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MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

Survey of the Recipients of Maryland Nursing Scholarships

February 2004

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION
839 Bestgate Rd. • Suite 400 • Annapolis, MD 21401-3013

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Purpose and Background

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the Maryland Nursing Scholarship Program in persuading students to enter and remain in the nursing profession in the State.

This program provides awards to students pursuing a career in nursing. The program is open to all full- and part-time undergraduate and graduate students who are Maryland residents and are enrolled in a course of study leading to a nursing degree. Recipients must have earned a “B” average in high school and must maintain a “B” average in college. Awards cover a maximum of \$3,000 per year in tuition and mandatory fees. A living expenses grant of up to \$3,000 annually is available based on need. Students enrolled in an accelerated program with required summer academic sessions may receive a yearly award covering up to \$4,500 in tuition and fees. This program has a service obligation: students who accept the award must work as a full-time nurse in Maryland for the same number of years they received the scholarship or repay the funds.

Study Design

Included in the study were all individuals who were offered a Maryland Nursing Scholarship during the past six years. These persons were organized into the following groups:

- Those who accepted the award and are currently participating in the program.
- Those who were offered the award but did not accept it.
- Those who received the award but decided to pay back the money rather than complete their service obligation.
- Those who are completing the service obligation.
- Those who have completed the service obligation.

Data Collection

A total of 1,538 questionnaires with accompanying letters were mailed (see Appendix A). A follow-up mailing was conducted to increase the participation rate. There were 156 questionnaires returned because of bad addresses. Completed surveys were received from 843 persons for an overall response rate of 61.0 percent. Participation in the survey was very strong among those individuals who accepted the award and are either currently participating in the program (78.5 percent), are completing their service requirement (79.0 percent) or have finished their obligation (59.9 percent). A majority (51.0 percent) of those who decided to repay the money rather than complete their service obligation took part in the survey. However, just 16.0 percent of the students who were offered the award, yet declined it, returned the questionnaire.

Principal Author: Laura Filipp

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS. Highlights of the results of each of the five groups of individuals who were offered the scholarship are discussed individually. Tables containing frequencies of responses to each question in each survey are presented in Appendix B. Copies of the questionnaires are in Appendix C.

All of the scholarship recipients were asked a common question: why had they chosen to accept the award? The vast majority in each group answered that they had done so because they had needed the money (between 78 and 90 percent) and/or because they had already planned to become a nurse (between 71 and 75 percent).

Students Who Accepted the Award and are Currently Participating in the Program

For most of these students, the scholarship did not have a strong impact on their decision to pursue a nursing career. Just one-fifth of the students said the scholarship influenced their decision “a great deal”, and nearly half indicated that it had no effect at all. An overwhelming majority (86 percent) reported that they would have enrolled in a nursing preparatory program even if they had not received the award.

Nonetheless, 85 percent of the current recipients said they were satisfied with the scholarship. Many added personal notes of gratitude. In the words of one student, “This scholarship allowed me to continue my education and it convinced me to stay in Maryland upon graduation—thank you for everything.”

Nearly 40 percent of the students said that they would be continuing with this scholarship next year and most of the remainder said they had already graduated.

Students Who Accepted the Award, Graduated and are Currently Completing the Service Obligation

Virtually all of these individuals (99 percent) plan to complete their service requirement. **In addition, 99 percent plan to stay in the nursing profession after finishing their obligation, and 96 percent intend to work in this capacity in Maryland.**

Asked to suggest ways to make the scholarship more beneficial to future students, many wrote that the program should be extensively advertised so that more students could take advantage of it. Several suggested allocating money for books or providing assistance in paying back nursing school loans. Others advocated increasing award amounts to keep up with rising tuition. Many respondents added appreciative comments. In the words of one nurse, “I honestly feel that the nursing scholarship was extremely generous and allowed me to become a nurse.”

Students Who Accepted the Award, Graduated and Have Completed the Service Obligation

Virtually all of these persons (98 percent) are still working as nurses and 95 percent are currently nurses in Maryland. The most frequent suggestion offered by respondents to improve the award for future students was more publicity of the scholarship. Other common suggestions included increasing award amounts to keep up with rising tuition, making funds available for graduate school, and giving special assistance to older, career-changing adults. Some recommended increasing the scholarship amount for recipients who agreed to perform extra years of Maryland service.

