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In general the transition from a structured and somewhat controlled high school lifestyle to an increasingly more spontaneous and self reliant college environment can prove to be difficult. Moving into a dorm, developing new relationships, and adjusting to new academic rigor are just a few of the hardships college freshmen typically face. These among other contributing factors add to the stereotypical struggle of the transition from high school to college.

This paper will examine not only the transition of high school students to college but specifically the adjustment of undergraduate nursing students and what resources they have in place to aid them in their journey. While the transition of a traditional degree-seeking, non-nursing student may be a challenge, nursing students face a myriad of additional adjustments. At most universities every pre-nursing student is assigned an academic advisor. Advisors work to provide students with academic information, encourage utilization of campus resources, personally encourage students, and enrich their time on campus (Grand Valley Statue University [GVSU], 2009b). While this is adequate for students who are not approaching a secondary admission program, the stress of applying to nursing school requires extra attention. It is not uncommon for the additional stressors of pre-nursing students to be overlooked. While there is abundant research relating to the stress of admitted nursing students there is little known about the pressures of preparing for the application process to nursing school and how to cope with that stress. However research has shown that peer support groups and mentorships programs, especially when targeted at first and second year undergraduate students, result in lower levels of stress, an increased sense of belonging and generally a more positive transition to the university (Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh & Wilss, 2008, p. 109). Research specific to nursing students supports the need for stress reduction as well. A recent study found that of 95 admitted
baccalaureate nursing students, 90.5% agreed that stress management skills should be taught prior to admittance into the nursing program (Murdock, Naber & Perlow, 2010, p. 8). These findings show a definite need for a peer group which addresses the drive to obtain stress management skills instruction, facilitates peer camaraderie, and implements a mentorship program.

Current pre-nursing students at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) have expressed the desire for the formation of a student lead organization which meets the aforementioned needs unique to pre-nursing students. With the support of the faculty and advising staff at the Kirkhof College of Nursing (KCON) and the current nursing students involved in the Student Nursing Association (SNA), five interested pre-nursing students agreed to undertake the development and implementation of the club. The students hope that the organization will fill the void the research has presented.

**Theories**

Long standing theories show that many different environmental aspects as well as personal beliefs contribute to one’s character and how he or she makes decisions. Bandura’s social cognitive theory suggests that people are not completely autonomous nor mechanically run. Yet there are a number of different factors in the environment which combined with personal outlook and efficacious beliefs, define how a person reacts in a given situation (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). Bandura’s social cognitive theory can be directly applied to pre-nursing students because they are affected by a number of different environmental factors. These include, transitioning to college, utilizing advising resources, preparing for a professional program, and the stress associated with secondary admission and a competitive admissions pool.
The creation of an organization would be one more environmental factor that would positively impact the outlook of pre-nursing students.

According to the social cognitive theory, student involvement in structured environments increases self efficacy. In turn self efficacy increases competence and academic aspirations which leads to overall greater academic success. (Bandura, 2003, p.87). The founding five students of the pre-nursing club at GVSU hope to create a sense of belonging and facilitate open communication amongst pre-nursing students. By creating a feeling of universality and encouragement, students are likely to develop a greater sense of self efficacy. Bandura’s social cognitive theory is not the only theory to support the above schematic. Alexander Astin’s well
known longitudinal study of student success identified a positive correlation between involvement and achievement (Berger, 1999, p. 641). Students who are involved on campus and feel a commitment to their university, will be more likely to succeed both in and out of the classroom. These two well accepted theories lend support to the creation of a student organization to fill the void present in the lives of pre-nursing students. The creation of a pre-nursing club will aid students in adjusting to the transition to college, the advising process, admittance to a professional program, and the stress of a competitive secondary admissions pool (See Figure 1).

