

School of Nursing – Program Efficiency and Performance Review 2017

The faculty of the School of Nursing reviewed the 2014 - 2016 program data, and compared that data to other programs at WNMU. Domains for review included the following: Quality of Outcomes, Quality of Inputs, Costs, And Revenue Generation. Responses to the five core questions were developed by faculty and subsequently will be presented at the SON Faculty Workday scheduled for the end of the spring 2017 semester.

Question #1 “What was the School of Nursing program created to do in the first place?”

The nursing program at Western New Mexico University was created in 1989, with the first cohort of students admitted in 1991. The intent of the program was to address a nursing shortage in this underserved geographical area of New Mexico. A secondary goal was to increase the number of Registered Nurses in the state, in anticipation of a predicted nursing shortage identified as potentially occurring during the first two decades of the 21st century. The shortage had been predicted in part due to an aging nursing workforce combined with increasing life-expectancy for residents within the United States. The overall mission of the program was to prepare generalist Registered Nurses with strong clinical skills that would enable the graduates to enter the workforce well-prepared to participate in patient care. Subsequent employer surveys have indicated high satisfaction with WNMU graduates as they enter the workforce.

The mission statement of the WNMU School of Nursing is to promote health and improve the quality of life for diverse populations by providing nursing education which instills the values of community, nursing scholarship, practice, and community service. In the years since the opening of the program, the mission and goals of the School of Nursing have remained consistent, with updates to the program as required to keep abreast of trends in nursing, health care, societal shifts, and the population at large. Examples of changes include the introduction of the concepts of inclusivity and cultural competence, the increasing use of computerized technology in the workplace, and the inclusion of advances in medical diagnostics and treatment. The culmination of all of these changes precipitated the adoption in the Fall of 2015 of a new state-wide concept-based curriculum currently utilized by the School of Nursing in collaboration with 18 other schools of nursing across the state.

In 2002, a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) program was developed and implemented by the School of Nursing. The CNA program was transferred to the Applied Technology division of WNMU in 2015, and therefore no longer falls under the purview of the School of Nursing.

In 2005, WNMU created an RN to BSN in response to community requests for a transition program for Associate’s prepared RNs to earn a Baccalaureate in Nursing. The program was designed with the working nurse in mind, and transitioned to an online format to facilitate access by working nurses. Today there are approximately 70 nurses enrolled in the program, and demand, while not increasing, continues to be steady. The creation of the Baccalaureate in Nursing (BSN) program came about in part due to response to nationwide calls within the profession of nursing to raise the level of education for all nurses practicing in the United States (IOM, 2011).

Question #2 – What is the program doing now?

The School of Nursing currently admits a cohort of 40 students once per year during the fall semester. With the adoption of the New Mexico Nurse Educators Consortium (NMNEC) state-wide concept-based curriculum, the WNMU School of Nursing became the third state-supported institution in New Mexico to offer the pre-licensure Baccalaureate in Nursing (BSN). The remainder of state-funded schools of nursing in the state all offer the Associate's Degree in Nursing.

The final cohort of the previous block-style Associate's Degree in Nursing (ADN) curriculum graduated in May of 2016. The cohort in question did not perform well on the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) licensure exam, and as a result the first-time test-taker's pass rate for the WNMU SON was 68.67 for the year 2016. While such results are admittedly disappointing, significant steps have been taken to improve the pass rate, including the adoption of a new Comprehensive Predictor exam and preparation package. The faculty felt that the previously-used Kaplan Exit exam was not adequately predicting the future success of students in meeting the challenges associated with the nationwide licensure exam, thus bringing about the change in vendors. Future cohorts (including May of 2017) will have completed the NMNEC state-wide curriculum, and hopes are high for their success with the licensure exam as well as nursing careers.