Like other award recipients, many nurses wrote testimonials about how much they appreciated the scholarship. The following quotes are representative:

“The scholarship worked out well for me. I was a part-time student at UMB. I received the scholarship for 3 1/2 years and fulfilled my four-year commitment to practice in Maryland. I remain a nurse at the same hospital. It has been 8 1/2 years now...”

“I’ve been out of school 11+ years, working as an ICU nurse and am extremely grateful for the opportunities my nursing scholarship gave me.”

“I want to thank you for your assistance. Since receiving the scholarship and getting my RN license, I have gone on to get a BSN and also sat for my certification test and am a Certified Occupational Health Nurse Specialist. Thanks! I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Students Who Initially Accepted the Award but Later Decided to Pay Back the Money

Lack of interest in nursing was *not* the reason that prompted the decision of those students who paid back the scholarship. Most survey respondents in this category indicated in their comments that they *are* currently working as nurses, and 80 percent said they planned to pursue careers in nursing. Over 83 percent of the respondents said that they had decided to pay back the scholarship because they had not wanted to fulfill the service obligation. A majority of these individuals either had moved and were working full-time as nurses in other states or they were working part-time as nurses in Maryland. Most said family obligations prevented them from fulfilling the service obligation—a husband being transferred out-of-state, for example, or a need to work part-time in order to rear young children. Several wrote that they were working in nursing related fields and made pleas for these nursing specialty occupations to qualify for fulfillment of the service obligation. Some of these positions involved hospital duties, including research or administrative supervision. Other persons, however, had taken jobs outside hospitals, such as teaching faculty at nursing programs at colleges or universities in the State.

Asked whether something might have been done to persuade them to complete the service obligation instead of paying back the scholarship, virtually all indicated that nothing short of altering specific service obligation requirements (such as in-state service, full-time work, or requiring “bedside” nursing jobs only) would have convinced them to change their minds. The many who are nursing part-time in Maryland wrote extensive comments suggesting that part-time work count at least partially toward the service obligation. In the words of one, “...pro-rate the payback schedule as money for hours worked, so that nurses are not penalized for working part-time—many are moms who enter nursing for flexibility in schedule.”

Since the vast majority of these respondents reported that they intend to pursue nursing careers in the future, it is reasonable to assume that at least some who are now working as nurses part-time due to child-rearing responsibilities will return to full-time work after their children grow older.

Students Who Were Offered, but Did Not Accept, the Award

Because of the very low response rate for this group, the results must be interpreted with great caution.

Asked to identify the most important factor in their decision not to accept the award, slightly more than half indicated that they had not wanted to perform the service obligation and 44 percent said that this had been the *most* important factor in their decision. More than one-fourth said that the scholarship amount was too small. Many individuals offered a reason that was not on the questionnaire: an inability to combine the Maryland Nursing Scholarship with other awards. Only 9 percent said that they did not need the money.

Even though they refused the scholarship, 90 percent of these students said that they still planned to enter the nursing profession after graduation and 73 percent said that they intended to do so in Maryland.

Policy Issues

These are policy issues emerging from the survey findings:

The goal of the scholarship program to increase the number of nurses working in Maryland is being achieved.

Nearly all of the current nurses who benefited from the scholarship are working in Maryland, and a similar percentage of those who are completing their service obligation have the same intention. This has important workforce implications. Like most states, Maryland faces a critical shortage of nurses, and the gap between the supply of professionals in this area and the number required to staff hospitals and other care facilities is expected to grow dramatically in the next two decades. Surveys of the needs of employers conducted by the Commission and the

Maryland Business Roundtable for Education have found nursing to be among those occupations which are keenly demanded but for which there has been a dearth of qualified applicants. Even though most students indicated that they would have enrolled in a nursing program regardless of whether they had gotten the scholarship, it is unlikely that all would have taken a job in the State in the absence of the service requirement. In addition, this obligation might serve as an inducement to new nurses to stick with their job, which is one of the most taxing in terms of occupational pressures and other factors. Hence, the scholarships are apt to impact positively the proportion of Maryland-prepared nurses who remain in the State after completing their program and earning certification.

