

## Breakthrough to Nursing

Diane J. Mancino

To commemorate the 40th Anniversary of NSNA's minority recruitment project, known today as *Breakthrough to Nursing*, this article traces the origins of this lasting contribution to recruiting students into nursing from under-represented populations.

The 1960s were a time of hope and rage for the American people. It was also a time of revelations, revolutions, and regrets. Within 5 years, Americans struggled to come to terms with the assassinations of three national leaders. On November 22, 1963, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 45, President of the United States and architect of the New Frontier, was killed by a bullet fired from a building along the President's parade route in Dallas, TX. On April 4, 1968, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, 39, father of nonviolence in the American civil rights movement, was hit in the neck by a bullet as he stood on the balcony of a motel in Memphis, TN. Then, on June 5, 1968, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, 42, while thanking supporters for his victory in the California Presidential Primary Election, was shot in the head at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, CA. He died the next day.

Two issues permeated this decade – the war in Vietnam and civil rights. These two issues contributed to an ideological schism that separated the American people and to a “conflict of generations” for American college and university students. Perhaps due to restrictive nursing school policies, nursing students did not become visibly engaged in the anti-Vietnam War movement. However, the civil rights movement presented unique challenges and opportunities for nursing student involvement through the National Student Nurses Association (NSNA).

Established in 1952, NSNA was a viable and energetic organization by 1960. Student leaders were mentored and guided by the top echelon of the American Nurses Association (ANA) and National League for Nursing (NLN) leadership. They had a sound organizational structure, a competent staff, headquarters, equipment, and faculty support. They were eager, idealistic, and curious. The transient nature and time limitations of being a full-time student required quick learning so that goals could be met in a short period of time. This transient membership, however swift, permitted nursing students to create a meaningful community for student leaders. NSNA staff and advisors provided the continuity needed to sustain projects. The opportunity for NSNA to make a significant impact on nursing education during this decade was unparalleled in the history of the profession.

## 2005 BREAK THROUGH to NURSING



### A PROFESSION MOVING FORWARD THROUGH THE DOOR OF DIVERSITY 40th ANNIVERSARY

In 1960, there were 118,849 nursing students enrolled in 1,137 nursing programs, and 80,000 of these students belonged to the NSNA. By the end of the 1960s, there were 1,343 nursing schools, 164,545 nursing students enrolled, and 59,149 NSNA members. In 1962, dues were raised from fifty cents to one dollar; in 1967, they went up to two dollars; and in 1969, dues were raised to five dollars. Human and financial resources were available to conduct business and act on important issues.

NSNA was well-positioned to be in the vanguard of the coming surge of social consciousness among the general student nursing population. By the mid-1960s, NSNA became deeply involved in social issues related to civil rights and poverty, and in 1971, NSNA received funding from the Division of Nursing, National Institutes of Health, and the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to fund the Breakthrough to Nursing Project.

NSNA's interest in recruiting nursing students into the profession began long before Federal support. In 1954, the nursing profession was faced with a critical shortage of nurses. NSNA responded by establishing a Committee on Careers and also appointing an NSNA representative to serve on the NLN Committee on Careers. NSNA had a valuable resource to offer the committee – student contacts at state and district levels of the association. At the time, it was felt that student nurses, being close in age to those they were targeting, could be effective recruiters. Hundreds of Future Nurse Clubs, with club names such as “Daughters of Florence Nightingale,” “The Clara Barton League,” “Future White Caps,” and “Nurses of Tomorrow,” to name a few, had been established in secondary schools throughout the country. NSNA members would prove to be valuable in reaching these high school and junior high school students.

With the passage of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, in 1954, many educators as well as the public became acutely aware of efforts to integrate schools, especially in the Deep South, where it was met with fierce opposition. This Supreme Court ruling invalidated the 1896 decision in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* upholding “separate but equal” facilities. Separate schools for blacks and whites were now unconstitutional. In October 1956, the NLN committee began addressing issues related to new supplies of nursing students and raised the question, “What limitations, based on factors such as marriage, age, sex, and racial origin, should schools be encouraged to modify or remove?”