Beginning with the fall semester of 2017, the WNMU School of Nursing will begin phasing out the Associate's Degree program and will offer only the Baccalaureate in Nursing for pre-licensure students. Adoption of the BSN-only program is undertaken in response to the IOM 2011 report on nursing in the United States, which called for increases in the level of education for all nurses so that the increasing health needs of an aging U.S. population may be met (IOM, 2011). The adoption of the BSN curriculum also paves the way for articulation with NMNEC partner community colleges in the state, such that students may earn a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing from a four-year university while residing and attending coursework without leaving their homes located in the community served by the partner Community College. Again, WNMU is only the third institution state-supported institution currently licensed and credentialed to offer the pre-licensure BSN program.

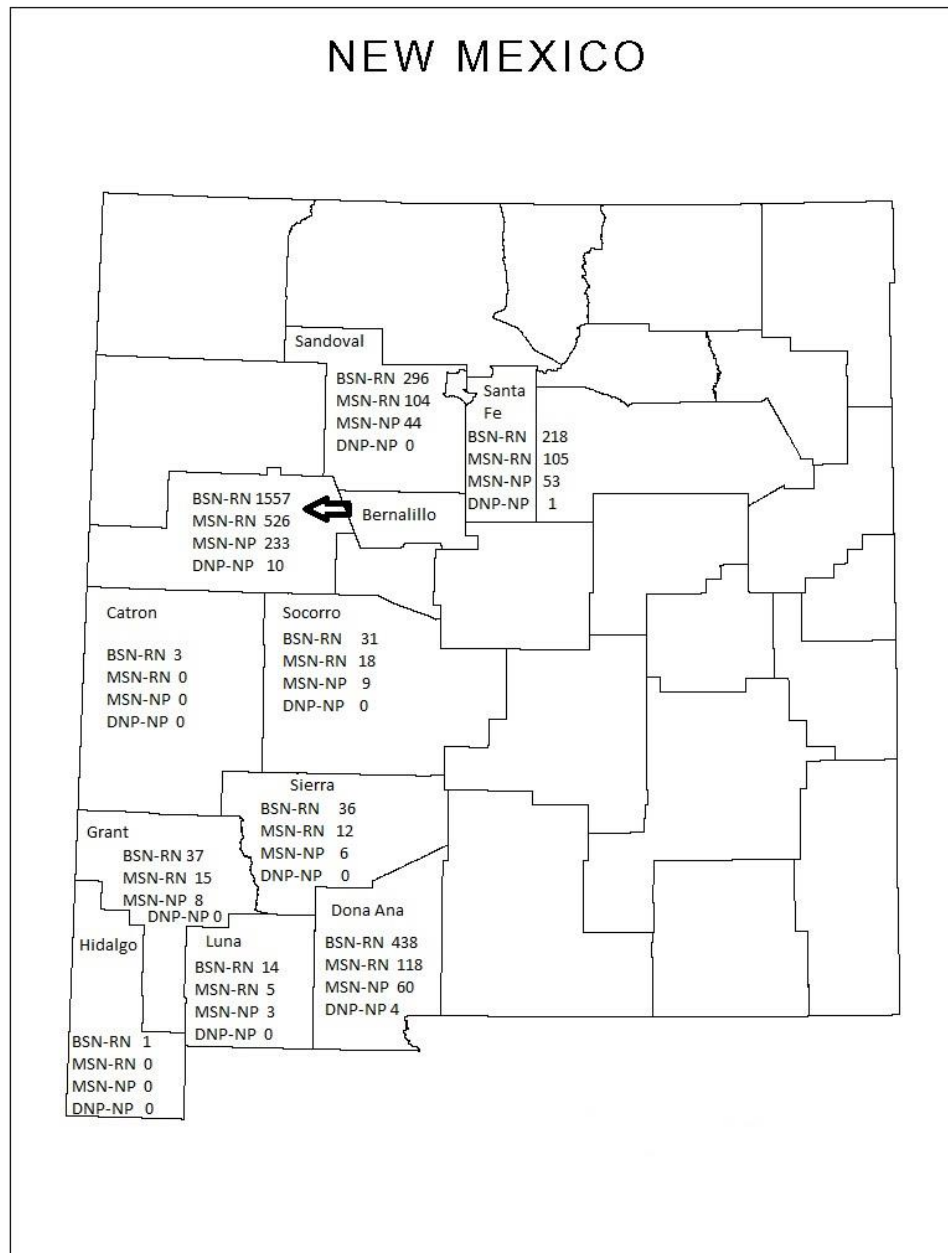
In further attempts to maximize the use of clinical agencies in SW New Mexico, which have historically been underutilized by students during the summer term (as the WNMU SON pre-licensure program offers no courses during the summer), a pilot program is being initiated beginning in May of 2017. The pilot program will enroll 8 additional baccalaureate-seeking nursing students in a fast-track program designed for students who previously have earned a bachelor's degree in another discipline outside of nursing. The program will make best use of the historically unused clinical agency spaces during the summer months, while not over-burdening the traditional undergraduate nursing program underway during the fall and spring terms. The same 8 students will graduate 5 semesters later, attending WNMU every term nonstop for 5 consecutive semesters. The incremental increase in head-count has been taken using existing resources and faculty, without the need for any additional funding for the School of Nursing.

