



Minority Student Perspectives of Barriers, Supports, and Christian Virtues in an Undergraduate Christian Nursing Program

ABSTRACT: *Diversity and inclusion are critical priorities in nursing education programs. Literature has focused on minority student experiences of barriers and supports—but not through a Christian worldview. This qualitative study using a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach gave voice to the experiences of 15 self-identified minority student graduates from a Christian baccalaureate nursing program. Data analysis revealed opportunities for growth in providing a supportive climate within the program and how Christian virtues of hospitality, humility, and reconciliation can be employed to achieve this goal.*

KEY WORDS: *Christian virtues, diversity, hospitality, humility, inclusion, minority, nursing, nursing education, reconciliation*

Diversity and inclusion are pressing priorities for the nursing profession and nursing education (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2022). Christian nursing programs are poised to lead in implementing these values because of the foundation Christ set: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28,

NIV). Some aspects of supporting minority students are very concrete, such as providing financial support, tutoring, and academic services to help with writing and test-taking skills (Carter & Derouin, 2016; Murray et al., 2016).

Other aspects of support, however, are more challenging to address. Although minority students have identified lack of diversity or homogenous cultures of the student body as barriers to success (Alicea-

Planas, 2017; Diefenbeck et al., 2016), considerably changing the student body makeup may not be possible without addressing minority students’ perceived barriers of isolation and discrimination (Graham et al., 2016). Students and faculty may be able to recite the definition of unconscious bias or list culturally competent

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■ **Katherine E. E. Kunnen, DNP, APRN, FNP-C**, is an assistant professor of nursing at Calvin University and has worked as a nurse and nurse practitioner in orthopedics and emergency field hospital work. She is passionate about embodying Christ in teaching and practice.

■ **Katherine Miller, PhD, RN**, has worked in pediatrics, global health, and community health. Trained at the University of Michigan, she is passionate about educating students to pursue sustainable partnerships for the improved health of populations.

■ **Yehyeon Oh, BSN, RN**, recently graduated from Calvin University and grew up in a multi-ethnic cul-

ture. She is passionate about bringing medical justice to unreached populations through nursing.

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actions but still act in ways that cause minority students to feel a lack of emotional support and an overall sense of loneliness (Applebaum, 2019). More is needed than concrete services and intellectual practices to promote diversity and inclusion.

Could Christian virtues of *hospitality, humility, and reconciliation* be employed to create a more supportive climate for minority students? If so,



how would minority students envision the practice of such virtues? The Bible emphasizes hospitality beginning in the Old Testament: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien... must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself...” (Leviticus 19:33–34, NIV; see also Romans 15:7; Hebrews 13:1–2; 1 Peter 4:9). Christ-followers are directed to live in humility (Romans 12:16; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:3, 1 Peter

religion, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or physical/functional/cognitive ability. The item regarding ability was categorized as able-bodied or differently abled. All 15 alumni who responded provided written consent. The primary or secondary investigator conducted a 12-question semistructured interview with each participant to explore the participant’s experiences as a minority in the BSN program and the institution. The interview questions are avail-

interviewed was 26.2 years; 60% were female and 40% male. See Table 1 as SDC at <http://links.lww.com/NCF-JCN/A107> for all demographic information.

Five global themes emerged from the interviews, revolving around the alumni’s definitions and experiences pertaining to success, structural supports, structural barriers, and core virtues. Emerging themes from success were dual in nature: students recognized an achievement component to success, as well as a more intrinsic factor of success related to personal growth, belonging, and development. The major themes identified from student experiences of structural support related to the accessibility of faculty, academic resources, and a sense of belonging perceived from organizations and peers outside the nursing program. The most significant theme expressed by students when discussing structural barriers was the sense of isolation and competition experienced prior to and within the nursing program. Finally, an emerging concept of openness came out of student descriptions of the specified Christian virtues.

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3:8), and seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23–24; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19; Ephesians 2:13–16; Colossians 3:13).

