

Understanding the Transition, Onboarding, and New Faculty Integration into the Academic Environment: A Scoping Review



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Research brief, November 2024

I. Introduction

The shortage of nursing faculty has been identified as a major bottleneck in preparing new nurses to enter practice and address the overall shortage of nurses.¹ Because nursing curricula do not typically train graduates to assume academic roles, nurses are often hired into faculty positions based on their clinical or research expertise, rather than knowledge of pedagogy, understanding of teaching strategies, or a vision for developing teaching innovations.² Unlike newly licensed nurses onboarded into clinical practice settings,^{3,4} nursing faculty are often left to learn how to be educators on their own, and without mentoring, access to resources, or support for developing important teaching skills.² Subsequently, new faculty often leave the academic environment at a high rate.⁵ Reasons cited for leaving include low pay, high workloads, and conflicting responsibilities.⁶ Also, academic leaders may assume that good clinical nurses make good teachers, which is not always the case.

Emerging discussions in nursing academia suggest that some nursing leaders and faculty recognize the need to provide intentional onboarding to recruit, grow, develop, and retain new faculty.⁷ Yet, little is known about existing new faculty onboarding programs, the status and characteristics of programs, the success of these programs in preparing confident nursing faculty, the metrics used to measure “success,” or whether the programs are effective in retaining faculty. To address these knowledge gaps, this study examines the existence and characteristics of faculty onboarding programs, and the value of the programs in achieving key program outcomes.

Policy Implications

A faculty onboarding program is essential for preparing novice nursing faculty for their academic roles and ensuring a successful transition from clinical practice to academia.

Based on a scoping literature review of 20 distinct studies on new nursing faculty onboarding programs, we found:

- Inconsistencies faculty onboarding definitions, as well as variability in program features and focus.
- Small sample sizes, varying methodologies, and disparate metrics limit study generalizability and utility.

Policy implications of faculty onboarding research span multiple levels:

1. Academic institutions provide relevant and consistent onboarding for all types of nursing faculty hired.
2. Professional nursing organizations, provide supports and resources to academic programs to guide the implementation of onboarding programs.
3. National standards for faculty training should be considered to facilitate faculty movement across state lines.
4. Federal policies should implement, study, and expand faculty onboarding programs to enhance the nurse faculty workforce.

These multi-level policy considerations are crucial for developing effective and sustainable faculty onboarding programs, and for creating conditions to retain faculty.

This work is funded through HRSA Cooperative Agreement #U81HP26495: Health Workforce Research Centers Program.



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II. Methods

This study conducted a scoping review of the literature on new nursing faculty onboarding programs to identify components of existing programs and to answer three questions: 1) How is onboarding defined by academic leaders? 2) What are the characteristics of existing onboarding programs in nursing schools (e.g., program features, guiding framework, format)? and 3) What outcomes are examined to assess the effectiveness of onboarding programs?