In addition to the pilot program, the WNMU School of Nursing continues the operation and management of a remote site in Deming, NM, where we offer coursework for residents of Luna county the

opportunity to earn degrees as registered nurses without leaving their homes or area of residence. The program is housed at the Mimbres Valley Learning Center. While the program does not increase the total number of nurses educated when contrasted with previous years, the opportunity to receive professional education as a registered nurse strives to meet the University's mission to promote higher education not only in Silver City, NM, but in the southwestern region of the state.

Work on a second area of growth for the School of Nursing has been underway for the past two years in pursuit of establishing a graduate program for nursing at WNMU. The proposal and coursework have been completed and submitted for external review prior to submission through the appropriate academic channels, including: Provost, WNMU Graduate Committee, NM Graduate Deans, NM Finance, and finally, NM Higher Education Department (NMHED). If full approval is received at all levels, the first cohort of master's-prepared nurses would commence studies in the fall of 2018, graduating with a Master's (MSN) in Community & Rural/Frontier Health upon completion of coursework. The development of a degree focusing on rural health embraces one of the key 'areas of distinction' identified by the WNMU Board of Regents as targeted areas for development of the university. Graduates of the MSN program could then continue in a proposed Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) Certificate program, requiring three further semesters of work beyond the MSN. The ability to train local RNs to become Family Nurse Practitioners would help to meet the medically underserved populations of Catron, Hidalgo, Luna, and Grant counties. Table 1 illustrates the need for Family Nurse Practitioners within the region, identifying the total number of Registered Nurses with baccalaureate or higher education within the identified medically-underserved counties. The number of Family Nurse Practitioners (FNPs) is particularly noteworthy.

Table 1 – Baccalaureate and higher RN education in SW NM



As a further advantage to the students and residents of southern New Mexico, a proposed WNMU Post-Master’s Certificate for Family Nurse Practitioner has been developed in collaboration with the New Mexico State University (NMSU) School of Nursing Graduate Programs in Las Cruces, NM. NMSU currently has in place a baccalaureate (BSN) to doctorate (DNP) Family Nurse Practitioner program. Many of the core courses offered at NMSU transfer directly to the proposed FNP program at WNMU, and the majority of core courses at WNMU likewise would transfer to NMSU.

While the NMSU BSN to DNP program has met with much success, one finding emerging from close collaboration with the DNP program at NMSU has involved the ability of students to succeed with doctoral-level work when moving directly from a baccalaureate degree and progressing to doctoral studies without the benefit of an intervening master's degree. For selected students who demonstrate competence in practice and scholarly work at the master's level but who are unable to rise to the more stringent scholastic demands of a doctorate, the possibility of transfer to a regional partner (WNMU) would allow the students to complete their studies and become Family Nurse Practitioners. The availability of an alternate path to achieving FNP status for these students would necessarily alleviate the burden associated with significant investment of time, energy, and finances which conceivably could be forfeited should the students be unable to complete the Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) at NMSU.

