



A comparison of younger and older students graduated from the baccalaureate nursing program at Montana State University in 1973, 1974, and 1975  
by Karen Elaine Solstad Johnson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF NURSING  
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**Abstract:**

This was a descriptive survey designed to identify differences in characteristics between younger and older students who were graduated from the baccalaureate nursing program at Montana State University in 1973, 1974, and 1975. The sample included all of the 27 older students and 63 randomly selected younger students who were graduated from 1973 through 1975.

The characteristics studied included post-high school employment and education before enrolling in the nursing program, needs and problems as a student, employment after graduation from the nursing program, and career goals. Data for comparison and analysis were obtained through the use of a mailed questionnaire. The findings of the study were based on the returned questionnaires (70% of the older students and 76% of the younger students).

Some differences between the two age groups were identified in relation to: the frequency of post-high school education and employment prior to enrolling in the baccalaureate nursing program; the percent who perceived they made no improvement in study skills; the proportion who identified difficulty in clinical performance during the program; and the number who identified problems relating to family responsibilities during the nursing program. With respect to the other characteristics studied, more similarity than difference between the age groups was noted.

The major conclusion of the study was that, although some differences between the younger and older students were noted, there was generally more similarity between the two age groups than between the individuals within each age group. The differences between individuals within each age group were as great or greater than the differences between the two groups.

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A COMPARISON OF YOUNGER AND OLDER STUDENTS GRADUATED  
FROM THE BACCALAUREATE NURSING PROGRAM AT MONTANA  
STATE UNIVERSITY IN 1973, 1974, AND 1975

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
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of

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## ABSTRACT

This was a descriptive survey designed to identify differences in characteristics between younger and older students who were graduated from the baccalaureate nursing program at Montana State University in 1973, 1974, and 1975. The sample included all of the 27 older students and 63 randomly selected younger students who were graduated from 1973 through 1975.

The characteristics studied included post-high school employment and education before enrolling in the nursing program, needs and problems as a student, employment after graduation from the nursing program, and career goals. Data for comparison and analysis were obtained through the use of a mailed questionnaire. The findings of the study were based on the returned questionnaires (70% of the older students and 76% of the younger students).

Some differences between the two age groups were identified in relation to: the frequency of post-high school education and employment prior to enrolling in the baccalaureate nursing program; the percent who perceived they made no improvement in study skills; the proportion who identified difficulty in clinical performance during the program; and the number who identified problems relating to family responsibilities during the nursing program. With respect to the other characteristics studied, more similarity than difference between the age groups was noted.

The major conclusion of the study was that, although some differences between the younger and older students were noted, there was generally more similarity between the two age groups than between the individuals within each age group. The differences between individuals within each age group were as great or greater than the differences between the two groups.

## Chapter I

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

#### Introduction

As society has grown in numbers, in complexity, and in awareness, it has demanded increased and improved health care. Indeed, society has come to accept health care as a basic right of all, rather than a privilege of those who could afford it.

This demand obviously affected nursing service and nursing education. At the same time that public demand for health care, including nursing services, was increasing there was a decline in the percentage of white, middle-class, female high school graduates--the traditional source of nursing students--seeking admission to nursing education programs.<sup>1, 2</sup>

As the result of a number of research studies, nursing educators became aware of this trend as well as the need to "produce" more nurses. Various steps were initiated to meet this need, including the recruitment of a more

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<sup>1</sup>Stuart H. Altman, Present and Future Supply of Registered Nurses, DHEW publ. no. 72-134, November, 1971.

<sup>2</sup>Jerome P. Lysaught, Abstract for Action, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.

diverse group of students. There is now a greater diversity in professional nursing students with respect to age, sex, marital status, education and experience backgrounds, and career goals. With this in mind the researcher sought to answer the following question: Are there significant differences between younger and older students who were graduated from the baccalaureate nursing program of Montana State University in 1973, 1974, and 1975 in relation to post-high school employment and education, needs as a student, and career goals?

#### Purpose of the Study

It was the intent of the researcher to survey the 1973, 1974, and 1975 graduates of the baccalaureate nursing program at Montana State University to investigate and compare characteristics of younger and older students relating to experiences, needs as a student, and career goals. Identification of significant differences in characteristics between these graduates can assist in planning for recruitment, guidance, counseling, placement, and curriculum development.

