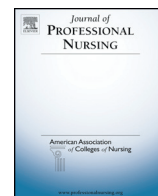




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Professional Nursing



The challenges and opportunities in leading a multi-campus university

Susan L. Groenwald

Chamberlain University, 3005 Highland Parkway, Downers Grove, IL 60515, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 May 2017

Revised 4 December 2017

Accepted 11 December 2017

Available online xxxxx

Keywords:

Multi-campus university

Multi-campus system

Multi-site management

Workforce dispersion

Management of dispersed workers

Knowledge management

ABSTRACT

Leadership in higher education on the best of days is complex and challenging due to the many competing internal and external demands and constituents. In today's climate of decreased funding, dwindling enrollments and political debate over the value of higher education, the higher education leader is often in the crossfires of debate and conflict. Nursing education leaders have the added requirement of protecting the public safety by graduating competent and safe practitioners. The role of the higher education leader is even more complex when the institution has multiple campuses, whether within one state or across states. This article addresses the unique challenges of leading across multiple college campus sites including autonomy in decision-making, communication, quality academic outcomes, consistency, culture, and knowledge management. Approaches to enhance leadership success include establishing system-wide goals and strategies; technology to facilitate knowledge management, communication and consistent policies; system-wide committees or councils and a central office to provide support and consistency. By building the appropriate infrastructure and processes, multiple benefits of scale, expanded access, and efficiencies can be derived in multi-campus educational institutions.

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Introduction

Leaders in higher education are challenged daily by competing demands from multiple internal and external constituents. For higher education in the United States (US), enrollments are declining; state funding is shrinking; the public is challenging the value, especially as the average student debt and the cost of tuition continue to rise; there is increased expectation of transparency in leadership and consumer demand for organizational accountability; competition is increasing as students become better consumers and online advertising changes the nature of competition; and so on. At the same time, higher education leaders strive to improve their institutional outcomes through academic innovation, application of learning science, and technology. Leaders in nursing education have the additional responsibility to society of graduating safe and competent nurses prepared for emerging technologies and models of care. The higher education leader is further challenged when multiple campuses extend across several states (Fraser & Stott, 2015; Johnstone, 2005; Rothchild, 2011).

The preponderance of scholarly literature regarding multi-campus universities relates to state university systems where there are multiple institutions under one governing body, but each institution is relatively autonomous. An extensive literature review produced no scholarly articles pertaining to multi-campus nursing programs that have one central office or main campus and one nursing leader, and where the mission and vision of the institution are the same for all campuses.

This article has two main purposes: 1) To describe the unique challenges and opportunities of nursing leaders of multi-campus universities where the campuses are geographically distributed, but have one common mission and vision and the nursing leader is responsible for managing program delivery and outcomes for all campuses; and 2) to provide examples of potential approaches for overcoming those unique challenges. This area of nursing education has grown significantly in recent years, but is missing in the nursing literature. Given the scarcity of scholarly information about multi-campus nursing schools in the academic literature, this article draws upon literature from educational and business management.

Background

Groups have different definitions using the same words to describe varying structures of colleges or universities that have multiple physical presences. Terms such as campuses, sites, locations, satellites, branches may be used interchangeably, hence the language can be confusing. Some of these terms have special meanings and rules for accrediting and regulatory approval agencies, which adds to the confusion. For purposes of this article, the term "campus" is used to refer to any physical location that exists in addition to a central office or main campus of a college or university. Campuses differ in their size, structure, and relationship to the university. The following is a brief review of the literature to distinguish among the various types of multi-campus universities and systems. Table 1 depicts defining characteristics and examples of each.

E-mail address: sgroenwald@chamberlain.edu.<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2017.12.005>

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Table 1
Differences among types of multi campus universities.