A final area of work concerning expansion within the School of Nursing includes the establishment of an articulation agreement with Luna Community College (LCC) in Las Vegas, NM. Under the auspices of the New Mexico Nurse Educator's Consortium (NMNEC) state-wide shared curriculum, 8 students shall be admitted in the Fall of 2018 to co-enrolled cohort of future registered nurses. The students will enroll in both Luna Community College and WNMU as School of Nursing students, but will be selected from and reside in the Las Vegas, NM region and community. Upon graduation 5 semesters later, successful students will earn both an Associate's Degree in Nursing from LCC and a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing from WNMU – on the same date and at the same time and without ever leaving Las Vegas, NM. The articulation agreement will increase the head-count for WNMU by 8 further students as well as produce baccalaureate-prepared nurses with degrees from WNMU in the north-central part of the state.

In summary for this section: the School of Nursing at WNMU is seeking to increase enrollment and provide ever-higher levels of education for New Mexico nurses all without any increase in funding or expenditures. Specific programs involved include the pre-licensure BSN accelerated second-degree pilot program, the creation of a Master's Degree in Nursing, creation of a post-master's Family Nurse Practitioner Certificate, and articulation with LCC in delivering the WNMU BSN program at a distance in Las Vegas, NM.

Question #3: Should this program be doing what it is doing?

The WNMU School of Nursing continues its efforts towards increasing the level of education for registered nurses within the state, exemplified by the admission of a final Associate's Degree in Nursing (ADN) cohort in the Fall of 2016 and consequent shift to an all-baccalaureate program.

Further development of increases in educational level are demonstrated by the creation and submission of a Master's Degree in Community and Rural/Frontier Health to be offered online and a related post-master's certificate for Family Nurse Practitioner education (all described previously). Both projects demonstrate commitment by the University to better serve the public and health needs of New Mexico through increasing not only the training level of nurses, but also to create new Family Nurse Practitioners, able to serve as primary care providers and points of entry in to the health care system. The increase in availability of FNPs will help to improve access to care and alleviate wait times for individuals seeking care.

All of the projects and undertakings currently in process embody and operationalize the mission statements of both the nursing program and University at large. Our efforts are closely aligned with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report in transforming education such that “Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes a seamless academic progression.” (IOM Future of Nursing 2011, 4.1, p. 166).

Question #4: If not, what should it be doing?

The department has made every effort to meet the financial challenges and health care needs of the region served by WNMU, albeit with some challenges.

A central difficulty experienced ongoing by the program concerns the attrition rate of students enrolled in the nursing programs. For students currently enrolled in the Spring of 2017, a total of 16 students admitted in the Fall of 2015 have been unsuccessful in one or more courses across three semesters, representing 40% attrition. For students admitted in the Fall of 2016, a total of 4 students were unsuccessful in their first term, representing 10% attrition. In pursuit of an explanation for high attrition rates, recent analysis of data related to the preparatory course work of pre-licensure students enrolled in the Spring 2017 academic year reveals that 35% of the students were required to complete multiple sections of remedial coursework in reading comprehension and written expression and/or mathematics before being allowed to progress in the completion of nursing program pre-requisites. Table 2 provides information concerning the educational background for students currently enrolled and experiencing success in the pre-licensure programs.

Table 2 – Remediation coursework required by current students

Spring 2017 Currently-Enrolled Nursing Students	
Percent requiring remediation in at least 1 course	35.38%
Percent requiring remediation in math	26.15%
Percent requiring remediation in both math & writing	13.84%

Any difficulties encountered in achieving mastery of the essentials of mathematics and/or reading comprehension and written expression present the learner with significant obstacles when later striving to understand and analyze complex health care situations required for success in the nursing programs.