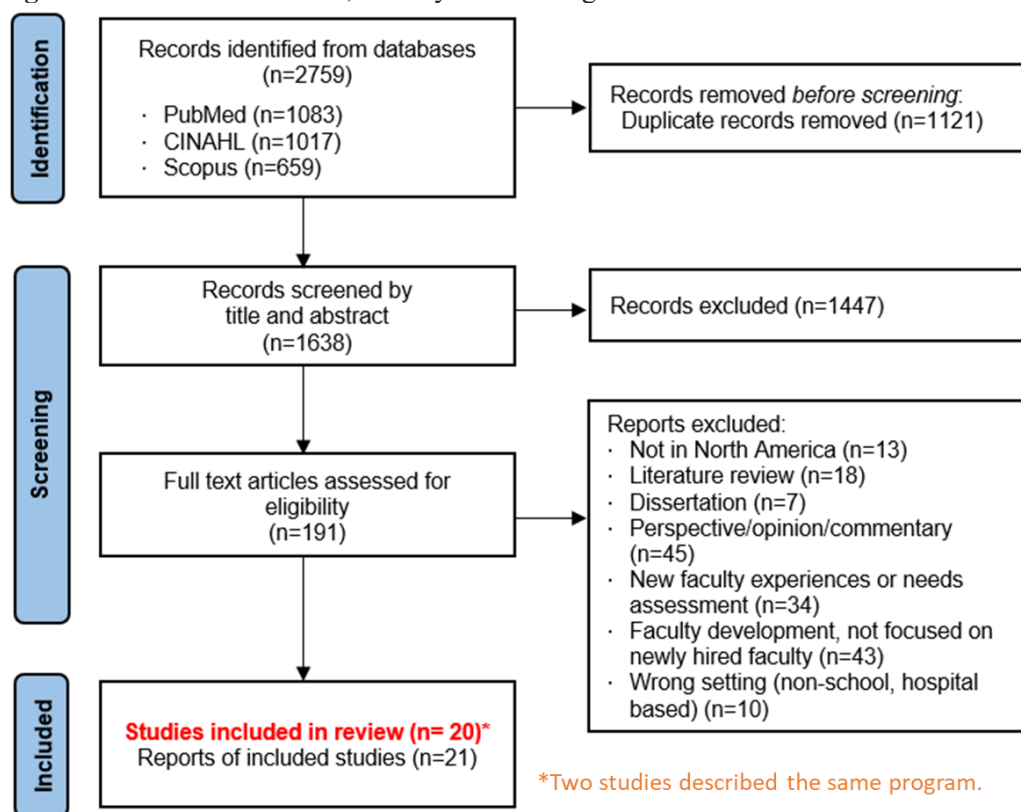
Three databases were used for this review: PubMed, CINAHL, and Scopus. The following key terms were used: ["nursing faculty" OR "nursing professor" OR "nursing instructor" OR "nurse educator"] for nursing faculty, and [("onboarding" OR "orientation" OR "inservice training" OR "on the job training") AND ("junior" OR "novice" OR "new" OR "newly")] for the onboarding program. Other key terms – “career trajectory”, "career development," "professional development," and "faculty development" – were also included because these terms were used interchangeably with “onboarding” for new nursing faculty training. The literature search included articles published from January 2000 through December 2023. Table 1 presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria used for the literature review

Inclusion	Exclusion
▪ Newly hired faculty ▪ New nursing faculty ▪ Academic or educational setting ▪ Onboarding program ▪ Orientation program ▪ Mentoring program ▪ Based in North America ▪ Empirical	▪ Onboarding in clinical settings ▪ Clinical nurse administrators/clinical nurse educators onboarding ▪ Nursing students onboarding ▪ Perspective/opinion/commentary pieces ▪ Faculty development program (not specific to onboarding/beginning of appointment) ▪ Article published prior to 2000

After removing 1,121 duplicates, 1,638 studies remained. Two researchers reviewed all selected manuscripts from this step forward. Of the 1,638 studies, 1,447 were excluded after title and abstract review. Full texts of the remaining 191 studies were retrieved and assessed for eligibility; 170 studies were excluded (Figure 1). The final number of articles was 21, however our final sample included 20 studies of unique faculty onboarding programs because two studies reported complementary findings for the same program.

Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart, Faculty Onboarding



III. Findings

Most studies identified were reports of faculty onboarding programs from individual organizations (n=20). These reports included quality improvement projects (n=3), educational innovations (n=2), and research briefs (n=2). Most studies did not specify the research design or methods used (n=13). Many of the included articles were qualitatively focused (n=16), including reports of data collected from interviews with nursing faculty, or from open-ended questions on surveys. There were two reports that used online surveys and two that used a mixed methods approach. All nursing faculty onboarding studies were in the United States, and most were conducted at public institutions (n=13). Sample size in terms of numbers of nursing faculty participating ranged from 3 to 29 nursing faculty, with a median of 15 participating new faculty.