NSNA leaders began to realize that they needed to address the many barriers that prevented qualified students from entering and graduating from nursing school. In addition to academic standing, admission policies were restricted based on marriage, age, gender, and race. In 1950, the percentage of nonwhite nurses to the total nurse population was reported as 3.5% by the Bureau of the Census. Admission of Negroes\* to nursing schools was 3.2% in 1960, and in the Fall of 1962, 82% of schools reported that they had a policy to admit students regardless of race. A survey conducted by the NLN in 1963 reported that the number of Negro students admitted into all associate degree, baccalaureate, and diploma programs constituted 3% of the total number of students admitted to the schools reporting, and that the percentage of those actually enrolled was 2.7%. Almost 52% of the Negroes admitted to nursing schools cited in this study were admitted to predominately Negro programs. The number of Negroes admitted to nursing programs was lower in 1960 than it had been in 1950, even though the number of Negroes in the population had increased. The closing of many predominately Negro nursing programs resulted in limiting the access of Negroes to professional nursing.

By 1963, the NSNA Committee on Careers had fostered the development of state and local involvement in recruitment. The need for nurses continued to rise, and in 1961, the military pressed nurse volunteers to serve in the Armed Forces in response to Communist tensions in Cuba and Berlin. In a report entitled, “Toward Quality in Nursing: Needs and Goals,” published by the Surgeon General’s Consultant Group on Nursing in 1963, it was estimated that “graduations from schools of professional nursing must increase by 75% to a total of 53,000 per year to meet minimal goals for 1970.” One fifth of all professional nursing positions were vacant in 1962, 58% of nurse educators lacked graduate degrees, and 11% of budgeted faculty vacancies were unfilled.

In a Special Report of the 1964-1965 NSNA Nursing Recruitment Committee, it was announced that the Committee would implement some of the recommendations in the Surgeon General’s report. The report stated that, “Restrictions on admission of certain groups to nursing schools result in serious loss to the profession. Men, married women, older women, and members of certain racial groups, particularly Negroes, are not accepted by all schools.” The Recruitment Committee determined that removal of restrictions in admission policies needed to be combined with intensive recruitment efforts specifically geared toward these groups.

Actions taken at the November 1964 meeting of the NSNA Nursing Recruitment Committee changed the course of nursing recruitment. This meeting marked the beginning of a nationwide

project that would eventually be labeled, “Breakthrough to Nursing.” Fresh on the heels of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed by President Johnson in July, the NSNA Nursing Recruitment Committee developed a comprehensive plan to address the recruitment of minorities into the profession. Working closely with the NSNA Board of Directors, the Committee on Recruitment prepared a resolution to bring before the 1965 NSNA House of Delegates to make minority recruitment a national project. The following resolution was passed by the House of Delegates on May 2, 1965:

Therefore be it resolved that the National Student Nurses’ Association, Incorporated, in convention assembled... adopt as its national project: 1) Involving nursing students in improving the position of disadvantaged groups in society; 2) Further involving present members of NSNA and other nursing students from disadvantaged groups in the work of the association; and 3) Recruiting members of these groups into nursing.

The 1965-1966 NSNA Nursing Recruitment Committee was empowered with the task of implementing the resolution. With guidance from Frank Stanley representing the Urban League, and Dr. Elizabeth Carnegie, a black nursing leader, the committee developed strategies to involve all NSNA members in the national project, developed models, and collected data. Approaches were devised to reach college-bound racial minorities and interest them in nursing. State and district national project committees were established.

In an effort to target Negro students to enter the profession, NSNA members served as tutors for primary and secondary school Negro students. They made movies and produced skits to interest Negroes in nursing. They helped to obtain and complete applications for nursing school and guided students once they were admitted. They developed numerous routes of reaching minorities through Urban Leagues, coalitions, community agencies, school districts, church groups, and Head Start Programs. Literature about nursing was placed in libraries and given to guidance counselors. Future Nurse Clubs were encouraged to focus on recruiting minority students. Local contributions and grants were solicited to offset expenses. Nursing school admission policies were questioned, and local committees worked with directors of nursing schools, state nurses associations, and state leagues for nursing to get them changed.

In 1967, the first three target areas were selected for a new phase of the NSNA’s National Project – Breakthrough to Nursing. The Board pushed hard to interest members in Breakthrough to Nursing. Because interest was slow and resources scarce, the Board targeted cities to concentrate its energies. In 1971, the Breakthrough to Nursing Project received Federal monies to expand the number of target cities, hire field and headquarters staff, and strengthen an already established structure for minority recruitment. Funded target areas included: Phoenix, AZ; Los Angeles, CA; Denver, CO; Columbus, OH; and Charlotte, NC. Non-funded areas included: Alabama, Idaho, and Illinois.