These data were gathered retrospectively after the pre-licensure RN programs experienced significant attrition due to difficulties in the nursing program; the numbers would be even higher should those who have been dismissed from the program due to lack of success with academic rigor in a prior semester be included. The above data do not include the need for some students to repeat remedial work in order to be successful; one currently-enrolled student required three attempts at remedial mathematics before a passing grade of ‘B’ could be achieved and progression be afforded.

The challenge of improving student preparation continues to present challenges towards achieving departmental goals. Construction of plans and processes to address weaknesses in prior preparation are

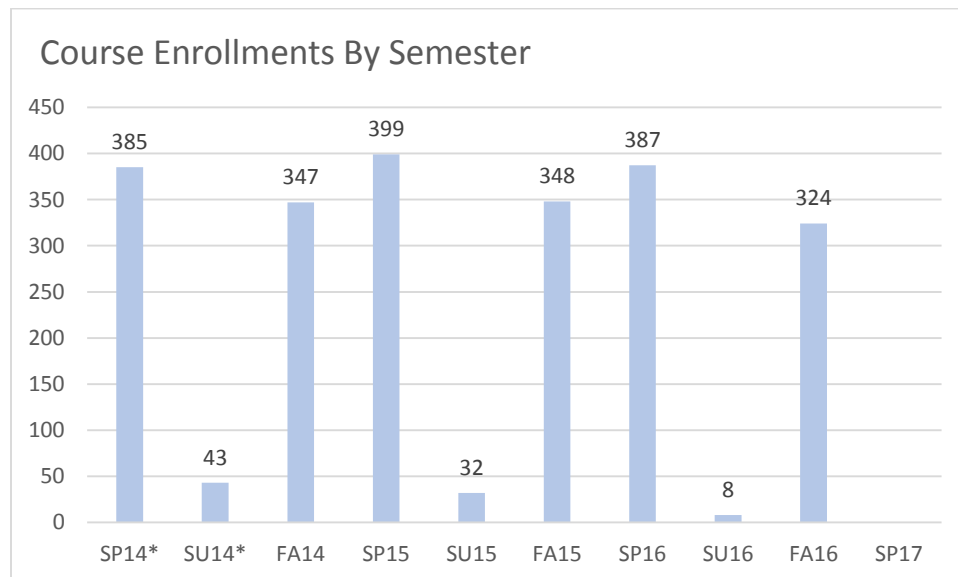
difficult at best, as the School of Nursing itself has only limited ability to influence a complex situation involving not only collegiate work, but all of a student’s educational experiences prior to enrollment in universities which embrace open admissions as a part of their mission statements. This is not to shirk our responsibility as a university, but it is worth noting the additional challenges that are presented by the same.

A second and perhaps even more important factor relating to student success involves finances. At least 50% of our students work while attending the university, and many attempt full-time employment, hoping to meet financial realities of daily life while achieving higher education. The two competing needs (education versus employment) commonly result in students attending classes while physically and mentally exhausted due to external employment. The exhausted and stressed individual is at a distinct disadvantage when they try to master complex material and while developing critical thinking skills.

