Overcoming Enrollment Growth Barriers

HEALTH CARE EDUCATION REPORT
Turning Health Care Programs Into Growth Engines for Universities and Colleges

The United States and many countries around the world are experiencing a health care professional shortage that is projected only to get worse. (Ledbetter, 2015) Health care education programs need to remove enrollment growth barriers to meet the demand but face budget restrictions, slim faculty availability, and lack of physical space. With traditional methods, substantially growing enrollment in health care degree programs without straining existing operations is difficult, which makes turning these high-cost, complex programs into revenue generators seem impossible.

Nursing industry studies have projected that by 2022, the U.S. will need an additional one million nurses to meet the unprecedented demand caused by the “silver tsunami” of an aging Baby Boomer population and nurses reaching retirement age, (PwC, 2007) along with legislation and other factors leading to this critically concerning shortage. (U.S. BLS, 2013)

NOTE:

While this report focuses mostly on nursing programs, the solutions provided can also apply to many other health care programs that educate students for patient-facing roles. For clarity, this report focuses on the field of nursing.
Current Enrollment Growth Barriers

Traditional Nursing Education Constraints

Considering the current and projected predicted nursing shortage, it makes sense to expand degree programs and increase enrollment to meet the rising demand. However, significant resource constraints in nursing education often cause colleges and universities to turn away qualified candidates who could otherwise provide the enrollment growth and incremental tuition revenue. (AACN, 2008)

Enrollment growth barriers inherent in traditional pre-licensure nursing education models lead to supply and demand imbalances. Factors including limited faculty availability, the high cost of space and equipment, and the complexities of securing clinical spots make it nearly impossible for nursing programs to expand to the level needed to meet demand. (RFWJ, 2010) Combine cost pressures with the reluctance to raise tuition, go back to the donor pool, or draw down the endowment, and it is clear that nursing programs will never be able to provide health care facilities with the number and quality of nurses they need not just now, but for years to come. (AACN, 2008)

For nursing, in particular, there is a shortage that is only becoming worse as current nurses retire. Meeting projected quality and supply is becoming increasingly difficult for nursing programs. (Juraschek, 2011)


Percentage may not total 100 due to rounding.
Key Factors that Created the Growth Barriers

For decades, health care education programs have faced too many obstacles and growth barriers. Education professionals long ago sounded the alarm, but they still do not have the resources to make a meaningful difference. (Ledbetter, 2015) The barriers that are currently keeping health care education programs from producing more graduates include:

- Shrinking budgets
- Stretched and stressed faculty
- Severe shortage of qualified health care faculty; nurses can earn substantially more and work fewer hours by staying in practice
- Significant competition among schools for limited clinical spots and not enough clinical placements to facilitate substantial enrollment increases
- Limited classroom and lab space in brick-and-mortar campus facilities
- Campus-based programs that are more suited to traditional college students and deter the "second-degree" non-traditional students who do not need the "college life" experience again

Example: Typical Nursing Program Barriers, by the Numbers

Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers Health Research Institute report: "What Works: Healing the Healthcare Staffing Shortage"
The Educator Shortage Inside the Nursing Shortage

As more Americans purchase health insurance, health care education programs need faculty to teach the practitioners who are going to take care of these previously uninsured patients. However, the health care professional shortage revealed a faculty shortage that is yet another growth barrier.

The educator shortage is the most severe in nursing. (Hausman, 2012) In a recent American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) survey of 400 nursing schools, respondents collectively reported a total of 1,236 full-time faculty vacancies for the 2014 to 2015 school year. The biggest barriers to hiring enough nursing faculty were an insufficient pool of nurses with post-graduate degrees, and teaching salaries that simply cannot compete with the salaries offered for clinical practice. The cycle self-perpetuates in nursing because, to get a post-grad degree, you have to have a BSN. Considering the current constraints on producing more BSNs, this obviously places limitations on those who can become nurse educators.