Type	Comprised of 2 or more colleges or universities	Single governing board	Main or flagship campus	Single state	Multiple states	Each campus has unique mission	Central office with central curriculum and mission	Public	Private	Examples
State multi-institution system	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		46 states plus Puerto Rico. (Ex. Illinois: University of Illinois, Southern Illinois University, Illinois State University, etc.)
College or university with multiple autonomous campuses				✓	✓	✓		✓		University of Illinois
College or university with satellite campus(es)		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	Ohio State University Penn State University
Multi-state, multi-campus college or university with central office		✓			✓		✓		✓	Chamberlain University Rasmussen College West Coast University

References: Diehl et al., 2011; Fraser & Stott, 2015; Lane, 2013; National Association of Systems Heads (NASH), 2017; Pinheiro & Berg, 2017.

State multi-institutional systems

State multi-institution systems developed in public higher education in the twentieth century primarily as a way for states to oversee their public colleges and universities (Lane, 2013). The National Association of System Heads (NASH) defines a public higher education system as “a group of two or more colleges or universities, each with substantial autonomy and led by a chief executive or operating officer, all under a single governing board which is served by a system chief executive officer who is not also the chief executive officer of any of the system institutions” (National Association of Systems Heads (NASH), 2017). Every state has a public university, and 45 states plus Puerto Rico have a public college or university system as defined by NASH, with multiple campuses and in many cases different institution types. In such multi-institution systems, all campuses are within one state. The 46 public multi-institution systems serve more than six million students, roughly 30% of all post-secondary students in the US (National Association of Systems Heads (NASH), 2017).

Institutions with multiple autonomous campuses

In public or private institutions with multiple autonomous campuses, each campus has a unique mission and purpose, and each has separate-but-equal institutional heads and faculty governance bodies. Those institutions that offer nursing degrees have nursing directors or deans at each campus (Diehl et al., 2011), but no central nursing leader.

Institutions with satellite campuses

In contrast to institutions with multiple autonomous campuses like University of Illinois, public or private institutions with satellite campuses have a single governing board, but they lack the separate-but-equal institutional heads and faculty governance bodies at each campus. Satellite campuses are affiliated with a main or flagship campus and reflect the main campus mission. In some cases, satellite campuses do not offer the full array of services and student support offered at the flagship campus (Fraser & Stott, 2015).

Multi-state, multi-campus institutions with central office

A university structure that is not described in the literature is the multi-state, multi-campus university with a central office (as opposed to main campus), a central leader, and multiple campuses often distributed among various states, where all campuses reflect the same mission. The key difference between this type of institution and others is

the existence of a central office that provides support services to all campuses.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) manages the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), a repository of core post-secondary education data, reported by all Title IV institutions in the US since 1993 (US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The NCES reports that no criteria have been identified that would make it possible to know how many and which institutions have satellite or multiple campuses, and how many of each exist. An extensive search of the literature, national nursing association websites, the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and Robert Wood Johnson websites failed to produce a comprehensive and up-to-date list of nursing programs in the US, let alone indication of which schools have multiple campuses. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the National League for Nursing, and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing responded to a request for a list of schools of nursing with multiple campuses with the answer that such a list is not kept by the organizations. The information that follows is derived from websites and from personal knowledge of peers in the industry.

There are several for-profit entities offering nursing degrees that have multiple brick and mortar campuses distributed over more than one state, including but not limited to Carrington College, Chamberlain University, Galen College, Herzing University, Kaplan University, Rasmussen College, South University and West Coast University. A review of the school's websites revealed that these entities range in size from three nursing campuses (West Coast University) to 21 (Chamberlain College of Nursing). Chamberlain, South and West Coast Universities offer pre-licensure baccalaureate degrees in nursing on multiple campuses; the other institutions offer associate degrees in nursing and some offer post-licensure programs. Western Governors University is a non-profit university with multi-state offices, but no campuses as students take courses online. The websites of the colleges and universities listed above indicate that all have one governing board, a central headquarters office that provides shared services, and one leader responsible for all nursing programs on all campuses/states, in addition to a campus-based president, dean, or director. The balance of this paper will address the unique challenges and approaches for nursing leaders of multi-campus colleges or universities.

Unique challenges for nursing leaders of multi-campus universities

The key challenges for any leader are maintaining consistency of action throughout the organization and communicating vision and strategy that resonates at all levels of the enterprise regardless of organizational structure (Brown, 2013). Challenges unique to the leader

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