

## How to Help Students Get the Most from an NSNA Convention: What Deans, Directors, and Faculty Need to Know

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Learning, leadership, networking, and national visibility exemplify outcomes of nursing students' attendance at the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) MidYear Conference in November or Annual Convention in April. The NSNA is the largest pre-professional organization in the United States. Its 60,000+ membership includes pre-nursing and nursing students in Associate Degree, Baccalaureate, Diploma, generic Masters, and generic Doctoral programs.

At the MidYear Conference and Annual NSNA Convention, students from across the United States attend plenary sessions and workshops presented by expert nursing leaders. They see their own and their peers' ideas transform into resolutions that become NSNA policy, as they participate in a student congress in the NSNA's annual House of Delegates. They elect a national student Board of Directors who will lead the association. The Exhibit Halls include potential employers and recruiters from academic programs, as well representatives of products that relate to nursing students and health care. Through booths devoted to professional development, students can have professional photographs taken and consult with experienced advisors about résumés and attaining career goals.

Attending NSNA's national meetings can be viewed as both simulation and a practicum in leadership for the present and future, and never has NSNA involvement been more important. In 2014, NSNA was among the 21 nursing organizations that formed the Nurses on Boards Coalition with the vision of nurses serving effectively on corporate and community boards and in other decision-making groups. Students who are involved in NSNA graduate already experienced as board members



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and leaders. Attendance at the MidYear Conference and/or Annual Convention brings understanding of boards to the next levels.

A lot takes place at the NSNA MidYear Conference and the Annual Convention. However, many students do not know how to attend a convention, how to be a member of a delegation, how to act professionally at a convention, and how to get the most from the event. Faculty, too, need orientation to their roles as advisors and consultants. Deans, directors, and faculty have

key roles in ensuring the success not only of individual students, but of the entire delegation representing their nursing programs.

### Deans and Directors: Success Begins with You

A thriving chapter and delegation depend upon the support of a nursing program's deans and directors. When deans and directors educate their own faculty about the importance of professional involvement – beginning during the earliest undergraduate days – and communicate strongly that involvement in the NSNA and its conventions are co-curricular activities essential for education of nursing students, faculty are also supportive. *Total school NSNA membership alone does not guarantee that faculty either know about or support NSNA.*

Support for convention attendance from deans, program directors, and faculty

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### More about the authors:

Dr. Schmidt and Dr. Weingarten have witnessed firsthand the impact of NSNA membership and have been involved with NSNA for many years. Both are Sustaining Members and Honorary Members of the NSNA. Along with NSNA's staff, they co-authored the Advisor/Consultant Certification Program under the NSNA Leadership University and helped create the criteria for the NSNA School of Excellence Award.

takes many forms. Dates of the MidYear Conference and Annual Convention can be included on the nursing program's calendar. At meetings and in email and other communications, deans and directors can emphasize the importance of student involvement and the national visibility that comes with attendance at the national meetings. When funds are available, deans and directors may provide some financial support to enable students to attend the MidYear Conference and/or Annual Convention.

Faculty support includes learning about NSNA, encouraging students to be part of the program's delegation, and not penalizing students for their involvement. Choosing test dates that do not coincide with the convention or allowing students to test at different times, providing alternate assignments, structuring assignments based on convention programs, and making time for students to share learning with them and the class upon their return foster both student involvement and respect for faculty. Faculty really do get reputations for impeding or empowering student leaders. Many faculty base assignments on the NSNA's program or count involvement in the convention as an equivalent class or clinical. The NSNA Leadership U website (<http://www.nсна.org/Membership/LeadershipUniversity.aspx>) includes measurable objectives that can be put into a table and aligned with course objectives. Activities at NSNA that will help the students meet those objectives also are included.

### Pre-Convention Preparation

Delegations are selected in many ways. Some schools have specific criteria and then select the delegation by lottery. Some delegations receive all or partial financial support from their chapters or schools. Small delegations may team with larger, local delegations to travel together for company, safety, and economy. Regardless of the method of delegation selection, all students should be in good standing (i.e., not on probation of any kind or experiencing issues that would risk cancellation at the last minute).

