

# Position Statement

## **LIFELONG LEARNING FOR NURSING FACULTY**

NLN Board of Governors  
September 19, 2001

*The National League for Nursing (NLN) encourages all nurse educators to engage in activities that promote their lifelong learning and ongoing development as educators. In addition, the NLN encourages nursing program deans and directors to support faculty efforts to develop the pedagogical components of their role, as well as the clinical and research components.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As is true for so many aspects of our lives in the 21st century, the concept of lifelong learning for nursing faculty (or faculty development) is complex and multi-faceted. Learning about the various dimensions of a nursing faculty role may begin in an individual's master's and/or doctoral program. It also occurs through self-study and a constant inquisitiveness about the role and all its dimensions. And it is a lifelong pursuit.

The elements of faculty development differ for faculty with differing types of appointments (e.g., full-time versus part-time, tenure track versus non-tenure track, academic versus service setting), and they differ for faculty at various career stages (i.e., the novice versus those who are more senior in the role). Furthermore, the mission of a university affects the nature of expectations for the scope of the role of faculty and, consequently, the educator role. Nonetheless, there are basic principles and emerging technology and trends of pedagogy with which all faculty must remain current throughout their careers. Pursuit of lifelong learning is essential if our education programs are to be of the highest quality.

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Some individuals come to their faculty positions knowing little if anything about principles of teaching and learning. Many who have been in a faculty role for several years may know only those approaches to teaching or evaluating learning that they experienced themselves as students or to which their senior colleagues introduced them when they first started in the role. In addition, a vast majority of nursing faculty have been prepared as advanced clinicians, not educators, and have a limited understanding of the workings of a university, the campus-wide role senior faculty need to play, the subtleties of curriculum development and change, or the accreditation process. As a result, there are individuals who hold faculty rank but who may not fully understand the complexities of the faculty role. Faculty development programs, therefore, must be multi-dimensional and able to be individually adapted in order to meet the wide array of faculty needs.

### **DIMENSIONS OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT**

Faculty development must take many forms and address a wide variety of topics if it is to be helpful to the range of individuals teaching in our nursing programs today. Such topics include, but are not limited to, student advisement, clinical teaching and evaluation, test construction, outcomes assessment, the faculty role as leaders in the university community, creative teaching strategies, promoting critical thinking, and so on. No single program or approach will meet the needs of everyone, and even the most senior tenured Full Professor must never think that she/he has nothing new to learn.

There are many topics that are of concern to faculty as they implement the academic role and progress through their careers. Many universities and individual faculty readily acknowledge weaknesses or limitations in various areas of the faculty role, and they support the pursuit of activities that facilitate faculty growth in those areas. In other institutions, however, the emphasis on research, publication, and securing grants outweighs the focus on developing faculty competence as teachers, advisors, and academics. If we are to achieve quality in our programs, faculty development efforts need to be viewed as important, valued, and rewarded.

### **NLN'S COMMITMENT TO FACULTY DEVELOPMENT**

Given that individuals learn and grow from a variety of stimuli, the National League for Nursing is committed to offering a wide range of opportunities for faculty to facilitate their lifelong development as educators. Included among these opportunities are the following:

- An annual Faculty Development Institute that allows nurse educators to immerse themselves in discussions of real-world challenges to implementing the educator role
- The annual Education Summit, where faculty are challenged to think in new ways, integrate research findings into their approaches to teaching and evaluating students, and consider different curriculum models
- NLN Press publications that address innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and evaluation; implementation of the faculty role; and evidence-based teaching
- Articles and features in the NLN's official journal that address similar topics and that present opportunities for faculty to debate, argue, or struggle with real-world issues that are student-related or that arise from attempting to implement a complex, demanding role
- Local/regional workshops that provide opportunities for faculty to dialogue with expert educators and have a "hands on" experience in solving a problem or creating new approaches to teaching

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- Programs sponsored by the NLN's Constituent Leagues
- Research grants that support studies related to effective approaches to facilitating learning, developing innovative curricula, enhancing students' total development, etc.
- Online courses that allow individuals to study topics at their own leisure and without having to admit publicly that they do not know as much about a topic (e.g., test construction) as colleagues think they should know
- An annual Nursing Education Research Institute that assists nurse educators to develop studies that address the NLN's Priorities for Research in Nursing Education and develop the science of nursing education
- Opportunities to network with colleagues who share similar interests, either through listservs, chat rooms, or contacts made through a nurse educator database, as well as at conferences

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