Preparing international nurse researchers:
An equitable and inclusive PhD program initiative

Adelais Markaki, Karen Heaton, Sigrid Ladores, Edwin Aroke, & Linda Moneyham
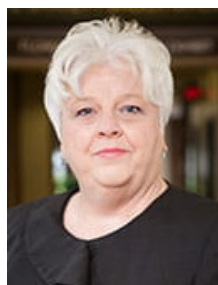
School of Nursing, University of Alabama at Birmingham

ALSN 2023 International Conference

Building Leaders for an Equitable and Inclusive Future

UAB
SCHOOL OF NURSING
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Hyatt Regency Hotel
Oct 28-30, Birmingham, Alabama
http://ALSN.info/Conference

ALSN
Association for Leadership Science in Nursing

CONTRIBUTORS

Adelais Markaki
Director of Global Partnerships & Co-Director, PAHO/WHOCC

Karen Heaton
PhD Program Director (2015-2021)

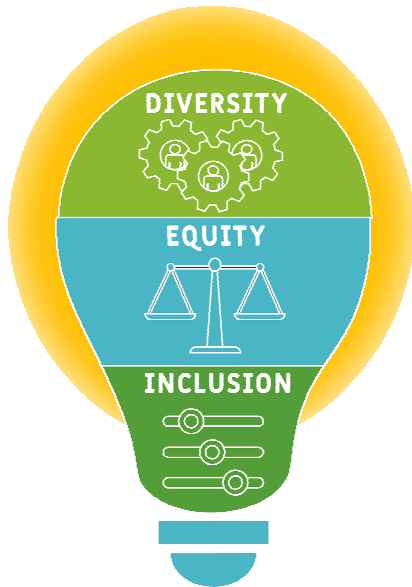**Sigrid Ladores**
PhD Program Director (2021-2022)

Edwin Aroke
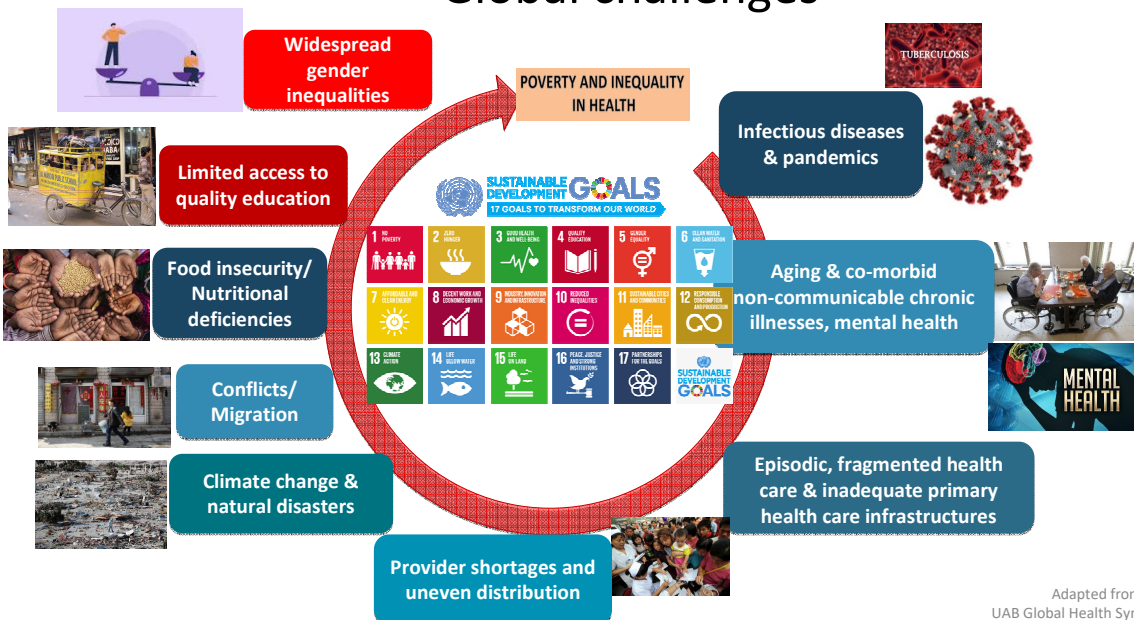PhD Program Director (2022-present)

Linda Moneyham
Senior Assoc. Dean for Academic Affairs

UAB SCHOOL OF NURSING
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

What to expect?