The New York-based Jonas Center for Nursing Excellence estimated that each nurse educator position left vacant could affect the care of 3.6 million patients if we count both the nurses each instructor could teach and the number of patients for whom those nurses could provide care. (Robeznieks, 2015)

Great Candidates Are Giving Up

Health care providers are at the mercy of nursing schools when it comes to the number and quality of nurses to fill vacancies. Additionally, the pool of bachelor’s-educated nurses who are truly practice-ready is currently too shallow. (HRSA, 2013) Meanwhile, nursing programs are at the mercy of budgets and the constraints imposed by traditional methods of educating nurses, which leaves top candidates denied their dream education or stuck languishing on the waitlist. The limited enrollment capacity is not necessarily about the allocation of money, but about not having the money to begin with due to the cost pressures universities are experiencing and the high fixed expense of programs with an experiential/clinical component.
The Academic-Practice Partnership Solution

Increase Enrollment & Produce Incremental Income Without Sacriﬁcing Quality

Nursing schools need to maintain and even improve their academic standards while increasing enrollment and generating incremental income. While achieving all three in the current environment may seem impossible, it is not. By entering into strategic academic-practice partnerships, nursing schools can increase enrollment and produce meaningful incremental income while maintaining or improving academic quality.

Successful academic-practice partnerships that enable transformative enrollment growth and incremental revenue need a third-party partnership manager. This third-party partnership manager helps nursing programs systematically remove each of the signiﬁcant barriers to growth, ultimately providing employers with a broader hiring pool.

This type of partnership is not new, but the depth of how it works goes beyond what most people think. The academic-practice partnership manager absorbs all the upfront resource and cost burden of growth by migrating the curriculum to an online format, providing sophisticated student recruitment and enrollment services, adding lab space and equipment and securing and managing all clinical placements for students.

Schools Still Set the Academic Standards

Most colleges and universities are aware that academic-practice partnerships exist, but not to this level. Schools are always surprised by the signiﬁcant ﬁnancial impact such programs can have on their institutions while also improving educational relevance for employers. When entering a true academic-practice partnership, high-quality nursing education becomes more accessible and generates more practice-ready nurses, faster.
Students receive the same academic quality and outcomes as with the traditional nursing education models, but with a more flexible and accelerated schedule. Traditional four-year BSN programs have built-in growth limitations, while hybrid (i.e., part online, part hands-on) ABSN programs have almost unlimited growth potential, thanks to sophisticated e-learning technologies, multiple start dates, satellite learning centers, and flexible clinical schedules.

Overcoming Growth Barriers with an Academic-Practice Partnership

Creating a successful academic-practice partnership brings a number of benefits to colleges and universities:

- **The partnership manager absorbs the costs of growth**, including:
  - Migrating the existing curriculum to an online format
  - Creating off-campus academic learning centers
  - Securing clinical partners and managing clinical scheduling
  - Recruiting students and advising them throughout the enrollment process
  - Sourcing, vetting, and funding incremental faculty (if the university chooses such an arrangement)

- The hybrid learning model includes **online and hands-on education using interactive virtual classrooms** that leverage the latest educational technology

- The partnership manager **brings each school’s curriculum to life online**, using proven Learning Management System (LMS) technology and other engaging and interactive online solutions.

- Off-campus learning centers with fully equipped simulation labs are **set up and staffed by the academic-practice partnership manager**

- Hybrid programs provide **24-hour access to online courses**, which appeals to the growing market of adult learners

- Online courses allow **didactic faculty to reside anywhere, which increases the faculty recruitment pool**

- Clinical rotations are almost entirely within the health care partner’s facilities, with the **partnership manager scheduling all rotations**

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**Northeastern University’s Story: Increased Growth with Online Learning**

As Northeastern University’s Administration & Finance Associate Dean for the Bouvé College of Health Sciences, Steve Cramer knew that the university’s nursing program needed to find new ways to stay competitive and grow. This meant considering the hybrid Accelerated BSN (ABSN) with online learning, which initially was not a popular idea.

“We take the quality of our program extremely seriously,” Cramer said. “We always want to improve upon our prestigious program, and there was a perception that the ABSN with online learning would actually hurt the quality of our nursing school.”

When the school partnered with Orbis Education, Cramer saw how Orbis and its hybrid ABSN model could help them achieve growth goals without compromising quality. “Orbis had the operations and infrastructure to make online learning work for our program,” Cramer added. However, the faculty was not easy to convince. They questioned whether online learning would dilute the strength of the nursing program.

Orbis instructional designers worked one-on-one with faculty members to structure Northeastern’s ABSN program to meet the faculty’s specific needs and curricular objectives. And while the curriculum, program, and academic standards were all Northeastern’s, it was soon evident that Orbis’ expertise in online learning not only helped the school maintain quality, it helped the school with its efforts to improve quality. Northeastern ABSN students went on to achieve equal to—or better than—first-time NCLEX pass rates than the students in the traditional campus-based BSN program.
Resources and Innovation That Are Crucial to Growth

Academic-practice partnership managers can provide schools with the resources necessary to grow, using innovative program delivery methods along with providing the funds to break through current barriers.

