAY BY PROGRAM TYPE, 2012- 2016

MAIN OBSTACLES TO EXPANDING CAPACITY OF PRELICENSURE RN PROGRAMS, 2012- 2016