- Rationale for adopting a DEI perspective to tackle global disparities in doctoral nursing education
- Characteristics of an inclusive and equitable research-focused doctoral nursing program
- Main enablers and barriers in recruiting, admitting, and retaining international PhD students
- Lessons learned, future implications

Global challenges

Widespread gender inequalities

Limited access to quality education

Food insecurity/ Nutritional deficiencies

Conflicts/ Migration

Climate change & natural disasters

Provider shortages and uneven distribution

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN HEALTH

Infectious diseases & pandemics

Aging & co-morbid non-communicable chronic illnesses, mental health

Episodic, fragmented health care & inadequate primary health care infrastructures

Adapted from: N. Reynolds, UAB Global Health Symposium, 2023

Global Conscience & Response to Challenges

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is *"our shared vision of humanity and a social contract between the world's leaders and the people…A to-do list for people and planet, and a blueprint for success."*
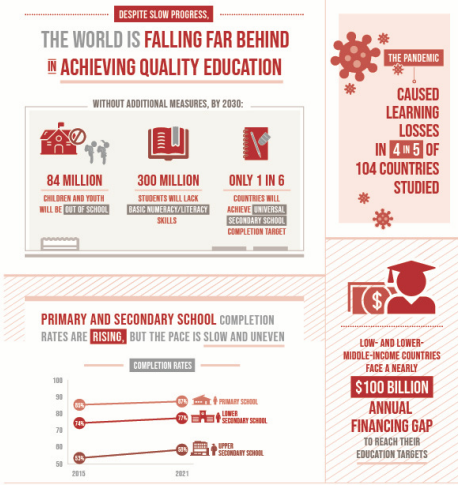
Ban Ki Moon (Former UN Secretary General)

Equity

Diversity — Caring — Inclusion

Commitment

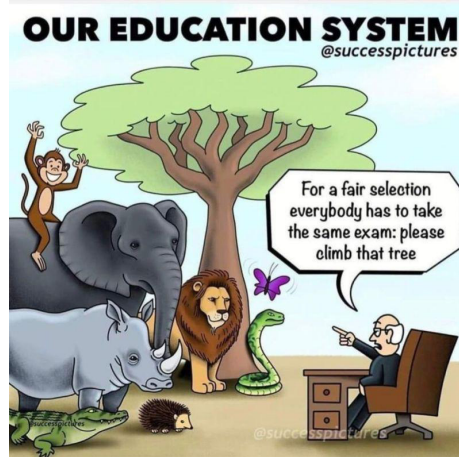# Equity, inclusivity, and diversity - interconnection
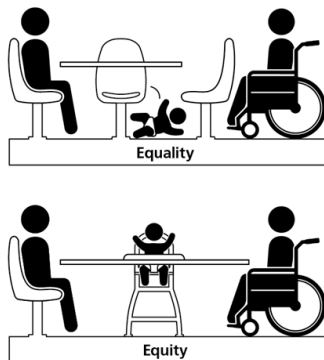
Equality

Equity

"Equity is not just about creating a level playing field for partners to work together, but also means understanding and compensating for inherent inequalities to enable all partners to fully participate and benefit from interactions."

Equitable partnerships in global health research. *Nature Food* **1**, 760–761 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-020-00201-9

Integrating DEI in education

Nursing Education - What is known
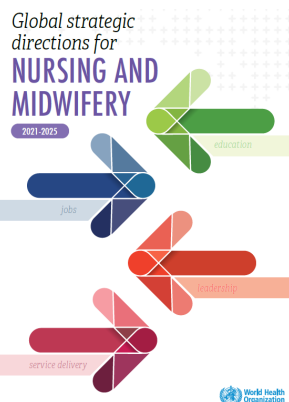
Global disparities in nursing education have come to the forefront since the COVID-19 pandemic and the release of the WHO *Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery 2021-2025* report.

Nursing Doctoral Education - What is known

- Addressing educational inequities for international (and minority) doctoral students is a first step in advancing health equity in academia and beyond.

- The PhD is a research-focused degree that prepares individuals to create, translate, and communicate new knowledge as leaders within institutions of higher education and outside of academia *(AACN-The Research-Focused Doctoral Program in Nursing: Pathways to Excellence)*.

- The *Future of Nursing 2020–2030* report has provided a foundation for achieving the goal of **equity in health and health care**, both in the US and beyond (Wakefield, 2022).

So, what can we do?

At UAB School of Nursing, PhD program leadership initiated a bold academic-service partnership to operationalize an equitable and inclusive initiative that prepares the next generation of international nurse researchers and leaders.

Every 1000-mile journey starts with first steps…

Institutional Commitment to Global Engagement

- Over the last 50 years, UAB is committed to global engagement for faculty, staff and students.
- Providing **world-class education,** sponsoring **international research,** offering **exceptional education abroad experiences** and **cultural exchange** events.
- Since 2016, academic-service partnership with INTO

UAB AND PARTNERS GLOBAL HEALTH SYMPOSIUM

PROMOTING EQUITY IN GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

September 28-29, 2023

To best tackle global problems, we need people with diverse backgrounds and experiences to work collaboratively and innovatively.