This project set out to explore the experiences of a diverse set of alumni from a Christian nursing program who self-identified as minorities. Additionally, we explored their perspectives on how the Christian virtues of hospitality, humility, and reconciliation affected their experiences and whether these virtues should be employed more consistently to positively impact minority students.

METHODS

Parse’s three-phase phenomenological hermeneutic research method informed data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Polit & Beck, 2021). Data collection took place at a private liberal arts institution in the midwest United States after review and approval by the establishment’s Institutional Review Board. Emails were sent to 601 Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program alumni who graduated from 2008 to 2019 who had email addresses on record. The email invited participation by those who self-identified as a minority of gender, sexual orientation,

able in the Appendix online as supplemental digital content (SDC) at <http://links.lww.com/NCF-JCN/A107>. All interviews were recorded. On completion of the interview, participants were mailed a \$5 gift card. Transcribed interviews were deidentified and analyzed using NVivo (Lumivero, 2023) and a team analysis approach between the two researchers and an undergraduate research assistant. Each team member read the transcripts independently to look for repeating themes. The lead researcher and research assistant coded the transcripts into nodes based off the global themes. From these nodes, overarching themes and subthemes emerged. The team discussed differences in analysis multiple times to support interrater reliability.

RESULTS

Of the 15 participants, 33% were Asian, 33% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic, and 7% African American. Regarding the 33% who were Caucasian, although not racial minorities, most represented minorities of gender, sexual orientation, or physical/functional/cognitive ability. The mean age of the alumni

Theme 1: The Duality of Success

Although most of the students described success as having to do with achievement (keeping a high grade point average [GPA], passing classes, graduating from the program, starting a career), more than half also recognized success as something larger and more holistic. The subtheme “Intrinsic” highlights descriptions of success related to becoming “more rounded,” the “best version of whoever you are,” and people who “contribute to the community” (see Table 2). There appeared to be a distinction between students who felt like they survived the program and students who felt like they were able to thrive in the program.

Theme 2: Accessibility

Participants frequently referred to the positive influence of the faculty

Table 2. Themes and Subthemes of Minority Student Perspectives in an Undergraduate Christian Nursing Program

THEME 1: Duality of Success	
Subthemes:	Example Quotes
Achievement	<p>"I think for [the institution], especially in our program, success is defined by our GPA."</p> <p>"So, I think success at [the institution] for me was school for sure, getting good grades and passing."</p> <p>"I would say success is two things—first off, graduating. Just being able to apply yourself, pass your classes, and actually graduate from the program."</p>
Intrinsic	<p>"I would say second—actually being changed by your education in some way. Bettering yourself in knowledge, it's a liberal arts degree ... you should become more rounded of a person."</p> <p>"I think in general [the institution] wants to prepare you to be the best version of whoever you are."</p> <p>"When I think about the students that thrive at [the institution], I think about students that not only are successful in the classroom but those who are leaders in the community, who contribute...through student organizations or student leadership, helping to build other students up or just contributing...at [the institution], the city, or the world."</p>
THEME 2: Accessibility	
Subthemes:	Example Quotes
Professors	<p>"I should think that the faculty was one of the best things about the nursing program. There's a sprawl of professors, even when I was not in their classes, they would help with any project, any assignment, any topic. You could come to them with questions, and they would help you."</p> <p>"If I had any queries about a grade I got, or a question about a paper or a test, I could always send an email...that was good from the academic standpoint and also just a comfort standpoint."</p> <p>"I would say faculty and advisors were pretty helpful. I think all of the nursing faculty are really sweet, really respectful, and you can see that they are sincere in what they want you to learn."</p> <p>"There were [a] couple professors who reached out to me and seeing the potential in me [were] able to say, 'Hey, I kind of see you slipping down, I want you to get back up. Let's find a way and time to discuss what ways I can help you.'"</p>
Academic resources	<p>"It was the tutoring program, that 1:1 thing for the prerequisites, that was really good."</p> <p>"I used the library a lot, like a lot a lot, especially with the research projects. I did a lot of interlibrary loans and stuff. It was so helpful. The librarians were great."</p> <p>"[The institution] has really good academic services. They do a really good job of helping students. They make accommodations and communicate it to professors and make sure accommodations are in place. So, it's a very safe environment for minority students here."</p>
THEME 3: Belonging Outside the Program	
Subthemes:	Example Quotes
Clubs and organizations	<p>"We had a number of dinners together because not all of us were in the same programs or classes, but during these dinners we were able to interact with each other, share our experiences, work out differences, work out any problem areas that we may have faced. I would say there's a lot of supportive environments."</p> <p>"MSDO is one of my top resources because of just being able to put faith in environment with my friends and knowing that someone who looks like me is going through the same or similar things."</p>
Peers	<p>"I think there were definitely [meaningful peer relationships]—the ones that lasted longer were the ones at [the institution] but within the nursing program, not so much."</p> <p>"I had my close friends that I hung out with a lot outside of the nursing program."</p> <p>"I mean, they were all fine, but I really only hung out with like only one person in the nursing program and the rest were internationals."</p>
THEME 4: Isolation and Competition Within the Program	
Subthemes:	Example Quotes
Isolation and lack of diversity	<p>"I remember struggling around the fact that there were hardly any biracial kids ... It's kind of either you were Caucasian, or you were fully a missionary kid from Korea, or you were an international student."</p> <p>"In all my clinical groups, I was the only male. So, I always felt alone when it came to being able to stand up for myself and trying to understand things."</p>



