

# Succession Plan for Nursing Academic Program Administrators

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**How to cite this paper:** Carrasquillo, E.M. (2024) Succession Plan for Nursing Academic Program Administrators. *Open Journal of Nursing*, 14, 548-553.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojn.2024.1410038>

**Received:** August 20, 2024

**Accepted:** October 27, 2024

**Published:** October 30, 2024

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## Abstract

Leadership succession in nursing academic programs poses a significant challenge, primarily due to the limited availability of professionals with the competencies required for effective leadership [1]. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the critical factors in succession planning for nursing program administrators. The research objectives include identifying the competencies necessary for academic administrators, assessing the experience of current administrators, and developing a comprehensive succession plan framework. The research uses qualitative methods, including literature review, interviews with nursing administrators, and analysis of existing succession models. Results highlight the importance of integrating strategic planning into succession processes to ensure smooth transitions and organizational stability. Conclusions suggest that a formalized succession plan, incorporating mentorship and leadership development, can mitigate leadership gaps in nursing academia [2].

## Keywords

Nursing Administrator, Succession Plan, Academia

## 1. Introduction

The issue of succession planning in nursing academia has become increasingly pressing due to the growing number of retirements among academic leaders and the national shortage of qualified faculty [3]. Florence Nightingale laid the foundation for modern nursing education, but the discipline has since evolved significantly, especially in response to regulatory frameworks and accreditation standards [4]. Despite these advances, succession planning has remained largely underdeveloped in academia, particularly in nursing programs. As a result, there is an urgent need to

develop a strategic framework for leadership succession to maintain academic excellence and operational continuity. This study seeks to explore the gaps in succession planning for nursing academic administrators and proposes solutions for addressing them [5].

## 2. Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following:

- 1) To assess the current state of succession planning in nursing academic programs.
- 2) To identify the competencies required for future nursing academic administrators.
- 3) To evaluate the experience of current nursing administrators with existing or absent succession plans.
- 4) To propose a comprehensive succession plan for nursing academia.

## 3. Methodology

This study adopts a hermeneutic approach to interpret the experiences of nursing academic administrators with succession planning. The research involves a qualitative method that includes a literature review, interviews with administrators, and case studies from nursing programs in Puerto Rico.

## 4. Literature Review

The literature review focused on the current state of succession planning in nursing academic settings. Studies on leadership development, mentorship, and succession planning from healthcare and academia were analyzed. A gap was identified in the availability of comprehensive succession plans in academic nursing [6].

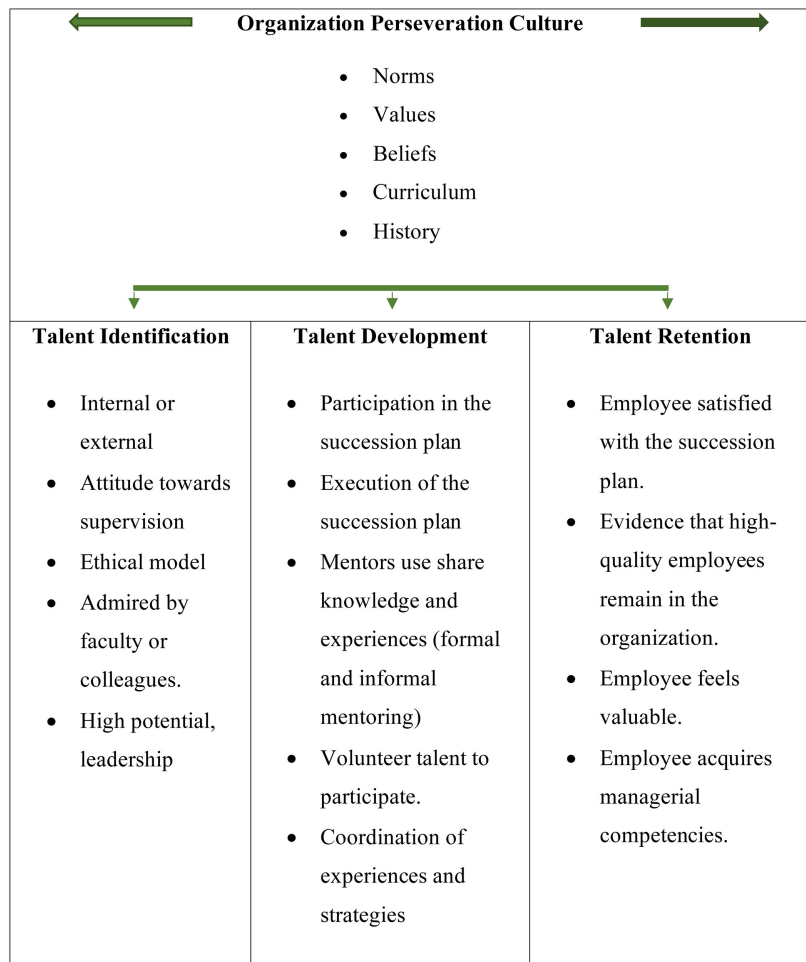
## 5. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nursing administrators from three universities in Puerto Rico. The interviews aimed to explore their experiences with succession planning, the competencies they believe are necessary for future leaders, and their thoughts on how succession planning can be improved.