Prior to the convention, the chapter president or delegation leader, with the advisor present, should hold a mandatory delegation meeting. Before that meeting, he or she should confer with the chapter's advisor so that an agenda with necessary information can be created.

At the meeting:

1. The names, email addresses, cell phone numbers, and emergency contact names and numbers of everyone in the delegation should be finalized and shared. The delegation leader can set up a text message group (using Google or another service) for easy

communication among the entire group, including the advisor. A delegation can scatter at an airport or get lost easily in a large convention; the instant communication of text messaging minimizes problems.

2. The convention schedule and expectations for participation in convention and chapter activities should be reviewed. Students should realize that if they are being sponsored by their nursing program and/or chapter, they are representing their chapters and nursing programs and "working jobs." They are expected to attend the convention and not simply go to one or two sessions before sightseeing. Everyone can plan for a great time, but the MidYear Conference and Annual Convention are not vacations. Students need to leave the pre-convention and convention delegation meetings clear about their roles and what they will be attending.
3. A Code of Conduct for the delegation should be discussed. For programs that need further information, NSNA's Convention Code of Conduct can be accessed at <http://www.nсна.org/Meetings/CodeofConduct.aspx>. Villanova University's Code of Conduct (see Figure 1) is an example of a chapter's Code of Conduct and can be used or adapted with reference by other chapters. Students also need reminders that elections for the student Board of Directors takes place at the annual convention. They or their peers will be candidates running for office or presenting resolutions. Civility and treating everyone with respect need to be emphasized, especially because students will have been exposed to public, governmental campaigns where vicious and demeaning rhetoric is used. In NSNA, enduring friendships have evolved among people who once ran against each other; everyone will be together in nursing. Emphasizing winning behavior, whether or not someone is elected, teaches career-smart values in NSNA.
4. Both alcohol and professional behavior during the convention and after hours should be addressed. For example, Villanova University travels as a dry delegation that is alcohol- and substance-free, regardless of the age of the students. This policy fosters opportunities for students to know each other and get the most from the convention experience in positive ways. Students appreciate learning about professional behavior and expectations. In a casual culture, serious problems can arise when a group travels to a "vacation destination" and expecta-

tions for behavior have not been communicated and accepted in advance. Advisors also need to be role models for students.

### Getting the Most at the Convention

At the convention, delegation leaders, with advisors included, should:

1. Schedule at least two group meetings each day so that the delegation stays in touch. Students get the most from attending the Opening, Plenary, and Closing sessions, which expose them to nationally-renowned speakers and frame the convention. By attending programs together, the delegation bonds, and the chance of students being left out or not participating decreases.
2. Encourage students to attend Resolutions Hearings and the House of Delegates, even if they are not serving as School Delegates. These events showcase Parliamentary procedure and shared governance in action. Students learn a lot about the process of transforming ideas into association policy through resolutions and how resolutions that become NSNA policy can endure and inspire activities in their own programs. For example, Dr. Cheryl Schmidt's students applied a resolution passed by the NSNA House of Delegates to a health policy assignment in their Community Health class. Dr. Carol Toussie Weingarten's students translated a resolution into ongoing chapter service projects. Students can sign up to speak with the authors of the resolutions at the roundtables before and/or after each Resolution Hearing. There are too many resolutions (60 in 2015!) for every student to talk with every author, but students can discuss the resolutions with their delegations and after the convention, with their classmates.
3. Ensure that students register for and attend the focus or breakout sessions, as many of them are simultaneous. During delegation meetings and in class assignments, they can share what they learned with students who attended other sessions or did not attend the convention. These sessions include speakers on clinical and professional topics that relate to most nursing courses.
4. Encourage students to tour the Exhibit Halls, which are "candy stores" of sweet career opportunities. Recruiters for employment or continued education, book publishers, and representatives of companies producing products for nursing students abound. In recent

years, the convention has been a site for students to exhibit posters based on individual or chapter projects. At every convention, students find jobs and get inspiration for further education in the Exhibit Halls. Students can also meet with expert faculty advisors and consultants at the Career Counseling Center and receive free, individualized help with career planning and résumé building. Students often gather information from the exhibitors to share with classmates when they return home.