**Transitioning to College**

For most college students, leaving home and attending a university can be a big adjustment. They are in a new environment and it is generally the first time they are completely free from parental influences and supervision. Beyond the obvious transition of moving into a dorm and different physical surroundings, students also face new expectations and increased academic rigor, an educational transition. It is the university’s responsibility to aid students in this change. One study which implemented a transitions program among first year university students by discipline, identified a correlation between small group sessions and engagement. Furthermore the study went on to say that participating in the transitions program lead to higher student involvement within the university and greater academic success (Vinson et al., 2005, p. 132). The idea of transitions within a university is well supported by the literature and Astin’s theory of involvement and greatly affects pre-nursing students. Specific to GVSU, a transitions program has been enacted for a number of years which, “prepares each student for the academic rigor of the University, assists students in meeting people and making connections both in and out of the classroom, and provides students with an overall knowledge of the resources and
services that Grand Valley State University has to offer” (GVSU, 2009a). These programs contribute greatly to the adjustment of students to a university lifestyle.

**Advising**

Advisors play a crucial role in recruitment and retention of university students. Students are encouraged to meet with their academic advisors to plan classes, identify resources, share knowledge of degree requirements, and assist the student in graduating in a timely manner (Baker & Griffin, 2010, p.3). Some students might not be aware of all the resources on campus available to them and advisors can help connect them to facilitate their growth academically. Students have the responsibility to seek advice from their advisors and form meaningful relationships to aid them on their academic journey. Students preparing for secondary admission, including pre-nursing students, must take the initiative of meeting with their advisors to ensure they have met curriculum requirements necessary for admittance to their specific programs. The mission statement of the advising department at GVSU parallels this theory of quality advising. It states, “Academic advising engages students in the process of exploring and defining their academic and career goals and in creating effective strategies to achieve these goals” (GVSU, 2009b). Not only do academic advisors facilitate academic success, they can be an added support system for students concerns as well. Current nursing student at GVSU, Kaitlin Downey stated, “My academic advisor made me feel so welcome and comfortable. When I walked into her office I was unsure about being accepted into the nursing program. When I left I felt reassured and knew that as long as I tried my best I had something to be proud of” (K. Downey, personal communication, March 28, 2011). It is explanations such as this which should encourage pre-nursing students to meet with their advisors to prepare for their professional program and
network within the university. Establishing a relationship with an advisor is crucial and the process should be initiated immediately.

**Professional Program**

Nursing is a profession, not a career. Nurses uphold a set of values and work under a strict code of ethics which guides their practice. Pre-nursing students are preparing to graduate with more than simply a four year degree. They are preparing to apply to a professional program in which the goal is to not only graduate with a bachelor’s degree but to become licensed and practice competently as a nurse. Nursing programs provide students with learning opportunities not seen in many other areas of academics. Nursing students must develop clinical judgment, understand cultural sensitivity, and collaborate with others in an interdisciplinary fashion (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2008, p. 36). Pre-nursing students are generally aware of this added pressure and responsibility and this often adds to the concern of the application process. Beyond the values and beliefs which guide nursing practice, nursing students are also faced with the obvious task of being responsible for the lives of patients. Because there is little room for error these students are held to much higher expectations. Although pre-nursing students may be aware of the added responsibilities of a professional nursing program, being in the health care setting working hands on with patients can still be undoubtedly intimidating.

**Stress**

All college students are faced with stress on a daily basis involving academics, their social lives, or personal issues. Pre-nursing students have an added stressor of obtaining exceptional grades for application acceptance into a nursing program. Although some stress is
healthy and motivates people at times, it can be overwhelming preparing for the admission process. Studies of current pre-nursing students have found that the experience of preparing to become a professional nurse had a greater risk to the students’ well being as well as their emotional status. Students find stress in striving for high and specific expectations, meeting and planning with faculty, being overworked academically, and the uncertainty of their future (Tully, 2004, p. 44). The fear of applying and being rejected can be frightening, especially when admittance dictates ones future and has always been the goal for which they have strived. Also to consider if one is rejected, what is the next step? Pre-nursing students are faced with fears of what path to take next as they have focused on being a nurse for so long. Pre-requisite courses are science based and specific to the nursing program. If one is to be rejected, he or she must complete additional pre-requisite course work to select a different major or apply to another nursing school. Financial stress is also present in pre-nursing students’ lives. Paying for pre-requisite courses is usually manageable but if one is not accepted, did they waste their hard earned money?