#### Need for the Study

Over the past fifty years there have been numerous

studies of nurses and their education and services. These studies have focused on aspects such as the shortage of nurses, personality traits of nursing students, career-patterns, role of nurses, and nursing curricula. Nurses have held meetings, workshops and conferences to discuss, analyze and support (or reject) the findings and recommendations of these studies.

As a result of the focus on the shortage of nurses in relation to the demand for their services, efforts have been made to decrease the attrition rate from nursing education programs,<sup>3</sup> to recruit more students from a broader base of the population,<sup>4, 5</sup> to return inactive nurses to an active, working role and to adjust the work role model.<sup>6</sup>

Along with these efforts within nursing, there have been changes in society which have influenced the present

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<sup>3</sup>Helen A. Cohen and F. Pauline Gesner, "Dropouts and Failures: A Preventive Program," Nursing Outlook, 20 (November, 1972), 723-725.

<sup>4</sup>Patty Hawken, "Developing an Open, Flexible Curriculum," speech presented at NLN-DBHDP meeting in Miami, Florida, November 12, 1970.

<sup>5</sup>Lucretia H. Richter, "Project Late Start," Nursing Outlook, 17 (March, 1969), 34-36.

<sup>6</sup>Virginia Cleland, "Sex Discrimination: Nursing's Most Pervasive Problem," American Journal of Nursing, 71 (August, 1971), 1542-1547.

situation. An increasing number of adults are enrolling in institutions of higher education. More women are combining career and marriage. Classification of jobs by sex is decreasing.

These factors in addition to others are significant to nursing education because they are creating a new profile of the nursing student and graduate. Rheba deTornyay pointed out that

Learning psychologists have demonstrated consistently that learning is a personal matter, that different learners (or the same learner under different circumstances) have different cognitive styles. Therefore, it is essential that we focus on the learner and plan learning experiences with him in mind as a unique individual, capable and eager to participate in decisions about his own learning.<sup>7</sup>

It is important for the nursing educator not only to possess fundamental knowledge of nursing practice that she can impart to students, but also to be aware of what the student already knows, his frame of reference, and his aspirations or goals.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Rheba deTornyay, "Individualizing Instruction in Nursing," Journal of Nursing Education, 11 (August, 1972), 2.

<sup>8</sup>Edith A. Metz and Carol M. McCleary, "Knowing the Learner," Journal of Nursing Education, 9 (January, 1970), 3.

To this end there have been studies on personality traits of students,<sup>9, 10</sup> there have been conferences and articles written on the expanding role of the nurse, and there have been workshops on the concept of an open, flexible curriculum. These activities have contributed to changes in nursing education toward a more open and flexible curriculum and diverse student population.

In a speech presented at a meeting of the National League for Nursing's Department of Baccalaureate and Higher Degree Programs, Hawken defined the open, flexible curriculum as one that capitalizes on students' diverse backgrounds and abilities and one designed to fulfill the students' interests and capabilities as well.<sup>11</sup>

The student brings into the classroom his past learning experiences, attitudes, and intrinsic needs, and the success of the educational process will be directly influenced by these learning characteristics. Therefore, educators must increase their efforts to identify student

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<sup>9</sup>Jerry Adams and Lilyan R. Klein, "Students in Nursing Schools: Considerations in Assessing Personality Characteristics," Nursing Research, 19 (July-August, 1970), 362-366.

<sup>10</sup>June T. Bailey and Karen E. Claus, "Comparative Analysis of the Personality Structure of Nursing Students," Nursing Research, 18 (July-August, 1969), 320-326.

<sup>11</sup>Hawken, op. cit.

characteristics first and then develop educational programs that will heighten and stimulate learning if they are to provide suitable types of learning experiences for students.<sup>12</sup>

### Objectives of the Study

In order to fulfill the major purpose of this study, the identification and comparison of characteristics of the 1973-1975 baccalaureate nursing graduates of Montana State University, the following specific objectives were formulated to direct the study:

1. To identify ages of these graduates at the time of enrollment in the baccalaureate nursing program.
2. To determine and compare post-high school education and employment of these graduates prior to enrollment in the baccalaureate nursing program.
3. To identify and compare their perceived individual assets, needs, and problems as students in relation to:

study skills  
academic program

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<sup>12</sup>Metz, op. cit., 3.

interpersonal relations

personal needs

4. To classify and compare current employment positions of these graduates.

5. To identify and compare career goals of these graduates.

### Assumptions

The following assumptions were basic to the pursuit of this study:

That differences in students' needs and goals have implications for guidance, counseling, placement, and curriculum development.