(Dean Shadi Martin, UAB Graduate School & Global Affairs)

UAB SON's commitment to global outreach
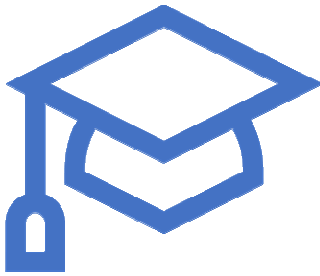
PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centre for International Nursing

THINK GLOBAL ACT LOCAL
BEST PRACTICES AROUND THE WORLD

Global Partnerships

WHERE WE WORK

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD

Project Aim - Goals

Aim:

To diversify the PhD nursing student body and expand opportunities for equitable research-focused doctoral nursing education around the globe.

Goals:

•Describe the structure, process, and outcomes of an innovative international PhD program initiative in the US

•Identify and address enablers and barriers in international PhD student recruitment, ensure academic success, and strengthen retention.

Framework
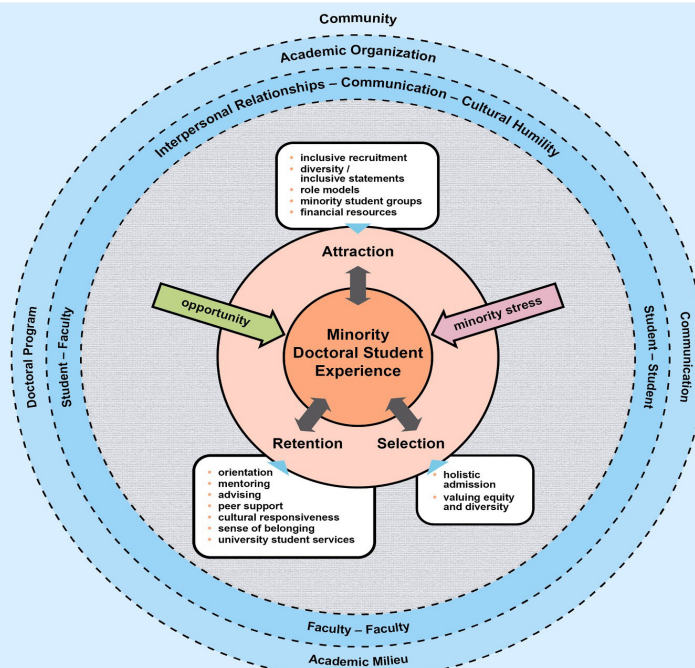
Avery-Desmarais, et. al. (2021). A theoretical framework to promote minority PhD and DNP student success. *Journal of Professional Nursing* 37:1149–1153.

Structure

Through a cross-campus academic-service partnership, SON instituted:

systematic recruitment
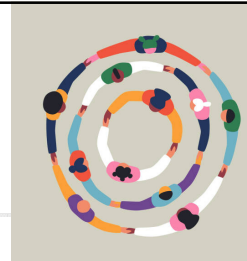
comprehensive evaluation of international applicants

and continuous support of matriculating students

Structure - Partnerships

- Across the university, partnerships with:
  - INTO: an organization specializing in raising student body diversity and expanding international opportunities for faculty
    - offers access to English language programs, academic advising, tutoring, orientation, cultural and other student-life enrichment activities.
  - Graduate School
  - International Student and Scholar Services

- Within SON, the Offices of:
  Academic Affairs, Global Partnerships, Student Success, ORS, and DEI
  spearheaded recruitment, selection, onboarding, and support efforts.

Process

Through collaborative planning and evaluation meetings, we established admission criteria based on language proficiency and transcript equivalency review processes.

Upon review of the application portfolio, an interview invitation or a declination letter was generated.

Qualified applicants were offered direct-entry, one-semester, or two-semester pathways admission, based on language proficiency.

Pathways allowed for seamless progression into the PhD program while receiving immersive training in Academic English.

International students met weekly with INTO tutors, as well as with faculty mentors.

Also participated in monthly PhD student Town Hall meetings, PhD student-led DEI group, and an International PhD Student Group mentoring community.

Process - Recruiting, Training & Supporting International PhD Students

- A growing cohort of 9 international PhD students and 5 graduates
- Representing Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Iran, Nigeria, S. Korea, and Thailand
- Support and mentorship offered in-person and virtually

Outcomes

Since 2019, 15 international students were admitted to the program, compared to only one prior to initiative implementation.