5. Encourage students to attend state or regional caucuses, whether or not they are delegates or alternates. The number of delegates is limited; however, delegates represent their delegations and nursing programs. The business of the convention includes all students. Many students who attend are future delegates. Everyone is connected through NSNA, and enduring friendships have been born at the conventions simply because people sat next to each other during the convention's events.
6. Realize that some of the best outcomes of a convention are networks, friendships, and great memories. Convention experiences that specifically promote these outcomes should be planned. For example, the First Night party brings everyone together with music, group dancing, food, and fun. With the 2016 Annual Convention being held in a Disney resort, nearly everyone will want to go to the theme park, and a trip together should be planned. This strategy also promotes students' attendance together at the convention. Disney World offers a reduced rate (\$63 per person) for entry to one park after 4:00 p.m. Thursday evening, March 31, 2016, is open, as is Saturday evening, April 2. Going to the park or visiting other local attractions as a group brings priceless memories. In addition, encourage students to have meals together and with other delegations so people can get to know each other. Delegations usually include students at different levels within a nursing program. Everyone benefits from the advice shared; many a student has been tutored in subjects such as chemistry during convention-related breaks or travel.

### How Faculty Advisors Get the Most

Advisors and consultants, too, need to plan their NSNA experience, including goals related to networking and learning. Both the MidYear Conference and Annual Convention offer opportunities for advisors

## Figure 1. Villanova University's Chapter of the Student Nurses' Association of Pennsylvania (SNAP-Villanova): Convention Code of Conduct

Congratulations on being a member of SNAP-Villanova's convention delegation! The conventions are a wonderful way to be involved and inspired, to get to know people, and perhaps to find your future job or career path. The conventions are professional events that bring education, professional development, and the chance to build networks and friendships. While many of the conventions are in great locations, they are not "vacations" or opportunities to spend the time away from Villanova in non-convention activities, although at times the group may choose to include visits to areas of interest as part of the convention experience. *Please realize that in choosing to be part of SNAP-Villanova's delegation and to have expenses paid by SNAP-Villanova, you are also agreeing to comply with the chapter's Convention Code of Conduct.* Examples of expected conduct are included below.

### Pre-Convention

1. After notification of selection as a delegation member for convention, all attendees are expected to independently register and send their confirmation page via email to the SNAP-Villanova President. Delegation members are also responsible for providing all emergency contact information and phone numbers at least one week before departure for convention.
2. A phone chain buddy system will be in place to ensure that all delegation members wake up on time and report to the buses or other vehicles for group transportation.
3. All delegation members must arrive on time. Anyone who is unable to come, MUST notify the SNAP-Villanova President (delegation leader) and/or Advisor. Anyone who is late or simply does not come risks being left behind and perhaps being asked to reimburse the chapter for lost expenses related to being a "no show."
4. Delegates are encouraged to travel in Villanova attire; however, for the duration of convention, appropriate business/business casual dress is required unless certain events state "casual" attire. As with any professional situation, no low-cut shirts or mini skirts (women) or pants that expose midriffs or undergarments. If you look appropriate for a professional convention, you will have the best opportunities.

### Convention

1. Delegation members are expected to attend *all* mandatory workshops while at convention. Delegates are expected to attend all meetings of the House of Delegates.
2. Delegation members are expected to participate actively in Villanova's meetings at the convention as well as state caucuses. Experienced delegation members should assist new members in feeling welcome and in learning how to experience a convention. New members should take the initiative to get to know other members of the SNAP-Villanova delegation. Everyone should take the opportunity to get to know the members and advisors of other delegations and to meet the exhibitors in the Exhibit Hall.
3. Delegation members are expected to educate themselves about issues and candidates and to master the process of a convention.
4. Villanova's delegation is a dry delegation as students are representing Villanova University. Drinking alcohol or use of any illegal substance in any form will result in dismissal from the convention and perhaps requirement that the person reimburse the chapter for his/her travel and hotel expenses. Nothing should be charged to the hotel room (including mini bar and room service).
5. All delegation members are expected to act in a professional and respectful manner at all convention activities, as they are representatives of Villanova University. This includes social networking in person and online, as well as the elections. Candidates for office just by running for office show support for the association. At no time should delegation members speak disrespectfully to or about candidates. While people may not be elected to office, they should not have a "losing" experience. Problems should be reported without delay to the President (delegation leader) and/or Advisor.
6. For safety reasons, delegation members should stay with each other and be sure to let SNAP's President and/or Advisor know if they will be away from the hotel or convention site.
7. Any problems that arise at the convention should be promptly communicated to SNAP-Villanova's President (delegation leader) and Advisor.