That the information solicited in the questionnaire described characteristics of students that can be utilized in recruitment, guidance, counseling, placement, and curriculum development.

That the graduates of 1973 and 1974 would be able to recall this information as accurately as the more recent graduates of 1975.

### Limitations

Cause and effect relationships for the differences

or similarities between the identified characteristics were not determined.

Graduates of only one school were included in the sample, and conclusions may not be applicable to students or graduates of all types of nursing education programs.

Characteristics of the graduates which could be compared were limited to the data obtained from the returned questionnaires.

The structure of the questionnaire did not rule out subjectivity in the responses.

#### Definitions

Younger student: a student who enrolled in the baccalaureate nursing program before the age of 23 years.

Older student: a student who enrolled in or transferred into the baccalaureate nursing program at or after the age of 23 years.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Three recent and extensive studies in the field of nursing have aspects relating to this study. They are highlighted here first and referred to later in this review of literature.

One of these studies was conducted by Stuart Altman under a Public Health Service contract from the Division of Nursing, National Institutes of Health, and an Urban Institute University Fellowship. The four years of investigation began in 1967 for the purpose of preparing a comprehensive analysis of the impact of economic factors on the present nurse supply and the projected supply through the 1970's. The report, Present and Future Supply of Registered Nurses (November, 1971), addressed the issues of: present nursing manpower or labor supply, the choice of nursing as an occupation, professional nursing education, and projections about future supply of nurses. Many other studies and reports have relied on the data gathered for Altman's study.<sup>1</sup>

Another notable study was that of the National Commission on Nursing and Nursing Education which reported its

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<sup>1</sup>Stuart Altman, Present and Future Supply of Nurses, DHEW publ. no. 72-134, November, 1971.

findings and recommendations in a volume entitled Abstract for Action published in 1970. This independent and incorporated commission extended from September, 1967 to January, 1970. It focused on four key areas or problems of the nursing profession: supply and demand for nurses, nursing roles and functions, nursing education, and nursing careers. It was noted that

nursing stands at a critical point in American history. Because it is an integral part of the entire health industry, nursing is affected by the entire major movements within our society, in general, and within the health system, in particular.<sup>2</sup>

The third study is a continuing, twenty year, longitudinal study initiated in 1962 by the National League for Nursing to obtain specific information about the biographical characteristics of nursing students, their occupational goals, and their reasons for choosing nursing as a career. The Nurse Career-Pattern Study is intended to assist Congress in developing effective legislation for improving nurse training. The study provides information to date on nursing students in baccalaureate, diploma, and associate degree programs. The four problems identified for study are:

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<sup>2</sup>Jerome P. Lysaught, dir., An Abstract for Action, report of the National Commission for the Study of Nursing and Nursing Education, New York: McGraw Hill, 1970, 32.

1. Relation of type of nursing educational program to subsequent employment.
2. Relation of family responsibilities to nurse's work life.
3. Relation of type of nursing educational program to occupational goals.
4. Characteristics of students who withdraw from nursing education programs.

Data on nursing attrition rates imply that institutional factors need to be identified, studied and remedied to decrease student withdrawals and prevent scholastic failure.<sup>3</sup>

#### Student Characteristics

It has been established by a number of investigators that individuals with different personality characteristics are attracted to different occupations.<sup>4</sup> The following two cited studies used the Edwards Personality Preference Schedule (EPPS) to identify characteristics of students.

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<sup>3</sup>Lucille Knopf, dir., From Student to RN: A Report of the Nurse Career-Pattern Study, DHEW publ. no. 72-130, 1972, 1-42.

<sup>4</sup>June T. Bailey and Karen E. Claus, "Comparative Analysis of the Personality Structure of Nursing Students," Nursing Research, 18 (July-August, 1969), 320-326.