Definitions of “onboarding”. There was inconsistency in how studies classified and defined faculty onboarding. Some programs included an initial orientation for new faculty that, in some cases, extended beyond the first few days of a faculty member’s appointment, while others mentioned formal and informal mentoring programs that spanned a longer period of time such as the first year of faculty appointment or during the time leading up to

tenure review. Other examples were more self-directed for a new faculty member, including the use of a handbook for new faculty onboarding or additional training available through an online learning management system. More recent studies included used the terms “onboarding orientation” and “onboarding program.” One definition described onboarding as “the integration of onboarding, orientation, and mentorship processes to enhance faculty support and overall retention.”^{8(p408)} Another defined it as “a program designed to provide ongoing education, mentorship, and support for novice clinical faculty.”^{9(p147)}

Key program features. Very few studies (n=6) reported using a guiding framework as a basis for the onboarding program, despite recommendations from leading organizations about the importance of and approaches for integrating and onboarding new faculty. Examples of frameworks that were found included principles of adult learning theory (n=1), Benner’s novice to expert framework (n=1), Meleis’ transition theory (n=1), the National League for Nursing (NLN) Core Competencies for Nurse Educators (n=2), and the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) competency (n=1).

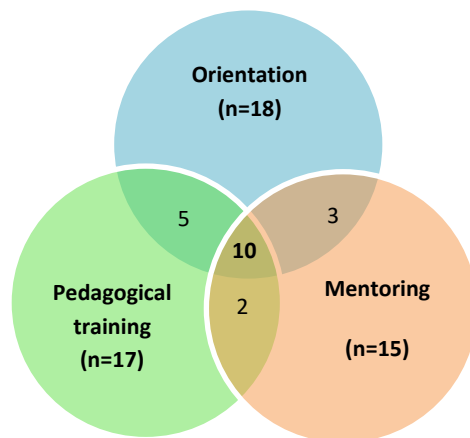
The studies reviewed focused on two categories of faculty: tenure-track and non-tenure track. Tenure-track included full-time faculty only, while non-tenure track included full- or part-time clinical and adjunct faculty. Among the 20 studies on faculty onboarding, the type of faculty being onboarded varied. The largest group was clinical/adjunct faculty (n=6). Within this group, two studies each were dedicated to part-time clinical/adjunct faculty and online adjunct faculty. Four focused on tenure-track faculty, while one emphasized full-time faculty. Additionally, one study focused on nurse practitioner faculty, some examined all types of faculty members (n=4), and some did not specify the type of faculty being onboarded (n=4).

Most studies did not specify when the new faculty onboarding program started (n=16). However, among those that did provide this information (n=4), all programs preceded the faculty member’s first semester. Most programs lasted one year (n=12). Programs were led by various individuals in schools of nursing. The most common faculty involved in the onboarding programs included a designated faculty member (n=5), a school of nursing committee member (n=3), nursing administrator/leader (n=3), or senior faculty member (n=3).

Based on the literature review, orientation, pedagogy, and mentoring were included in the faculty onboarding definition and analyzed the program features within these three domains. Because the programs represented by the 20 studies in the review have multiple features, they are represented more than once in the diagram (Figure 2). Ten out of 20 programs included all three features. Five programs included both orientation and pedagogical training, three programs included orientation and mentoring; and two programs included pedagogical training and mentoring

Orientation was typically offered either at the university or department levels in group workshop, in-person, or online formats. Orientation topics included university and department culture and expectations, faculty roles, school resources (i.e., library services, building and offices, technology resources), and program specifics (e.g., numbers of students, curriculum, examinations).

Figure 2. Distinct and overlapping features of faculty onboarding programs



Pedagogical training focused on the development of teaching skills (e.g., lecture vs. student-centered learning strategies), assessment and evaluation strategies, and educational technology resources (e.g., learning management system) available at the university or school levels. Training included not only didactic content but opportunities to engage in teaching practicums to apply their learning.