Table 2. Themes and Subthemes of Minority Student Perspectives in an Undergraduate Christian Nursing Program (*Continued*)

Isolation and lack of diversity	<p>"I didn't feel like there was a lot of diversity in the student body as well as the staff—it didn't foster a very open environment I would say."</p> <p>"I remember feeling like you didn't have a peer to lean on, or you didn't have a mentor to lean on because there wasn't anyone of color."</p> <p>"If I wanted to be successful... or be an active participant, I would again have to adjust or be adaptive to that type of environment so that the way in which I involved myself would be reflective of the majority."</p>
Competition and adversity	<p>"I think the difficulty of the nursing program was a barrier you could say."</p> <p>"But with the nursing people it was just so competitive. Everyone was on edge about the program and not everyone was willing to support each other."</p> <p>"There is just such a competitiveness ... everyone is on edge...is focused on getting a good grade so that you can keep your GPA high ... that you don't really make solid relationships."</p> <p>"You needed to be strong in order to move into the program. If you showed a sign of weakness or vulnerability, you're likely to get pushed out by other people."</p> <p>"Just because unlike any other major, you have the added pressure of meeting the GPA requirements and feeling like you might lose your spot. The engineering major—they were just as strict ... but they never felt like they would be dropped from their major."</p> <p>"I think there were a lot of times when I had to push my emotions, my physical well-being, and who I am as a person last."</p>
THEME 5: Virtues that Promote Openness & Inclusion	
Subthemes:	Example Quotes
Hospitality	<p>"When I think about hospitality, I think about being open and welcoming and just providing for other peoples' needs as best as you can."</p> <p>"I think as far as hospitality goes, it really means to me that you walk into a room and feel welcomed."</p> <p>"I would say opening up one's resources, voluntarily allowing someone else into your space."</p> <p>"I think hospitality is being able to lend a hand no matter what—being able to have an open environment for another people who are in need no matter what is going on."</p>
Humility	<p>"I think humility is coming to ... the table or classroom or coming into the lab or coming into any place...with the mindset that I don't know everything, and I'm open to learn."</p> <p>"Accepting when you are wrong and being open to change and new ideas."</p> <p>"Humility—just learning from other people ..."</p> <p>"When I think about humility, I think about putting others before yourself and putting pride aside."</p>
Reconciliation	<p>"The practice of reconciliation, for me, is first acknowledging that there may be a fault on your end ..."</p> <p>"If you find out that there's some sort of gap, some lack of knowledge you've had, and that you've been neglecting something, trying to come back and incorporate it and have whatever you were missing out be acknowledged and trying to heal a wound that was caused."</p> <p>"If an individual makes a mistake or there's a grievance against you but you're able to work through that and have a resolution and a positive experience through that."</p> <p>"I would describe reconciliation as return to the way that God intended this world to be—a return that original goodness of creation—not just in personal lives, but in our relationships with others, in the way we learn and interact with the world."</p>
Personal experience of virtues	<p>"They [faculty] just showed a lot of hospitality—some even opened up their homes."</p> <p>"The professors were really excited to get to know us and fit the atmosphere as a learning environment where there is a lot of space to be able to question things... and go to the professors one on one, so I felt it was very welcoming."</p> <p>"I experienced hospitality every day. They [faculty] treated me as their own family."</p> <p>"Every day I learned something new because of other people's humility and how they functioned ... so yeah, I learned a lot from them."</p> <p>"I think particularly from the professors there was a lot of humility...they were mirroring what it was to be a good nurse... You don't have answers all the time. As much as you want to, it's so much better in the long run to recognize, 'Hey I don't have the answer.' I felt like they were really good about doing that."</p>