Bailey and Claus concluded

Nursing students from different institutions and different nursing educational programs do not have identical need patterns as measured by the EPPS . . . However a cluster of similar traits appear in all five groups.<sup>5</sup>

Adams and Klein compared six studies regarding personality characteristics of nursing students and graduates. They noted the following consistencies in findings: Nursing students scored higher on the need Deference and the need Endurance scales, and scored lower on the following need scales--Exhibition, Dominance, and Autonomy. Inconsistencies in the findings of the six studies ranged from simple failure to support another to direct contradictions.<sup>6</sup>

Knopf found that practically all students who were admitted to the three types of nursing programs in the samples were women. The highest percentage of men students (4.5%) occurred in associate degree programs in the 1967 sample. The predominant age of entering students in all samples was 18 or 19 years. Married students entering the baccalaureate programs most frequently reported having no

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<sup>5</sup>Bailey, op. cit., 326.

<sup>6</sup>Jerry Adams and Lilyan R. Klein, "Students in Nursing Schools: Considerations in Assessing Personality Characteristics," Nursing Research, 19 (July-August, 1970), 362-366.

children. Baccalaureate students who reported having attended some other nursing program were about equally represented by prior attendance in diploma and baccalaureate schools. Those who had been in practical nursing programs and were now entering a baccalaureate program ranged from 14.0 to 20.0 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Knopf further found that more than three-quarters of all students in all samples were attending a nursing school in the same State in which they had attended high school, and this was usually the State of their home residence. The only geographic mobility reflected in the data is among the baccalaureate students, of whom about a fifth sought their nursing education in a State other than their home State.<sup>8</sup>

#### Attrition

Cohen and Gesner at the Cook County School of Nursing in Chicago where the attrition rate was 45-50 percent in 1968 analyzed exit interviews of five years and identified two key factors: 1) emotional problems from home

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<sup>7</sup>Knopf, op. cit., 7-10.

<sup>8</sup>Knopf, op. cit., 10.

and family situations, and 2) an inability to accept the demands of the nurse's work role. Contributing factors were: lack of basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics and poor study habits. They initiated a three part preventive program of crisis intervention, remedial skills tutoring, and motivational or achievement group meetings. In summary, the researchers said that attrition was not necessarily due to intellectual incapacity. Emotional problems due to grief, remembrance of past trauma activated by nursing clinical situations, and poor basic preparation and study skills were more important factors. Faculty, too, have an effect on students' performance. Therefore, programs to prevent attrition must take all these factors into consideration, if they are to succeed in reducing the present dropout rate.<sup>9</sup>

Katzell approached the problem differently in her study of 1852 students in 43 diploma programs. She compared the expectations and experiences of students who withdrew in the first year against the expectations and experiences of those who remained. The data showed that: Students who

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<sup>9</sup>Helen A. Cohen and F. Pauline Gesner, "Dropouts and Failures: A preventive Program," Nursing Outlook, 20 (November, 1972), 723-725.

remained had experienced more satisfactions, both expected and unexpected, than those who withdrew. It was not the presence of unexpected stresses which was associated with withdrawal, but the absence of expected satisfactions. Students who remained in nursing had more realistic expectations of both the stresses and the satisfactions to be found in nursing than those who withdrew.<sup>10</sup>

Rottkamp noted that

there is usually more than one reason for withdrawal . . . Academic difficulties are related to personal dissatisfactions, physical illness, and disciplinary problems . . . The nursing dropout who has had a lapse of time and experience and later returns to her earlier goal may prove to be the superior student and, later on, the superior practitioner.<sup>11</sup>

### Older Students

Baccalaureate programs were the first to help break down the age barrier. After World War II, the older student became part of the college scene; exclusion from the nursing program because of age seemed unreasonable. Community

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<sup>10</sup>Mildred E. Katzell, "Let's Examine--Student Expectations and Dropouts from Schools of Nursing," Nursing Outlook, 15 (July, 1967), 63.

<sup>11</sup>Barbara C. Torrkamp, "Attrition in Basic Baccalaureate Nursing Programs," Nursing Outlook, 16 (June, 1968) 45.

college programs of the 60's finally gave the older student a place in the sun. Now the older student is not only accepted, but sought and welcomed. Their previous style of education does create some problems for faculty. Ideally the student should be re-educated in current philosophy of education. These students need more specific directions.

Students often bring with them much resentment about past arbitrariness of instructors, exams, and grades, which may be projected into the present situation. Many of these older students have made heavy emotional, social, and financial investments in the nursing program. Passing the course is important, because it may not be possible to try again.