Of the 15 students:
- 4 enrolled through INTO pathways
- 4 came from low-or middle-income countries
- 10 received full funding with stipend
- 4 had funding from home institution

ACADEMIC YEAR	ACCEPTANCES/ TYPE OF ENTRY	COUNTRY	FUNDING
2023-2024	Total: 5 Direct Entry: 3 Two-semester Path: 2	Iran Cameroon Nigeria Colombia Thailand	Blazer Fellowships: 2 GRAs: 2 Home institution funding: 1
2022-2023	Total: 2 Direct Entry: 1 Two-semester Path: 1	Nigeria Thailand	Blazer Fellowships: 1 Home institution funding: 1
2021-2022	Total: 2 Direct Entry: 1 Two-Semester Path: 1	Thailand Colombia	Blazer Fellowships: 1 Home institution funding: 1
2020-2021	Total: 2 Direct Entry: 2	Canada S. Korea	Blazer Fellowships: 2
2019-2020	Total: 3 Direct Entry: 3	Thailand China S. Korea	Blazer Fellowships: 1 GRAs: 1 Home institution funding: 1

Outcomes

To date, 5 students have successfully graduated from the program:

•4 assumed post-doctoral fellowships

•1 returned to faculty position in home institution

All 9 enrolled students are on-track and excelling in their studies.

One student transferred to another institution.

MATRICULATING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (2019-2024)	STATUS
10	9 currently enrolled (2023-2024) 1 transferred to another institution

GRADUATES (2019-2023)	POST-GRADUATION STATUS
5	1 completed post-doctoral fellowship (currently Research Scientist) 3 post-doctoral fellows (in-progress) 1 faculty (at home institution)
TOTAL: 15	

Leveraging partnerships to advance international nursing research, education & practice
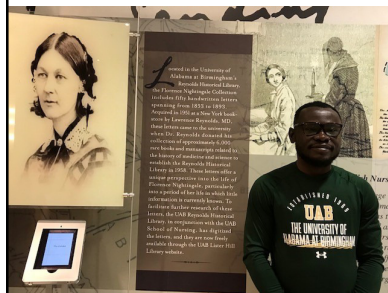
PhD prepared nurses

Resources

Mentoring of future nurse leaders

Investment - Coordination

Predictive elements of academic success

Regular interactions with faculty, staff, and peers who relate to students' backgrounds	Frequent dialogue and sharing of information related to culture, race, and ethnicity	Opportunities for community immersion and participatory experiences related to research and service	Institutional commitment to and respect for varying cultures and values

Collaborative practices and teamwork among students	Institution provides resources and support services to foster student success	Student has personal and authentic connections with at least one campus representative

(Murray, 2017; Museus et al., 2017; Murray & Noone, 2022)

Student testimony

"I want to thank you for supporting international students. Building and keeping the international student group connected has brought us closer to the school. Having such a connection gives us the strength to persevere.

I have met wonderful friends through the group and have learned a lot from them. So, thank you so much for your time and effort in keeping our group thriving."

(PhD, 2023)

Evaluating inclusive structure/process/outcomes

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF AN INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION

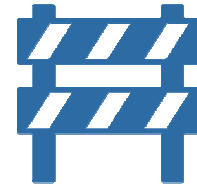| Recruiting, retaining and developing diverse talent	Developing tomorrow's inclusive leaders	Fostering inclusive cultures	Creating unbiased, data-driven processes

Adapted from: Russel Reynolds Associates. (2019). *Diversity and Inclusion: What separates the best from the rest.*

Enablers and Barriers

- Access to institutional/SON resources and funding
- Buy-in from key constituents and players
- Strategies to ensure success and retention of students
- A culturally welcoming campus environment
- Strong champions for building a community of inclusivity

- Logistic challenges
- Scarce funding and human resources
- Developing a holistic admission process
- Mitigating unconscious biases
- Fear of internationalization
- Resistance to change and partnerships

Key Takeaways

- Early findings show that an academic-service partnership facilitates successful recruitment and matriculation, while decreasing the risk of attrition among international PhD students.

- Recruiting and admitting international PhD students requires significant time, effort, funding, and dedicated university resources.

- Students must actively engage with and utilize all support services to optimize their academic successes and adjust to life in another country.

Implications

- Systematic, ongoing support for an equitable and inclusive initiative that prepares the next generation of international nurse researchers is essential.
- Raising awareness and skill levels in cultural sensitivity and inclusivity are paramount for PhD faculty, domestic students, and staff.
- By adopting a DEI approach, research-intensive nursing programs can ameliorate global nursing education disparities in academia and beyond.

UAB SCHOOL OF NURSING
The University of Alabama at Birmingham

PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centre for International Nursing

Looking into the future…

Instead of thinking outside the box, get rid of the box.

THANK YOU for joining!

markaki@uab.edu