within the nursing program. Despite competitive academics, the faculty served as a solid support system for students by being intentionally open

participant referred to the rhetoric center by saying, “Yes, that [rhetoric center] was one and that one was very crucial... In terms of writing, that was

nursing as opportunities to express their uniqueness and feel a sense of belonging. As the nursing program did not start until junior year, many of the friend groups and emotional support came from friends outside of the nursing program (Table 2). Even as alumni, the relationships that lasted the longest were generally those outside the nursing program.

For cultural minority participants, organizations such as the Multicultural Student Development Office (MSDO) served as stress outlets, providing a safe and open environment where students could talk to others who shared similar experiences. These organizations created a sense of trust (Table 2). Overall, friend groups, organizations, and extra-curricular groups outside the nursing program provided minority students with a safe place to express their identities, as these cohorts were composed of students like themselves.

Faculty can apply humility as openness to change or being wrong.

and available. Accessibility (Table 2) refers to the sense of close connection that the students felt because the faculty provided both academic and emotional support. One participant mentioned, “I could reach out to any professor, and they were accessible and provided time for whatever needs I had from education to personal life to spiritual aspects.” Faculty support across ethnic and gender divides was recognized:

I think about that and what that meant for me in the nursing program, the [faculty member’s] ability and her skill in being able to empathize with her students and me, in particular, transcends our differences in gender and ethnicity. Even though she was a Caucasian female, our ability to connect was really because of her ability to empathize.

Overall, the commitment and compassion for students by the faculty promoted a sense of encouragement and comfort for participants.

When asked about institutional academic resources that facilitated support, participants most often mentioned the rhetoric center or library and the tutoring services. The unique tutoring system at the institution helped students succeed in their prerequisite classes which was important because of the pressure on prenursing students to maintain their GPA to qualify for the program. One

very much needed.” The library and rhetoric center helped students who felt lacking in their writing skills both in nursing and non-nursing classes. Students also expressed their personal effort to access institutional support. One student said, “I’m also someone who would go out of my way to seek help if it’s there,” whereas another student relayed,

I think it’s very important for people in the minority group to advocate for themselves. It’s one big thing you need to learn, because you know yourself well and people are not going to just read your mind and do something for you.

Theme 4: Isolation and Competition Within the Program

Students noted a lack of diversity within the student body and faculty, which led to a feeling of isolation. As one student stated, “It was the absence of diversity in general that made it feel

If the burden of adding diversity to the program falls to the minority students in the program, that is not hospitable.

All students cited receiving financial support through the institution. Some students indicated that without scholarships, they would not have been able to attend the institution.