The greatest assets these students bring with them are their maturity and life experiences. The older student often tries to validate her own life experiences, both successes and failures, during the nursing course.<sup>12</sup>

Richter described a campaign of publicity to attract mature women to nursing in Rochester, New York and surrounding counties.<sup>13</sup> Cleland reported conclusions of a

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<sup>12</sup>Alma S. Woolley, "Reaching and Teaching the Older Student," Nursing Outlook, 21 (January, 1973), 37-39.

<sup>13</sup>Lucretia H. Richter, "Project Late Start," Nursing Outlook, 17 (March, 1969), 34-36.

reactivation study relating to career motivation of married nurses. It presented the following premise regarding combining career and marriage:

that employment for married women must be planned as secondary to family responsibility, but satisfying and meaningful within that framework, and the model of male employment need not be the model for the employment of married women.<sup>14</sup>

### Learning

It was previously pointed out that learning is a personal matter, differing with individuals and circumstances.<sup>15</sup> The student brings into the classroom his past learning experiences, attitudes, and intrinsic needs, and the success of the educational process will be directly influenced by these characteristics. Divergence of educational and student objectives is a frequent source of frustration to the learner and the teacher, and it reduces the effectiveness of the educational program. If differences in expectations can be identified by the teacher at the

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<sup>14</sup>Virginia Cleland, "Sex Discrimination: Nursing's Most Pervasive Problem," American Journal of Nursing, 71 (August, 1971), 1542-1547.

<sup>15</sup>Rheba deTornyay, "Individualizing Instruction in Nursing," Journal of Nursing Education, 9 (January, 1970), 2.

classroom level, adaptations can be made toward developing a more realistic learning environment.<sup>16</sup>

The process of identifying the learning characteristics and utilizing the information acquired involves four phases: 1) recognition of the necessity of acquiring information about the student's past educational experiences, 2) acquisition of the desired information, 3) determination of the implications of the data and 4) implementation of the prescribed adaptations. Educators must strive to identify the learning characteristics of the student on all educational levels in order to more fully prepare the student to meet the challenge of his professional future.<sup>17</sup>

#### Open and Flexible Curriculum

Much has been written about flexible curricula, articulation in nursing, career ladders, and upward mobility. Tyler recognized in 1966 that

if we are to develop a more effective curriculum and a more adequate instructional program, we shall need to experiment, because many of the things we are now doing may be less appropriate

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<sup>16</sup>Edith A. Metz and Carol M. McCleary, "Knowing the Learner," Journal of Nursing Education, 9 (January, 1970), 3, 4.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 4, 9.

for the conditions we now face, and certainly most of the things we are now doing can be improved in some respects, especially in terms of effectiveness.<sup>18</sup>

Lysaught noted that the benefits from curriculum studies can come only when new patterns are implemented. Based on study and analysis, one can hope for varied but useful approaches to nursing education and to effective articulation among the institutions involved.<sup>19</sup> He proposed two basic assumptions that should underlie any curriculum proposal. They were:

a) The acceptance, as a core value of our American culture, that education should be an open-ended process and that access to enlarged opportunities is a right of every individual.

b) As a corollary, care must be taken in curricular planning to avoid unnecessary impediments before or between collegiate programs in nursing that would inhibit the orderly transfer and acceptance of qualified individuals who wish to pursue higher career goals.<sup>20</sup>

Hawken defined the open, flexible curriculum and identified some means for permitting flexibility in a

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<sup>18</sup>Ralph W. Tyler, "Curriculum--Challenge for Experimentation" in Nursing Education--Creative, Continuing, Experimental, New York: National League for Nursing, 1966, 5.

<sup>19</sup>Lysaught, op. cit., 117.

<sup>20</sup>Lysaught, op. cit., 116.

curriculum plan. She recognized the following problems and challenges for the teacher:

1. motivating a diverse group of students to become self-directed.
2. providing valid means for assessment.
3. deciding how much of the nursing courses the student can complete through proficiency exams.
4. having faculty available to supervise the clinical assessment.
5. deciding the length of time one may spend in a decelerated program.
6. keeping up with the student is the most crucial and important challenge<sup>21</sup>

### Recruitment

The increasing availability of college to more and more young people, and the ever-widening opportunities for women in the traditionally masculine business and professional fields have an impact on the recruitment into nursing.<sup>22</sup> The conventional agencies for recruitment into all the professions are the academic institutions that prepare the future practitioners. In view of the magnitude of the current problems in nursing, the educational

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<sup>21</sup>Patty Hawken, "Developing an Open, Flexible Curriculum," speech presented at NLN-DBHDP meeting in Miami, November 12, 1970.