Employment in nursing fluctuates in availability. Currently an increased number of people are taking an interest in and applying to health related programs because jobs are thought to be available. Although a nursing shortage was predicted in the early twenty first century with the retirement of the baby boomer generation, because of the economy, this prediction did not come to fruition. There have been increased applications to nursing programs because of this perceived deficit. Yet the influx in students applying to nursing programs cannot be accommodated by the available faculty and resources (Committee on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing, at the Institute of Medicine, 2011, p. 31). According to a yearly survey of nursing programs conducted by the National League for
Nursing, a professional group for nurse educators, as many as one in three qualified applicants were rejected in 2006 (Evans, 2008, p. 20). This sense of competition and fear of rejection also applies to GVSU pre-nursing students. In the fall of 2009 there was a 28.8% acceptance rate (this percentage does not include those students directly admitted into the program from high school). Additionally acceptance becomes more difficult each year with the increase in grade point average (GPA). In the winter of 2007 the lowest GPA accepted was a 3.27. Just three and a half years later in the fall of 2010 the lowest GPA accepted into the program was a 3.96 (Kirkhof College of Nursing [KCON], personal communication, March 28, 2011). GVSU students are aware of these statistics and these higher standards lead to increased stress. Working incredibly hard with the possibility of being rejected is always a common stressor.

Organizations/Club

Because stress amongst pre-nursing students is not well identified in the literature there has not been much action taken to rectify this issue. It has been proven however that student lead organizations and peer mentoring programs within many majors help students adapt and manage stress. Recent research has shown this idea can apply to any discipline, nursing included (Heirdsfield et al., 2008, p. 110). Because these programs are discipline specific, all students involved are striving for the same general goal. This allows them to unite and grow academically and socially. Yalom (1995) identified 11 curative factors which are to be present in leadership organizations (See table 1). These factors can be applied to any student lead group or mentoring program including pre-nursing clubs. Groups such as this fill the void of what is lacking for student success. They provide social support, camaraderie, resources, networking opportunities, academic guidance, and connections with current nursing students. Another purpose of a pre-nursing club would be to inform prospective students of what the field of nursing actually entails.
It would give students an opportunity to be exposed to the medical field and decide if they want to devote their lives to nursing. Developing an organization such as this could help institute a mentoring program in which pre-nursing students are paired with a current nursing student in the program who can provide them with guidance and reassurance. One program instituted at a Midwest state university within a baccalaureate nursing program proved to be extremely successful. Freshmen were paired with students enrolled in clinical nursing coursework. Benefits for the freshmen being mentored included anxiety reduction, familiarity with the nurse’s role within the clinical setting, and a therapeutic relationship with a student enrolled in nursing school. The mentees were not the only ones to benefit from this relationship. The student nurse mentors also benefited from this by gaining self confidence and reassuring themselves how much they have learned since the beginning of their coursework (Sprengel & Job, 2004, p. 246). Both mentors and mentees saw benefits academically as well as personally and socially.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instillation of hope</td>
<td>Imparting faith that the group will be effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universality</td>
<td>Confirming that we are not unique in our suffering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imparting information</td>
<td>Providing didactic instruction or teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>Feeling good about having something to offer the other members of the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrective recapitulation of the primary family group</td>
<td>Acting out relationships with other group members in a similar way as in one’s own family systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of socializing techniques</td>
<td>Role playing or indirect learning from the way another person handled a situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitative behavior</td>
<td>Learning how to cope through observing others’ modeling of new behaviors or skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal learning</td>
<td>Discovering and accepting previously unknown parts of oneself, and other group members honestly telling what they think of the person, as well as learning about oneself based on feedback from others in the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catharsis</td>
<td>Being able to say what was bothering the person, rather than holding it in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesiveness</td>
<td>Being able to share feelings and experiences and having them be accepted by others in the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential factors</td>
<td>Facing issues of life and death knowing one must take full responsibility for one’s own actions no matter how much support is received or not.</td>
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Table 1. Yalom’s 11 Curative Factors
(Hamrin, Weycer, Pachler & Fournier, 2006, p. 41)
The club would also serve as way to meet the new challenges laid out by the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM’s) October, 2010 report. The report encourages four key aspects, two of which could be directly improved upon with the implementation of a student led organization for pre-nursing students. The report reads, “Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression” and it continues, “Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other health professionals, in redesigning health care in the United States” (Committee on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing, at the Institute of Medicine, 2011, p. 29). It is the intent of the pre-nursing club to improve the nursing education experience among students. By decreasing stress and promoting involvement students are more likely to experience academic development and personal growth. If this were the case it would be logical that a positive undergraduate experience may lead more students to seek out opportunities for further education. It should also be noted that students who become involved with student organizations learn leadership roles and generally find ways to take initiative. This is important as the IOM calls for active and involved nurses in policy making and the designing of the proposed new health care system. The report continues, “strong leadership will be required to transform the U.S. health care system” (Committee on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing, at the Institute of Medicine, 2011, p. 33). It’s important that students recognize this leadership must come from the nursing discipline equally, if not more so, than any other sect of professionals in the health care system. Students involved in a pre-nursing club are taking the first step in becoming nurse leaders.