Theme 3: Belonging Outside the Program

Many participants mentioned organizations and peers outside of

a bit ostracizing at times.” One student suggested, “It would be encouraging to hear how different people bring different things from different backgrounds to their place of work or place of learning.” The lack of diversity also led to concern over how the presentation of course material could affect minority students. A student mentioned a series of PowerPoint presentations in



Web Resources

- **American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)**
<https://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/Fact-Sheets/Enhancing-Diversity>
- **Christianity Today**
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/may-web-only/diversity-equity-evangelical-christian-youth-ministry.html>
- **InterVarsity (ministry to minority students)**
<https://intervarsity.org/our-ministry>
- **National League for Nursing**
<https://www.nln.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/default-document-library/diversity-toolkit.pdf>
- **Nursing OnPoint**
<https://nursingonpoint.com/about-nursing/nursing-diversity/minorities-in-nursing/>

which it seemed like every disease was “a constant reminder that either African Americans have a high chance of this, or African Americans are the leading group of this.” Without the context of social determinants of health this was demoralizing to the student.

In addition, participants mentioned the nature and difficulty of the program as a possible barrier. Although most nursing programs can be considered challenging, students described how the rigor and competition of the program became disruptive to their success—especially what they described as their holistic definitions of success related to personal and relational growth (Table 2).

Theme 5: Virtues That Promote Openness and Inclusion

From the student definitions of hospitality, humility, and reconciliation, a main theme of openness emerged (Table 2). The students overwhelmingly described hospitality using terms such as “welcome” and “openness.” Additionally, the theme of openness related

to humility with phrases including “open to learn” or “open to change or new ideas.” An emerging theme for reconciliation was an openness to acknowledge something is broken or damaged and to return to health or wholeness. One student indicated the importance of including education on racial reconciliation. According to the student, this would allow “people to know and understand what people are going through and being able to bridge in those gaps of humility and hospitality towards the minority students.” Most students stated they experienced hospitality and humility within the program and in the greater campus community.

DISCUSSION

The students’ responses suggest that the institution and nursing program have some strong supports in place for multicultural students. Both financial and academic resources were cited as structural facilitators of success, reflecting previous findings (Carter & Derouin, 2016; Murray et al., 2016). Although these resources might seem like services that benefit all students,

have demonstrated the strong influence of faculty support on minority BSN students’ feelings of belonging and overall success (Metzger et al., 2020; Osakwe et al., 2022). Perhaps the contrast between supportive faculty and competitive classmates reveals how crucial Christian virtues can be in promoting an environment where students not only feel welcome, but also feel fully able to be themselves and belong. Although students sometimes struggled to find peer support within the program, they were able to find support in the greater campus community. Various student organizations and extracurricular activities provided diverse and inclusive places for minority students to experience a sense of belonging (Metzger et al., 2020).

The data from this project also indicate the nursing program has opportunities for growth in providing a more open or hospitable climate, which echoes previous studies (Alicea-Planas, 2017). A noteworthy aspect of this research was the variety of students who self-identified as minorities. Students who would not be considered racial

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they have been self-identified by minority students as particularly valuable and directly relate to academic services which increase retention for minority students.

Of interest is how students, while identifying a lack of diversity in faculty and staff, cited faculty in the nursing program and the greater campus as supports, describing supportive faculty as expressing the Christian virtues of hospitality and humility. In contrast, the cultural homogeneity of nursing peers seemed to be a substantial barrier. Findings of previous studies

or ethnic minorities such as Caucasians raised in another country were included. Although this could be considered a limitation, it also highlights the complexity of creating an inclusive environment. Most students found faculty to be supportive even if educators did not always represent the student’s race, ethnicity, ability, or sexual orientation. Homogeneity does not necessarily predispose a community to become exclusive, cliquish, or isolating.