<sup>22</sup>American Nurses' Association, A Position Paper: Educational Preparation for Nurse Practitioners and Assistants to Nurses, New York: American Nurses' Association, 1965, 13.

institutions need help in developing public understanding about the opportunities and needs for nursing students.

In view of the growing need for more nurses and the current decline in the choice of a nursing career among students who have traditionally supplied the bulk of the manpower, whole new groups must be drawn into the recruitment effort. These could include: the disadvantaged and minority groups, practical nurses, older women, and men.<sup>23</sup>

Knopf reminded that schools recruiting older and/or married students must be aware that family responsibilities occupy an important part of the student's life. Schedules and other areas of the curriculum need to be flexible enough to retain these students. With the proliferation of health careers and many changes in nursing itself, nursing must be reinterpreted to prospective recruits and to the lay public.<sup>24</sup>

#### Expanding Role of Nursing

In the last several years, significant changes have occurred in the practice of nursing. It has a strengthened scientific basis. Nursing care is given more and more by specialists in short,

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<sup>23</sup>Lysaught, op. cit., 136-140.

<sup>24</sup>Knopf, op. cit., p. 41.

intensive periods in hospitals and in long-term follow-up periods in out-of-hospital facilities. Specialization has deepened in such clinical areas as coronary care, neurology, renal disorders, kidney dialysis, midwifery, and rehabilitation therapy. Not only are the changes taking place in the many varieties of clinical specialties, but also within whole categories of patient care--pediatrics, geriatrics, care of the chronically ill, intensive care, and rehabilitation care. New and broader nursing roles also are emerging in out-of-hospital areas where health services have heretofore been neglected, as in neighborhood health centers, school health, and in programs aimed at the prevention of illness and the maintenance of health.<sup>25</sup>

Lysaught summarized the ideas about the nurses' role thus:

There are some things we can predict with certainty about the future role of the nurse. It will undoubtedly be more complex, more broad, and more varied than it is today--and it will most likely involve far greater degrees of independent judgment and action. This role development will stem from the growth of the population and the critical shortage of physicians. The public and the other health professions will demand that nurses be utilized at their highest possible level of practice.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Secretary, Health, Education, and Welfare, Report to the President and the Congress, Progress Report on Nurse Training--1970, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, August, 1970, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Lysaught, op. cit., 158.

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to identify and compare selected characteristics of younger and older students who were graduated from the baccalaureate nursing program at Montana State University in 1973, 1974, and 1975. It was assumed that identification of significant differences between the characteristics of these students could assist in the planning for recruitment, guidance, counseling, placement, and curriculum development.

The population for this research study consisted of the 1973, 1974, and 1975 graduates of the baccalaureate nursing program at Montana State University. Students who were registered nurses at the time of enrolling in the baccalaureate nursing program were excluded from the sample. In addition to age, their previous education and experience in nursing might have been significant factors in influencing their needs as students and their career goals.

The names of the graduates were obtained from the commencement programs. The birthdates and dates of enrollment were obtained from the files of graduates in the School of Nursing.

The sample included: 1) all 27 of the 1973, 1974,

and 1975 graduates who enrolled in or transferred into the baccalaureate nursing program at or after the age of 23 years; 2) 63 randomly selected graduates from 1973-1975 who enrolled in the baccalaureate nursing program prior to the age of 23 years. A total sample size between 75 and 100 was desired. Sixty-three was approximately one sixth of all the younger students. The 63 younger students plus the 27 older students made a total sample size of 90.

A questionnaire was developed to elicit data from the graduates regarding:

- 1) education and employment before enrollment in the baccalaureate nursing program.
- 2) aspects of individual needs and problems as a student
- 3) employment following graduation from the baccalaureate nursing program
- 4) career goals in relation to employment and education.

The questionnaire was tested on ten registered nurse students from the 1973, 1974, and 1975 graduating classes of the baccalaureate nursing program at Montana State University.