## 6. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to identify key trends in the data. Key themes such as mentorship, leadership development, and the absence of structured succession planning programs emerged. This analysis helped to shape the final recommendations for a comprehensive succession plan.

To enhance understanding, a technical roadmap was created to illustrate the key stages of succession planning, including talent identification, mentorship, leadership development, and leadership transition (see **Figure 1**).



**Figure 1.** Road map of administrative preservation in nursing.

## 7. Results

The findings from the interviews and literature review revealed several key insights. First, most institutions lacked a formal succession plan, relying instead on ad-hoc mentorship and training programs. This absence of structured planning led to significant challenges during leadership transitions, often resulting in operational disruptions and a decline in educational quality [7].

Participants in the study stressed the importance of mentorship as a critical component of succession planning. They noted that long-term mentorship relationships provided potential leaders with the confidence, skills, and institutional knowledge needed for leadership roles. However, in the absence of formalized succession plans, many leaders had to “learn on the job”, which caused stress and inefficiencies [8].

The research also identified specific competencies that future academic nursing leaders must possess. These include:

- 1) Knowledge of accreditation processes and nursing curricula.
- 2) Budget management skills.
- 3) Competence in leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, which

fosters faculty and student engagement.

4) Understanding of technological advancements, such as online learning platforms and simulation technologies, which are increasingly vital in nursing education [9].

The study also highlighted the need for strategic alignment between succession planning and institutional goals. Succession planning should not be an isolated process but should be integrated into the broader strategic objectives of the institution. This approach ensures that leadership transitions are aligned with long-term institutional growth and development.

## 8. Discussion

The research underscores the pressing need for a formalized succession planning framework in nursing academia. The lack of structured programs poses a significant risk to institutional stability, particularly as many current leaders approach retirement [10]. While some institutions offer mentorship or leadership development programs, these are often informal and lack the consistency needed to ensure effective leadership transitions.

Mentorship emerged as a crucial component of successful succession planning. The findings suggest that mentorship programs should be structured, with clear goals and outcomes for both mentors and mentees. Additionally, professional development should be continuous, ensuring that future leaders are well-prepared for the complexities of the role.

A significant challenge identified by participants is the national shortage of qualified nursing faculty, which exacerbates the leadership gap in academia [3]. This shortage makes it difficult to recruit and retain individuals with the necessary skills to assume leadership roles, further highlighting the importance of succession planning.

## 9. Limitations

This study is limited in scope as it focuses primarily on nursing programs in Puerto Rico. While the findings are likely applicable to other regions, cultural and regulatory differences may affect the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the study's qualitative nature, while providing rich insights, may not capture the full scope of succession planning challenges faced by larger institutions or those in more resource-constrained settings.

## 10. Conclusions

Succession planning is vital to ensuring the long-term success of nursing academic programs. This study has shown that nursing programs need formalized succession plans to ensure smooth leadership transitions and maintain high standards of education. By integrating succession planning into institutional strategies and providing structured mentorship and professional development, nursing programs can prepare future leaders to meet the challenges of academic administration.

The findings underscore the need for a strategic, formalized approach to succession planning in nursing academia. Mentorship, leadership development, and strategic alignment are critical components of successful succession planning. Institutions must also address the national shortage of nursing faculty by actively recruiting and developing leaders from within their ranks.

## **11. Recommendations**

### **11.1. Develop Formalized Succession Planning Programs**

Nursing programs should establish formal succession planning programs that are aligned with institutional strategic goals. These programs should include mentorship, leadership training, and continuous professional development.

### **11.2. Structure Mentorship Programs**

Mentorship should be a key element of the succession plan, with clearly defined goals and outcomes for both mentors and mentees.

### **11.3. Provide Continuous Professional Development**

Institutions should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for potential leaders, ensuring they remain equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to assume leadership roles.

### **11.4. Address Faculty Shortages**

Institutions must actively address the national shortage of nursing faculty by recruiting and developing potential leaders from within their own programs.

### **11.5. Align Succession Planning with Institutional Strategy**

Succession planning should be integrated into the institution's overall strategic planning, ensuring that leadership transitions support long-term institutional growth.

## **12. Implications for Nursing Practice**

The development of formalized succession plans is critical to the future of nursing education. By establishing structured mentorship programs and providing ongoing professional development, nursing programs can cultivate the next generation of academic leaders. These steps will ensure that nursing programs maintain high standards of education and operational continuity, even as current leaders retire.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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