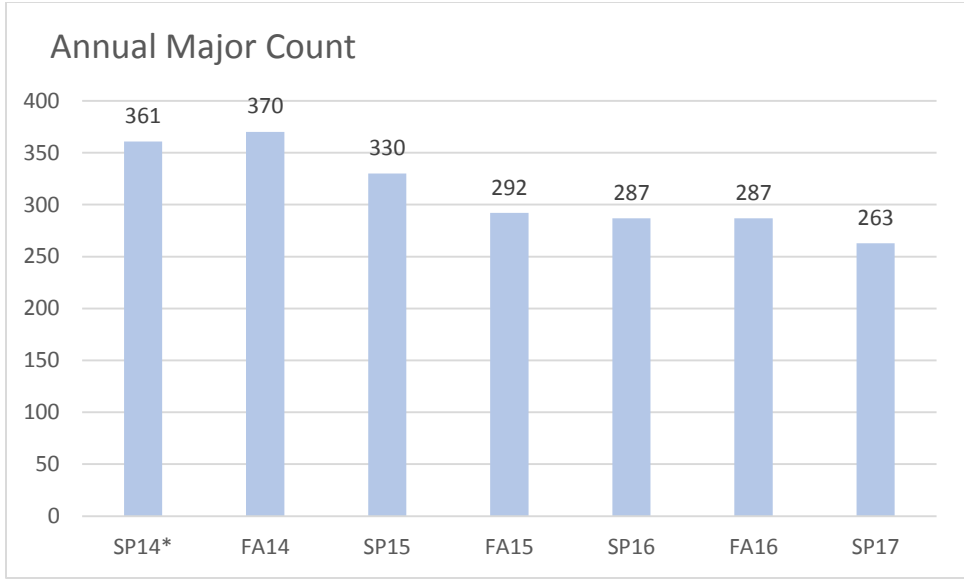
Question #5: How should the SON do what the SON should be doing?

In keeping with the vision and mission of both WNMU and the SON, the SON should be preparing student graduates to provide quality care to those they serve once in the profession. A close eye must be kept to the NCLEX first-time test taker’s pass rate, which experienced a significant reversal in 2016, in which a cumulative 67.86 fell short of the targeted 80% pass rate required by state and national accrediting bodies. The program shall continue to hold fast to appropriate student performance standards from the time of student admission through graduation.

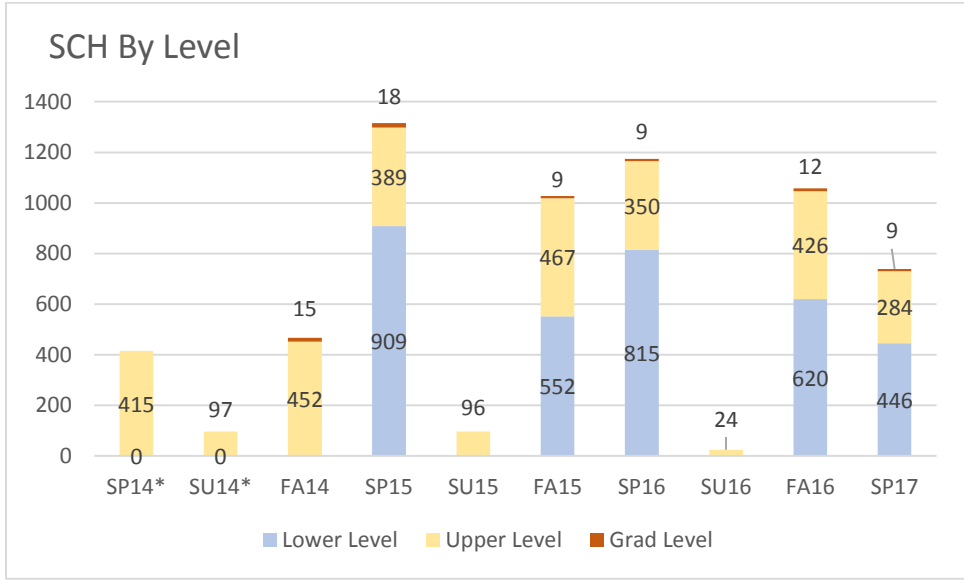
The SON faculty and staff should be modeling professional behaviors, as evidenced by communications within and outside of the walls of the building. The School of Nursing should continue its efforts to increase enrollment, drawing regionally upon potential applicants. The following tables 3-7 delineate the ebb and flow of student enrollment, course credit hours, average class sizes, and degrees awarded.