For instance, the partnership manager helps schools recruit and vet didactic and clinical faculty and pays all the up-front costs for the equipment and space needed to accommodate greater enrollment. Academic-practice partnerships also alleviate the complexity of securing and managing clinical rotations for students—the partnership manager brings a dedicated health care partner or partners to the table that secure all placements for students in the program in exchange for access to an ongoing pipeline of well-prepared graduates.

The academic-practice partnership manager also markets the program in the school’s name, acting as an invisible third party. Using a variety of online and offline channels, the partnership manager recruits qualified students who meet the school’s admissions standards, and guides those students through the enrollment process. The partnership manager absorbs the cost and the time it takes, and provides the school with highly qualified applicants.

Guaranteed Clinical Placement

Innovative academic-practice partnerships guarantee clinical placement, which takes away the burden from schools. The partnership manager brings the hospital partner to the relationship for the clinical placements for in-hospital practice with real patients under the supervision of existing RNs.

Additionally, the partnership manager also provides space and equipment for skills and simulation labs at an off-campus learning center. Here, the students practice skills on medical manikins in a simulated environment.

“We have an outstanding online learning program that improves our quality, and Orbis continues to deliver more high-quality students, faster, than we could ever do on our own.”

- Steve Cramer, Northeastern University

More Clinical Space, More Nursing Students

Another significant benefit for the nursing school was connecting with more clinical placements—something that had always been a struggle. “There’s so much competition in this area for clinical space, and our students were driving all over the place,” Cramer said. “Orbis got us in the door and gave us more clinical sites, which means more students.” Orbis also used its expertise to recruit the right students who would thrive in the program. The results were even better than Cramer anticipated. “Back in 2012, we hoped to grow our typical ABSN cohort size to 72 students in five years,” he noted. “We got there in three years.”

Incremental income for Northeastern University’s School of Nursing main campus since partnering with Orbis is between $4.5 and $5 million annually.

The Ideal Partnership

Cramer feels that the results speak for themselves. “Our engagement with Orbis is the poster child for what an academic-practice partnership should be. Both sides are very happy,” he explained. “We have an outstanding online learning program that improves our quality, and Orbis continues to deliver more high-quality students, faster, than we could ever do on our own.”
Benefits for Colleges and Universities

Substantial Incremental Income

A third-party academic-practice partnership can bring schools substantial incremental revenue and profit. The hybrid ABSN learning model removes barriers so that inherently cost-intensive health care programs can turn into growth engines for the university.

With the accelerated, hybrid-learning model, schools are not only able to scale their nursing programs and increase enrollment; they can do so with no incremental cost and with no negative impact on their existing programs. Colleges and universities benefit from a revenue-sharing agreement with the partnership manager that provides a recurring incremental revenue stream entirely independent of tuition increases, endowment income, or fundraising efforts. (Such a revenue stream can fund other strategic initiatives that support the institution’s mission.)

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<th>4-YR BSN</th>
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<td>Increased Pipeline over 4-Year BSN</td>
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*Cohort size varies by market, partner, and graduation rate.
Marketing, Recruiting, and Prerequisites

An academic-practice partnership manager can also work with the college or university to offer students online nursing prerequisite courses under the school’s brand. These prerequisites produce incremental revenue and profit more quickly. The academic-practice partnership manager also absorbs the cost and time it takes to market the program, recruit qualified students, and counsel those students through the pre-enrollment process to present qualified candidates to the school’s admissions teams. Typically, the partnership manager’s marketing department is well-versed in using a variety of online and offline channels that reach adult learners, which can result in increased brand awareness for the university overall.

Maintain (and Improve) Academic Quality

Academic-practice partnerships bring more than transformative enrollment growth—they bring robust and interactive online courses that use the latest e-learning technologies while offering comprehensive faculty support. When Northeastern University entered into an academic-practice partnership, their new ABSN program leveraged more than 600 interactive online learning modules for nursing that had been developed by the partnership manager. The right academic-practice partnerships bring smart recruitment strategies and enrollment advising that yield top-quality, pre-vetted candidates. Academic-practice partnerships also significantly increase educational access, up to 200 or more students a year vs. 30 to 40, so schools can finally meet the health care industry’s demands.