Recruitment of minorities into nursing exposed NSNA members to inequities that cut through to the core of American society. They saw the hopelessness of people living in poverty, the sadness of children who were hungry and dirty, and the flagrant failure of the health care system to address human needs. These experiences challenged NSNA leaders

to take a more active role in addressing social issues. NSNA members worked in collaboration with community groups, government agencies, and health professions students to provide services directly to the people where they lived.

NSNA achieved national recognition for its efforts. In 1970, the Breakthrough to Nursing Project was nominated for the American Nurses Association Mary Elizabeth Mahoney award (recognizes significant contributions to opening and advancing equal opportunities in nursing to members of minority groups), and the Project added 6 new target areas that same year. Several NSNA representatives attended interdisciplinary meetings, conferences, and symposia. NSNA members volunteered in Appalachia and participated in the Job Corps Summer Fellowship Program. They brought back stories of *The Other America* (Harrington, 1963) and wrote about their experiences in *Imprint*. A cadre of nursing students was fighting in the War on Poverty and prejudice, and fervently believed that every nursing student had a responsibility to make the world a better place for all people to live.

In 2005, NSNA celebrates the 40th Anniversary of the Breakthrough to Nursing (BTN) Project. Over the years, BTN has become an important component of NSNA's governance structure that includes the position of a BTN Director on the NSNA Board of Directors. The BTN Director chairs the BTN Committee, which is responsible for reaching out to state and school chapters to implement the goals of the Project. The 2004-2005 BTN Committee, chaired by Tanya Brown – a student at Georgia Baptist College, will take advantage of this significant milestone to involve nursing students and faculty in BTN. In addition, the sociopolitical context of BTN provides opportunities to inform nursing students about the history of racial discrimination in the United States and to continue the dialogue on issues such as prejudice, intolerance, and cultural competence.

I invite you, your faculty, and your students to celebrate BTN's 40th Anniversary with us. Let the 40th Anniversary theme, *Breakthrough to Nursing – A Profession Moving Forward Through the Door of Diversity*, inspire your recruitment efforts to increase the number of under-represented populations in the nursing profession. Watch for details in *Imprint*, *NSNA News*, [www.nсна.org](http://www.nсна.org), and future issues of *Dean's Notes*.

#### Reference

Harrington, M. (1963). *The other America*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

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***Diane J. Mancino, EdD, RN, CAE, is Executive Director, National Student Nurses Association and Foundation of the NSNA. This article is an excerpt of Dr. Mancino's doctoral dissertation, "The Role of the National Student Nurses Association in Addressing Social and Political Issues that Contributed to Student Unrest from 1960-1975" (Teachers College Columbia University, 1995). Additional references are available upon request by writing to the author at [diane@nsna.org](mailto:diane@nsna.org)***

*\*It is noted that the term "Negro" is used within the historical context of this article.*

## Join us in Daytona Beach, Florida, for the MidYear Conference

The 22nd Annual NSNA MidYear Conference will take place November 11-14, 2004, at the Adam's Mark Daytona Beach Resort. The conference offers nursing students and faculty a broad selection of activities, including workshops, panels, exhibits, and an NCLEX® Review to help prepare our future nurse leaders.

### MidYear Highlights

**Thursday, November 11:** Opening and Keynote Address presented by Melodie Chenevert, who is the president of Pronurse, located in Gaithersburg, MD. Pronurse is a motivational company that sells books, posters, stationary, etc. to recruit and retain people into nursing. Ms. Chenevert is an international speaker, author, and entrepreneur. Sponsored by Anthony J. Jannetti, Inc., Pitman, NJ.

**Friday, November 13:** A "New Directions in Nursing" panel will feature interactive dialogue with the audience about trends and issues in the nursing profession. The panel of nursing leaders will discuss mentorship, advancing your education, joining a professional organization, climbing the ladder of success, and more. Moderated by Dr. K. Lynn Wieck, CEO Management Solutions for Healthcare, Katy, Texas, and President of the Texas Nurses Association, the panel includes representatives from the American Nurses Association, National League for Nursing, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, and the American Organization of Nurse Executives.