However, this does not negate the need to have a diverse faculty. Students felt isolated by not always having fac-

ulty, staff, or mentors of color. Previous researchers have cited the lack of mentors from underrepresented minorities as a barrier for minority students (Osakwe et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the participants' responses illustrate how minority students' perceptions on the inclusivity of a community could be positively impacted by the expression of Christian virtues such as empathy, humility, and hospitality—even in circumstances with limited diversity. The suggested positive impact of these virtues aligns with Hughes et al.' (2020) proposal that nursing faculty demonstrate humility in relation to cultural understanding to improve student outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NURSING EDUCATION

How can nursing schools or programs employ Christian virtues as practices that transform the culture of the student body or lead to a more inclusive environment? Faculty can apply humility as openness to change or being wrong. They can be receptive to reevaluating how content is presented and whether it needs supplementation. Providing better context of social determinants leading to racial disparities and what is being done to correct disparities will help protect against misinterpretation. Current literature indicates nursing students equipped with knowledge and experiential training in the social determinants of health will be better able to advance health equity, reduce health disparities, and provide care with cultural humility (Schroeder et al., 2019).

Additionally, a simple statement added to a syllabus expressing a desire to acknowledge mistakes if harm is accidentally afflicted would be a significant practice of humility. It allows the faculty to acknowledge the power differential that students experience and presents the opportunity for timely restoration. The goal of the practice of humility is an "interconnectedness" that Dameron (2016) described as oc-

curring between nurse and patient that can also occur between educator and student.

Nursing programs can employ hospitality by making sure appropriate academic and financial resources are available for minority students. However, just because a program has resources doesn't automatically mean students

based on people they do not know well in order to avoid cliques and promote hospitality.

Lastly, the practice of humility works hand in hand with the practice of reconciliation. To promote the restoration of brokenness, faculty must first have the humility to recognize or admit the brokenness. As Table 2 illustrates, stu-

Many of the friend groups and emotional support came from friends outside of the nursing program.

will access resources. Several students mentioned how they were assertive in seeking help or advocating for themselves. However, not all students are culturally comfortable with asking for help, so one practice of hospitality could be reaching out to minority students more intentionally with individualized and specific resources. Although all students discussed faculty being accessible and open to questions, a few students specifically noted when faculty reached out to them. This reflects the type of audacious hospitality described by Nolson which emphasizes "the gift of presence and life-giving words" (2021, p. 132).

A further step of hospitality could include making sure diverse voices and perspectives are included in the curriculum. If the burden of adding diversity to the program falls to the minority students in the program, that is not hospitable. Faculty could host "family nights" where multiple students could gather and experience hospitality together. Creating this space as opposed to individual invitations of hospitality might foster a stronger sense of belonging. Finally, when faculty assign group work where students choose their partners, students could be required to make groups

students identifying an openness to learn or to admit to being wrong is the first step toward reconciliation. Faculty can admit systemic brokenness by providing classroom opportunities for openly discussing racism, a rare practice in academia even though racism is present in nursing education and practice (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2021).

Study Limitations


A limitation to generalizability of study findings is that all interviews were conducted with students from one small Christian liberal arts institution in the midwest United States. In addition, because the data were from students who self-identified as minorities with varied backgrounds, the data are less likely to be applicable in other settings. A small sample size and low response rate also are limitations.

CONCLUSION

This project explored the experiences of minority students and their perceptions of supports and barriers in a Christian nursing program, describing how specific Christian virtues acted as supports. Findings illustrate the institution has some strong supports related to faculty, finances, academic resources, and diverse organizations



outside the program. However, findings also reflect previous literature reporting minority students experience isolation and the need for a more accepting climate within the nursing program. The alumni voices brought a unique perspective on how Christian virtues were practiced and could be further employed to reshape the culture of the nursing program.

Hospitality, humility, and reconciliation can be enacted as practices that provide a more open and inclusive environment for minority students in Christian nursing programs. Continued research is needed related to the practice of Christian virtues in promoting diversity and inclusion and optimizing student success. 

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