Schools can maintain and improve academic standards while tapping into the gold mine of qualified waitlisted students and the adult learners who are more committed to success. Additionally, with the right partnership, the first-time NCLEX pass rates for students from hybrid learning programs can be much higher than the national average. Orbis partnerships frequently result in pass rates of 95% and above, with some cohorts achieving 100%.

Giving Access to More Diverse & Dedicated Nursing Students

One of the most positive aspects of an academic-practice partnership is that it brings the school highly qualified, diverse nursing students who might have otherwise remained overlooked on the waitlist due...
OVERCOMING ENROLLMENT GROWTH BARRIERS

Health Care Education Report

The graph represents the number of nursing students accepted into a program compared to the true pool of qualified students. Less than half of qualified nursing applications are admitted. Almost a quarter of applications are qualified, but denied due to lack of nursing school seats. However, there are also Career Switchers and Non-Traditional Students who can become qualified candidates, but are not pursued by traditional nursing programs. (In other words...lost nursing potential.)

Outstanding Student Experiences and Outcomes

Hybrid ABSN programs provide an excellent student experience, part of which stems from the added flexibility and access. The academic-practice partnership manager provides a robust, engaging online learning platform with 24-hour support for students and faculty.

Partnership managers also offer comprehensive resources for student support and retention. The partnership manager assists the school with providing academic support and resources throughout the entire program, not just before enrolling. Schools see the results in higher graduation rates.

Producing Well Prepared, Practice-Ready Nurses for Local Employers

With an academic-practice partnership model, students learn using facilities, resources, equipment, and instructors that prepare them to be practice-ready at key area employers. While at the health

Diverse, Mature, Well-Prepared Students

"With the ABSN program, Orbis was able to deliver a diverse group of nursing students," Dr. Siccardi said. “These are second-degree or advanced standing students who are more mature and well prepared for the rigors and pace of the ABSN. They make great nurses, and hospitals can see that while the students are still in nursing school.”

A Living, Breathing Partnership that Works

Given all of the parties involved—from faculty to administration—the Orbis partnership has required a constant stream of contact between Orbis and Marian. “With Orbis, when I saw something that needed to change, or just saw a new need, we talked about it,” Dr. Siccardi explained. “The outcomes of those conversations were always good due to mutual trust and respect. Ideas are always welcome, and everyone is honest.”

Marian continues to work with Orbis as it expands the nursing program, both in Indianapolis and in its newest satellite location in Nashville. The biggest problem Marian faces now? Keeping up with the growth. “Our program has increased so rapidly we had to slow it a bit,” Dr. Siccardi said. “The scope of growth we’ve achieved since our engagement in 2009 is beyond what we expected.”
care partner’s facilities during clinical rotations, students gain valuable, real-life experience and skills as well as early exposure to the health care partner’s specific way of doing things, which leads to better graduation rates and higher job placement rates. When nursing schools enter an academic-practice partnership with an experienced partnership manager, graduation rates are often 90 percent or above, while job placement rates after licensure are well above industry averages.

It is not just about students making connections after graduation. Students graduate with more tangible opportunities than many of their counterparts in traditional programs due to the close relationship with the health care partners. With early exposure to possible future employers through their clinical rotations, many students find their “home” while they are still in school. Working with experienced nurses employed by that health care partner and learning that organization’s unique procedures and tools gives the students a real sense of “family” and security.

Growth Plus More School Brand Recognition

The academic-practice partnership also enhances and expands the school’s brand by using new channels to market the program to prospective students. For instance, most traditional universities have limited or no experience using sophisticated digital channels to market their programs, whereas the partnership manager can also help the school to bring its program—and thus, its brand—to new geographic markets.

The third-party academic-practice partnership manager typically advertises and markets for the nursing program while remaining invisible to students and the public, essentially acting as “ghost marketers.” Prospective students see only the school brand and are unaware there is a third party involved in program delivery. Every interaction the student has with the partnership manager is the same as interacting with the school itself.
Benefits for Health Care Partners

Reduced Orientation & Onboarding Costs

Academic-practice partnerships with a third-party partnership manager can reduce hospital and health care facility orientation and onboarding costs by making students practice-ready. Hospitals and health care facilities have been forced to spend countless dollars just to get licensed nurses prepared with the appropriate skills to work in their facilities. *With an academic-practice partnership, practice-ready education happens while nurses are still in school, as part of their curriculum.* As a result, hospitals have access to better-prepared nurses with skills and experience unique to their own organizations, so they can reach the highest standards of care and improve patient outcomes.