Grand Valley students are not the only ones interested in forming a group such as this. Although they are rare, programs have been instituted at some larger universities such as the

**Grand Valley’s Pre-Nursing Association**

On February 4th, 2011 the Pre-Nursing Association (PNA) was approved by Grand Valley’s student organization review board and office of student life. Prior to this approval the five prospective students eagerly involved in the formation of the club gathered to develop a constitution and designate board member positions. This initial meeting proved to be successful and the draft of the constitution was submitted and approved (See appendix A). The first official board meeting of the club was held on February 9th, 2011. At this meeting the established board discussed goals and event planning for their organization. They decided to hold their first general meeting on February 28th, 2011 to gather ideas from other pre-nursing students about what they wanted to benefit from by joining the club. Upwards of sixty students attended and readily gave input. Advisor to the club and to KCON, Erin Busscher, brainstormed ideas on the white board with the group present. Not only did the five executive board members original ideas show up on the board but many new ideas were developed as well which the board members took note of and considered in planning future events.

After another small board meeting the students agreed upon their first event which the club would sponsor. Their idea was to involve the established current nursing students in SNA to provide insight through a roundtable event. Two board members attended a meeting at the Student Organization Center (SOC), where they learned what could be provided to them at no or
minimal cost to help establish their club on campus. They utilized SOC for advertising posters and materials such as table clothes and balloons for their roundtable event. The first event was held on March 28th, 2011 in MAK 1155 from 6:00pm to 8:00pm. The board members and a select few SNA members arrived at 5:00pm to help set up. The event consisted of a number of different tables representing different types of students within the nursing program. Traditional students, student athletes, male students, students with children, direct admit students, honors students, second degree students, accelerated second degree students, sorority students, and SNA board members were all in attendance. Each group of students was established at a table and pre-nursing students were welcomed into the room and sat at various tables which related to them or peaked their interest. Pizza and pop was provided by a small loan. The refreshments and table setting created a great environment for conversation. There were about thirty pre-nursing students in attendance (See appendix B). Because the club was established late in the semester the board members have agreed upon only holding one event in the Winter 2011. They look forward to planning future events in the Fall of 2011 and obtaining a table at student life night in Allendale to promote their club and recruit new members.

**Conclusion**

Both the board members and event and meeting attendees expressed how helpful the club has already been for them. It has connected students who have the same pre-requisite courses and are striving toward the same goal. The group showed much enthusiasm at both the general meeting and roundtable event. The discussion generated was helpful and insightful. Freshman and Vice President Lindsey Krebs commented, “I have met some new people who are in my classes who I would not have met otherwise promoting the club and sharing ideas. For being such a new club I think the progress we have already made proves how strong we can be next
fall. Having the support of KCON and the SNA has been helpful as well” (L. Krebs, personal communication, April 4, 2011). The club hopes to gain members and funds and looks forward to planning meetings and events throughout a normal calendar year.
Appendix A: PNA Constitution

The Constitution of Pre-Nursing Association
of Grand Valley State University

Preamble:

We, the pre-nursing students of Grand Valley State University, believe there is a common need to organize and to represent ourselves as pre-professional students.

We believe that it is our responsibility to provide opportunities for students at Grand Valley State University to learn more about the nursing profession.

Article One: Name

The name of the organization shall be the Pre-Nursing Association

Article Two: Purpose

The purpose of this organization shall be to:

Enable students to engage in opportunities related to health care.