to get to know their students as future colleagues. A strong working relationship and communication between the delegation's leader and the faculty advisor promote success all around. Faculty members are viewed as role models, whether or not they choose to be. They need to be present and to present themselves in ways that represent their delegations and nursing programs well.

The MidYear Conference and Annual Convention include special programming for chapter and state advisors and consultants. Few chapters have more than one advisor. Some states or chapters have strong associations; others are forming or struggling. All have issues and challenges related to an ever-changing membership and advising a student association. Informal breakfasts and scheduled ses-

sions, led by the Consultants to the NSNA, allow faculty to network, to have questions answered, and to learn more about advising a chapter or state constituent of NSNA and fostering leadership. The convention also offers professional development programs for continuing education credit.

Deans, directors, and faculty advisors have a tremendous impact on the careers of their students and on the future of the nursing profession. Understanding the benefits of involvement in NSNA and supporting students' attendance at NSNA's MidYear Conference and Annual Convention help students, faculty, and nursing programs get the most from the experience. Ultimately, the nursing profession and health care benefit greatly. **DN**

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## National Student Nurses' Association, Inc. (NSNA) 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention Disney's Coronado Springs Resort March 30 – April 3, 2016

### Faculty, Consultant, & Advisor Schedule

Faculty are invited to join over 3,000 nursing students at the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual NSNA Convention, where they can network and earn contact hours. In addition to 10 sessions offering contact hours and opportunities to save on registration fees by volunteering in the Career Counseling Center, there will be a pre-conference program that focuses on Interprofessional Education (highlighted here). See [www.nсна.org](http://www.nсна.org) for complete details.

### Wednesday, March 30, 2016

8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### Faculty Pre-Convention Workshop (Special Registration Required)

**Going Back to the Future – Creating Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice Opportunities at All Levels of Nursing Education**

(Earn 6.0 contact hours)

High quality patient care is best delivered by health care practitioners who effectively communicate and utilize the “team decision-making approach” to solve patient/client/person care issues. Accrediting agencies are now requiring that schools educate and engage in interprofessional education and collaborative practice initiatives. At the conclusion of this session, participants will have developed an interprofessional and/or collaborative practice learning activity and evaluation plan for the students in their respective program.

**Speaker:** Elizabeth Speakman, EdD, RN, ANEF, FNAP, Co-Director of the Jefferson Interprofessional Education Center, Thomas Jefferson University School of Nursing, Philadelphia, PA

**Sponsors:** National League for Nursing, Washington, DC; National Student Nurses' Association, Brooklyn, NY

The following sessions also offer contact hours:

- Coaching and Mentoring Nursing Students
- Excellence in Nursing Education through Purpose, Power, and Passion
- Don't Set Your Students Up to Fail: Rethinking Student Writing Assignments
- National Council of State Boards of Nursing Update – breakfast and discussion
- Flipping the Classroom with Simulation: Walking Rounds
- Overcoming the Challenges of Non-Self-Efficacious Nursing Students
- Conceptual Teaching: Memorable, Fun, and Easy Strategies Resulting in Test SUCCESS!
- Maximizing Your Own Career: Options for Faculty Academicians
- Filling the Need for Specialized Wound Care Nurses

Visit [www.nсна.org](http://www.nсна.org) and click on meetings for Convention updates.

Please make hotel reservations as soon as possible. The official hotel block is filling up.