A Seat At the Academic Table Without Additional Costs

Another significant benefit for health care partners from the academic-practice partnership is the third-party partnership manager doing all of the legwork and absorbing the cost of producing more nurses. Plus, through this academic-practice partnership, employers can become more influential advocates and leaders of much-needed academic innovation in nursing. (HRSA, 2013)

Steady Pipeline of Practice-Ready Nurses

Hospital-specific clinical experiences give health care providers the opportunity to gain early exposure to new hires and gauge their skills. This way, the health care partner gets priority access to hiring exceptional graduates and a more competitive edge in the market. With the leadership and resources of a third-party partnership manager, along with a hybrid approach to BSN education that increases access through technology, nursing schools can remove the barriers to growth. This approach, in turn, gives hospitals a steady, customized pipeline of RNs familiar with their unique way of doing things.
OVERCOMING ENROLLMENT GROWTH BARRIERS

Health Care Education Report

Schools Gain Substantial Incremental Revenue from Embracing the Academic-Practice Partnership

When nursing schools embrace the academic-practice partnership model, they create a continuous pipeline of top-performing, practice-ready nurses, while bringing incremental funds into their programs. Schools can finally enroll more qualified students—with few-to-no outstanding students on the waitlist because there was not enough room. The third-party partnership manager provides the physical lab space, the up-front capital, the online course delivery, and the hospital partner to guarantee clinical placements, all while ensuring that each accredited school’s standards and practices are not only upheld, but also improved.

The best part for academic administrators is that schools will start seeing the financial impact as soon as a potential candidate registers for his or her prerequisite courses, so the impact on the bottom line is almost immediately evident.

Creating the Right Academic-Practice Partnership

When implementing an academic-practice partnership, it is important to note that not all third-party partnership managers are the same, especially when it comes to ABSN programs. ABSN programs that incorporate online learning allow for transformative growth in enrollment. The hybrid-learning model produces the practice-ready nurses the market demands at a pace that can finally help to outrun shortages in health care facilities. However, implementing a hybrid ABSN program to drive growth requires a partnership manager who is well versed in managing and overseeing such programs. Many partnership managers have expertise with online learning, but in the nursing field, the hands-on, experiential learning components are just as critical and far more challenging to manage.
Why Orbis Education is the Right Partnership Facilitator

Orbis has redefined the partnership between educators and employers and has turned health care education programs into growth engines for universities.

The Orbis model lets colleges and universities grow their health care education program enrollments with top-quality students. Orbis is the only academic-practice partnership manager to link the educator directly to the employer for superior outcomes:

- The school provides the academic expertise and brand recognition
- The health care partner offers quality, job-relevant clinical experiences
- Orbis provides behind-the-scenes program management resources, growth capital, and proficiency

Education Partners Provide Academic Expertise & Credibility

Orbis is the matchmaker between the supply of health care professionals and the demand, providing schools with unique partnerships that solve workforce shortages. Since Orbis’ partners are only non-profit, accredited schools, they bring expertise and brand credibility to health care facilities. Orbis provides a comprehensive recruitment and enrollment service that delivers only qualified candidates who will excel in ABSN and other health care education programs. Dedicated admissions experts do all of the pre-enrollment counseling and legwork to keep students moving forward, and Orbis absorbs the cost of hiring, training, and keeping high-quality advisors.

Fine-Tuned Admissions Management & Funding

Orbis provides the program management skills and funding to deliver increased quantity with superior quality. Using an innovative, finely tuned marketing and admissions process that attracts the right kind of student, Orbis weeds out the applicants who cannot handle the rigors of the health care education program. Orbis’ admissions experts employ a high-touch approach to communicating with potential students and guiding them through the process, unlike what students get in traditional, four-year, on-campus programs.
Additionally, Orbis’ admissions experts know what to ask to identify students who can go the distance and who can meet the school’s set standards. Admissions experts also help prospective students with everything from reviewing their transcripts and their prerequisite classes, to submitting their applications. Since enrollment milestones can seem daunting, admissions experts are there to act as coaches, counselors, and cheerleaders.

**Orbis is an expert at providing education partners with:**

- Online course development/course migration
- Satellite learning center implementation/management
- Clinical placement scheduling
- Marketing and student recruitment
- Enrollment management and student admissions advising
- Student academic support and retention

To learn more about becoming an Orbis Partner, visit us at [www.orbiseducation.com](http://www.orbiseducation.com) or call 317.663.0260

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References