Mentoring was reported as being both focused in the immediate and spanning time. Immediate mentoring needs include acclimatizing new faculty to the logistics of their new environment and long-term mentoring was assisted faculty with goal setting and/or creating timelines for tenure and promotion. Mentoring differed by institutions, with some programs describing one-on-one mentoring (e.g., new faculty member paired with a senior faculty member). Another program assigned two mentors to new faculty, forming a team of three levels of faculty (tenured, midcareer, and new faculty), tailored to provide guidance and complement where individual faculty members were in their career trajectory. For example, a faculty member in their first academic position might be paired with a midcareer mentor for teaching support, and a tenured mentor for scholarship support. Mentoring was provided in different ways, including peer and role play activities, scholarship review, coaching, socialization, and classroom teaching.

Program outcomes. Most studies (n=19) evaluated onboarding programs based on feedback from participants, including satisfaction with program, program effectiveness, and perceived competency levels for role based on the program. Two studies evaluated student satisfaction with instruction quality through teaching evaluations. One study focusing on clinical faculty included an evaluation of faculty by the agency, the clinical coordinator, and students. Academic achievements of faculty were measured based on the number of conference presentations or manuscript publications, particularly for faculty on tenure track (n = 2). Five studies tracked the retention rates of new nursing faculty, which ranged from 80% to 100% after one or two years. These studies suggest that

onboarding programs for new nursing faculty members are effective in boosting satisfaction, competency, retention, and academic achievements, but small sample sizes, varied methodologies, and differing metrics limit the generalizability and utility of study findings.

◆ IV. Policy Implications

Faculty onboarding, especially for clinical disciplines, has not been well-studied. Existing research shows great variability in program features and focus, depending on types of faculty members hired, such as tenure track, clinical track, or adjunct faculty. This diversity highlights the need for more comprehensive and targeted research and evaluation to better understand and improve the onboarding process for all faculty types.

Most studies are descriptive and cross-sectional in nature, conducted at local levels, and in single sites. Studies were more similar to quality improvement projects, and there was often an unclear definition of what “onboarding” entailed. This ambiguity and lack of clarity and methodological rigor underscores the need for more robust and standardized research to develop more effective faculty onboarding practices.

In general, few “true” faculty onboarding programs were reported in the literature. Although twenty studies were reviewed, this number represents only a few onboarding programs relative to the number of academic institutions in the US, and of those, only a few were based on a guiding framework. Also, only ten programs provided new faculty training to include orientation, pedagogy, and mentoring, all important components of an onboarding program. Additionally, the characteristics of programs included in our review varied significantly based on the focus of the universities, schools, and clinical partnerships of the program. This variability further complicates the understanding, design, and implementation of effective faculty onboarding practices.

Policy implications of faculty onboarding research span multiple levels. At a basic level, all faculty need and deserve a foundational onboarding experience when joining a new academic institution or entering a new role, whether they are a novice or experienced educator. Therefore, academic institutions should strive to provide consistent and relevant onboarding for all types of nursing faculty hired, and all levels of experience in academia. Although specific needs may vary based on individual faculty member experiences and the track into which they are hired (i.e., tenure track, clinical track, and adjunct faculty), knowledge of educational practices, policies, and expectations are essential to set faculty up for success. At the state, regional, and professional levels, organizations such as boards of nursing, the NLN, and AACN should review onboarding requirements and provide necessary supports and resources to programs as they implement onboarding programs. Finally, at the federal level, public education policies should focus on intentional efforts to implement, study, and expand faculty onboarding programs to enhance the nurse faculty workforce. Like nurse residency programs for new graduate nurses, developing programs that support faculty based on evidence could foster recruitment, retention and the career advancement of faculty within academia. These multi-tiered policy considerations are crucial for developing both effective and sustainable faculty onboarding programs, and for ensuring adequate faculty to prepare nurses in the future.

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under Cooperative Agreement #U81HP26495, Health Workforce Research Centers Program. The information, content and conclusions are those of the authors and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.

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