**Saturday, November 14:** A breakfast buffet and presentation on leadership will be offered, sponsored by the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, Army Nurse Corps. Saturday also offers two panel presentations entitled, "Nursing Specialty Showcase," that will open the door to opportunities in a broad range of specialty nursing areas.

### Faculty Workshops

Faculty workshops offering continuing education credit are presented throughout the conference and include:

- Networking breakfast session (sponsored by the National League for Nursing).
- Current Issues for Faculty on the Regulation of Nursing Professionals (sponsored by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing).
- Redesigning Nursing Education, with Dr. Lynn Wieck. Leadership University: Professional Development and Course Credit through Involvement in NSNA.
- Measuring Outcomes and Grant Writing.
- Biological, Chemical and Nuclear Terrorism: Recognition and Preparedness.
- Doing the "Write" Thing for Your Career.
- Technology Putting Technology to Work in Learning.
- Membership Roundtable Discussion.

### Registration

Registration fees for Faculty Advisors/Consultants are \$55 in advance; \$70 onsite.

For more information about the conference and to register online, visit [www.nсна.org](http://www.nсна.org)

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# DEAN'S Notes™

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## The Best Prep Course for the NCLEX®-RN

NSNA has partnered with *Nursing Spectrum* to present 3 NCLEX®-RN review courses in 2005. The 3-day review course schedule is as follows:

**Atlantic City Convention Center**  
Atlantic City, NJ  
January 28-30, 2005

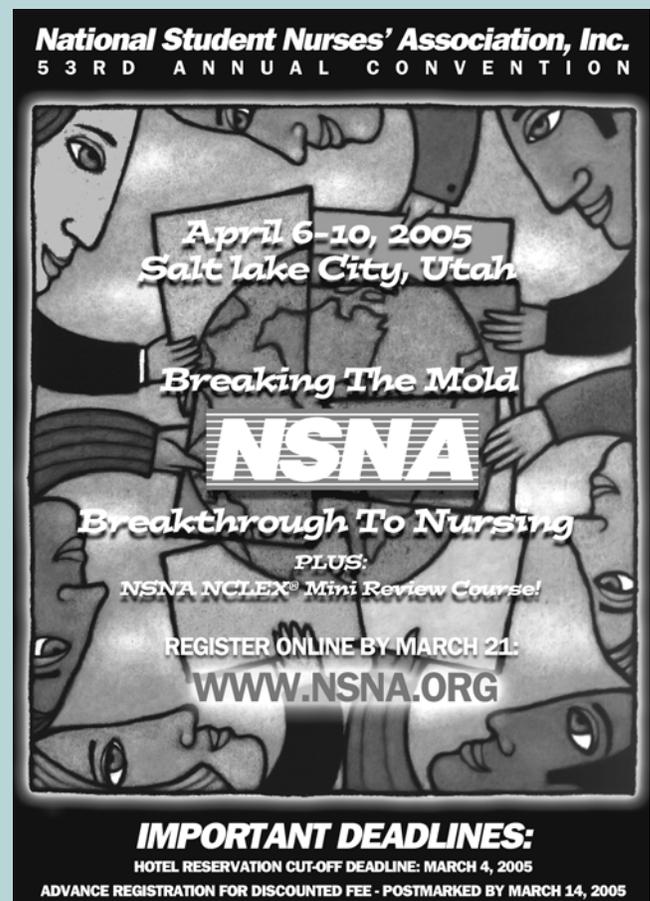
**Disney's Coronado Springs Resort**  
Orlando, FL  
February 25-28, 2005

**Chicago, IL**  
Date and location to be determined

The course includes a free book entitled, *NCLEX-RN Review*, published by Thomson Delmar Learning, and free access to Delmar's Online NCLEX-RN Review.

The course discussion focuses on topics that appear most frequently on the exam, test-taking skills, information about scheduling your test, test scoring, and helpful hints for taking the test. Quizzes throughout the 3-day course give you the opportunity to validate your learning and practice NCLEX-type questions.

Watch the NSNA Web site ([www.nсна.org](http://www.nсна.org)) for information and application to register for one of these outstanding NCLEX Review Courses.



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ADVANCE REGISTRATION FOR DISCOUNTED FEE - POSTMARKED BY MARCH 14, 2005