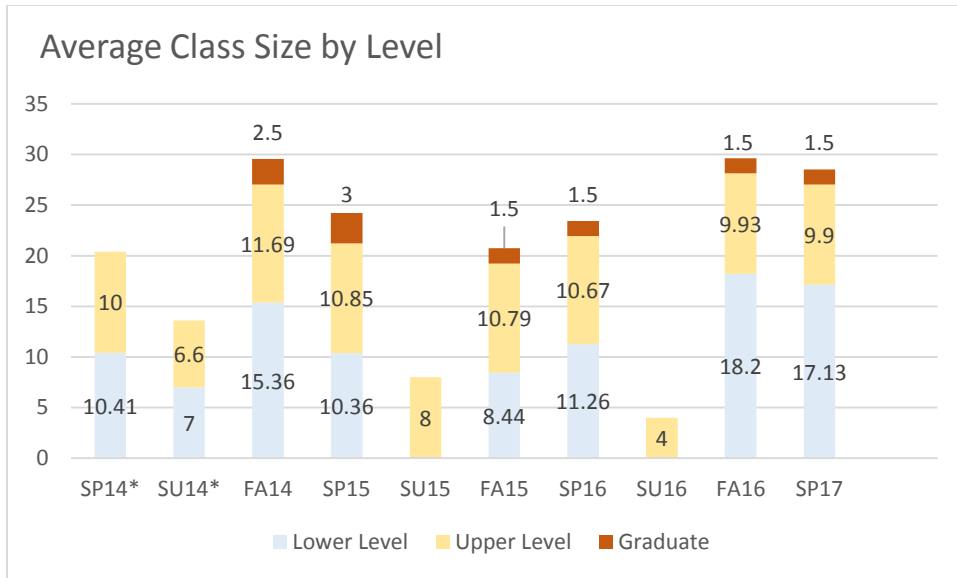
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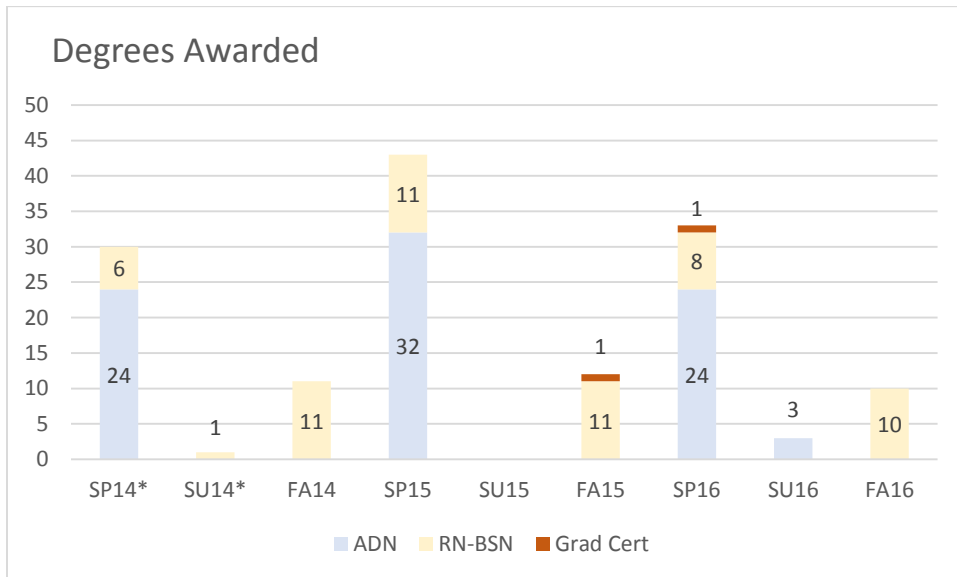
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The foregoing narrative and graphic presentation are intended to give an overview of the WNMU School of Nursing, including ongoing efforts towards providing the highest quality education possible to the students for which it is responsible. It is the belief of faculty and staff that in educating well-prepared Registered Nurses, the SON will play a role (however small) in the stabilization of current health care in the United States and also foster active participation in the creation of the future of nursing and health care across the nation.

References

Institute of Medicine Future of Nursing Report (2011). Retrieved:

<http://www.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ThePracticeofProfessionalNursing/workforce/IOM-Future-of-Nursing-Report-1>