The questionnaire with an introductory letter (see

Appendix A) and a stamped, self-addressed envelope was mailed to each of the 27 older students and 63 younger students in the sample. The addresses of the graduate were obtained from the files of the School of Nursing or the Alumni Office. If the questionnaire was returned to the researcher as nondeliverable to the address indicated in these files, a questionnaire was then sent to the graduate in care of his parents' address when such an address was available.

If the mailed questionnaire was not returned by the graduate within a month, a follow-up letter was sent to the graduate (see Appendix A). Of the 27 older students in the sample, 19 completed and returned the questionnaire (70.4%). A deliverable address was not available for three of the older graduates and the remaining five did not return the questionnaire to the researcher.

Forty-eight (76.2%) of the 63 younger students completed and returned the questionnaire. A deliverable address was not available for two graduates and the questionnaire was not returned by the remaining 13 graduates in the sample of younger students.

The analysis was based only on the responses on the returned questionnaires. Data obtained from the returned

questionnaires and not included in this analysis may be found in Appendix B.

The first two questions requested a listing of all formal education and employment following high school before enrolling in the baccalaureate nursing program. As one might expect, responses to question one showed a significantly greater proportion of the older students had some formal education following high school before entering the baccalaureate nursing program than did younger students. Only fourteen of the younger students (29%) indicated any formal education beyond high school prior to enrolling in the baccalaureate nursing program as contrasted with 89.5% of the older students.

Similarly, responses to the second question indicated a higher percentage of older students had had at least some employment experience before entering the baccalaureate nursing program. Only one of the nineteen responding older students indicated no paid work experience as contrasted with eleven of the 48 younger students. There was a wide diversity in types of work experiences reported by both groups. In both groups of students, experience as a nurse's aide was the most frequently identified job in related health occupations. Nine or 47 percent of the

older students had been employed in a related health occupation prior to entering the baccalaureate nursing program; whereas, only fourteen or 29 percent of the younger students had been employed in a related health occupation.

Organization of time and use of the library were identified more frequently by younger students than by older students. However, more of the older students felt they had difficulty understanding assignments than did the younger students. Table 1 shows the percentage of students who indicated difficulty in each aspect listed. The problems are listed in the order they appeared on the questionnaire.

Table 1  
Problems in Study Skills

Problem	% of students	
	younger	older
Reading ability and comprehension	27.1	26.3
Organization of time	47.9	26.3
Use of the library	18.8	10.5
Understanding assignments	2.1	10.5
Relevant notetaking	29.2	31.6
Ability to concentrate	41.7	47.4
Other aspect of self-discipline	14.6	26.3
No problem perceived	2.1	0

More than half of the students felt they improved their study skills during the program through their own effort. In comparing the younger and older students, they perceived the assistance of others as influencing their improvement in about equal proportions. However, nearly one-third of the older students said they made no improvement regarding their problems of study skills during the program, as contrasted with only one-eighth of the younger students making a similar response. Their responses, given in Table 2, are listed in the order they appeared on the questionnaire.

Table 2  
Perceptions Concerning Improvement in Study Skills During the Nursing Program

Student's perception	% of Students*	
	younger	older
No improvement in study skills	12.5	31.6
Improved through own effort	56.2	57.9
Improved through own effort and with the assistance of:		
nursing instructors	8.3	10.5
non-nursing instructors	4.2	5.3
fellow students	29.2	26.3
added other	2.1	0
Did not check any response	2.1	0

\*percents total more than 100 because some respondents checked more than one response

Question five related to the academic program and asked if they had difficulty in any of the following areas: non-nursing courses, nursing courses, or clinical performance. Clinical performance was perceived more frequently as an area of difficulty by older students than by younger students. Chemistry was the most frequently specified non-nursing course by both groups of respondents.

Table 3

## Area of Perceived Difficulty in Academic Program

Area	% of Students*	
	younger	older
Non-nursing courses	29.2	31.6
Nursing courses	18.8	15.8
Clinical performance	10.4	31.6
No difficulty perceived	45.8	36.8

\*percents total more than 100 because some respondents checked more than one response

The majority of students in both age groups felt the assistance received in the academic program from faculty was adequate or more than adequate for their needs. One-fifth of the older students felt the assistance from faculty was less than adequate. Thirty percent of the younger students

























































