Create and facilitate mentorship opportunities between the Association of Pre-Nursing Students and the Student Nurses Association.

Provide networking opportunities for students interested in nursing.

Promote a supportive and encouraging environment.

Article Four: Membership

Section One: General Assembly Membership

4.1.1 The membership of the Pre-Nursing Association shall consist of any interested students currently enrolled at Grand Valley State University. It is the policy of GVSU and Association of Pre-Nursing Students that no person on the basis of age, color, disability, familial status, height, marital status, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex/gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, veteran status, or weight shall be discriminated against.

4.1.2 Membership Clause: Every member must be registered on Stuey.
Every member must sign the membership clause indicating that they understand that affiliation with or membership in the association of pre-nursing students does not guarantee admission into the professional nursing program. See attached membership clause.

4.2.1 A membership fee of $5.00 per year will be due of all members.

Article Five: Executive Board

Section One: Description

5.1.1 The Executive Board shall consist of four (4) core members: (at minimum designated officers must include a President and Financial Officer/Treasurer).

Section Two: Qualification

5.2.1 Each Executive Board member must be registered for at least six semester hours of credit at GVSU.

5.2.2 Each Executive Board member must carry a 2.0 cumulative GPA and be in good academic standing with the University.

Section Three: Elections

5.3.1 The officers shall be nominated by general assembly.

5.3.2 The officers shall be elected by General Assembly, majority vote.

5.3.3 The New Executive Board shall serve from November 2010 to August 2011

Article Six: Executive Board Responsibilities

Section One: President

6.1.1 Preside at all meetings of the Pre-Nursing Association.

6.1.2 Create an agenda and plan for organization.

6.1.3 Serve as the principle officer of the association

6.1.4 Shall be responsible for seeing that the action of the board is carried into effect and for reporting to the membership on the conduct of the affairs of the association.

Section Two: Vice President

6.2.1 Address any duties deemed necessary by the organization and/or the President.
6.2.2 Perform the duties of the President in his/her absence.

6.2.3 Act as a liaison to the Student Nurses Association.

Section Three: Secretary

6.3.1 Perform the duties of the President in the absence of the President and Vice President.

6.3.2 Responsible for recording the minutes for each meeting.

6.3.3 Keep correct records of attendance at meetings.

6.3.4 Maintain membership records for the Pre-Nursing Association.

Section Four: Financial Officer / Treasurer

6.4.1 Continually update all financial records including both on and off-campus accounts.

6.4.2 Regular attendance at all finance board meetings.

6.4.3 Provide semester finance report to members.

Article Seven: Advisors

Section One: Advisors

7.1.1 The Advisor(s) of the Pre-Nursing Association shall be chosen by the executive board. Each advisor shall serve his/her term from November 2010 to August 2011.

Article Eight: Meetings

Section One: Meetings

8.1.1 The first general assembly meeting in the fall semester shall be held within the first three weeks of the semester.

8.1.2 General Assembly meetings shall be held once a month, at 9:00 pm, at Allendale campus of Grand Valley State University.

Section Two: Quorum

8.2.1 Quorum (number of members required to conduct business) shall be composed of five current members of the membership.

Article Nine: Amendments

Section One: Proposed Amendments
9.1.1 It is required that all proposed amendments must be presented to the President in writing in order to propose an amendment to the constitution.

9.1.2 The President must have the proposed amendment two weeks before an amendment may be voted upon.

9.1.3 A 51% vote is required to pass an amendment.

**Article Ten: Impeachment**

*Section One: Executive Board*

10.1.1 Impeachment proceedings and charges may be moved by any member.

10.1.2 A vote of 51% of the membership is necessary for impeachment.

**Article Eleven: Roberts Rules of Order**

*Section One: Roberts Rules of Order*

11.1.1 Look to “Roberts Rules of Order” to resolve any disputes, conflicts, or rulings.

**Article Twelve: Dissolution**

*Section One: Dissolution*

12.1.1 Upon the disbandment of the organization, off-campus and non-Office of Student Life assets and funds should be donated to the Student Nurses Association.

Ratified: November 14, 2010
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Student Organizations- Pre Nursing club. (2010). http://www.nursing.ouhsc.edu/
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