There may be ways to make the program more effective by reducing the number of students who decline to accept a scholarship or decide to pay back the award rather than fulfill the service obligation.

A large majority of the students who did not accept the scholarship and those who initially took it but decided later to return the money reported that they planned to seek a career in nursing. Some of the individuals who paid back the money had taken part-time work because of family considerations. Others were employed in nursing-related fields that do not meet the service requirements. These issues may be influencing a large number of the students who turned down the award; most of these individuals cited the service obligation as their reason. To increase the number of students who complete the program or accept the award, the State should give strong consideration to allowing service credit on a prorated basis for part-time nursing work. The possibility of expanding the type of nursing specialties that are eligible might also be explored. Emphasis should be given to jobs that are in strong demand and which reflect the hospital-centered mission of the grant. Any changes, however, would require legislation.

Appendix A. Response Rates

Response Rates: Survey of the Recipients of Maryland Nursing Scholarships

Subgroup	Mailed	Bad Addresses	Adjusted # of Surveys	Total Surveys Completed	Response Rate
A. Current Participants	401	5	396	311	78.5%
B. Declined the Award	268	62	206	33	16.0%
C. Repaying the Award	119	17	102	52	51.0%
D. Currently Performing Service Obligation	217	3	214	169	79.0%
E. Completed Service Obligation	533	69	464	278	59.9%
Total	1538	156	1382	843	61.0%

Appendix B. Frequency Tables

Survey A: Accepted Scholarship and Currently in School (n=311)

q1. Why did you accept the award?

needed the money	261	84.2%
planned to be a nurse	230	74.2%
parents urged	21	6.8%
other	8	2.6%

q2. To what extent did the award influence your decision to pursue a nursing career?

a great deal	62	20.1%
somewhat	55	17.8%
a little	40	12.9%
not at all	152	49.2%

q3. Would you have enrolled in a nursing prep. program if you had not received the award?

yes	263	86.2%
no	42	13.8%

q4. Satisfied with the MNSP?

yes	264	85.4%
no	19	6.1%
unsure	26	8.4%

q5. Plan to continue with the MNSP next year?

yes	119	38.5%
no	103	33.3%
unsure	24	7.8%
not eligible	63	20.4%

Survey B: Did Not Accept Scholarship (n=33)

	<u>Count</u>	<u>Column %</u>
q1. Why didn't you accept the award?	enrolled out-of-state	1 3.0%
	not considered reputable program	0 -
	didn't need the money	3 9.1%
	didn't want service obligation	17 51.5%
	academic requirements	0 -
	award amount too small	9 27.3%
	uncertain about becoming a nurse	1 3.0%
	other	17 51.5%
	q2. Most important factor above?	didn't want service obligation
award amount too small		3 9.4%
other		15 46.9%
q3. Plan to apply for award next year?	yes	3 9.7%
	no	28 90.3%
q4. Plan to become a nurse?	yes	22 73.3%
	yes, but not in Maryland	5 16.7%
	no	3 10.0%
q5. Recommend MNSP to others?	yes	28 84.8%
	no	1 3.0%
	unsure	4 12.1%
q6. Anything that would have persuaded you to take the award?	yes	19 59.4%
	no	13 40.6%

Survey C: Accepted Scholarship but Decided to Repay it (n=52)

		<u>Count</u>	<u>Column %</u>
q1. Why did you accept the award?	needed the money	40	78.4%
	planned to be a nurse	36	70.6%
	parents urged	4	7.8%
	other	3	5.9%
q2. Did you expect to be a nurse in MD?	yes	49	94.2%
	no	3	5.8%
q3. Why did you pay back the award?	unhappy with the program	0	-
	didn't want service obligation	27	51.9%
	unable to work full-time	16	30.8%
	uncertain about nursing	3	5.8%
	accepted non-nursing job	3	5.8%
	other	33	63.5%
q4 Most important factor listed above?	unhappy with the program	1	2.2%
	didn't want service obligation	19	41.3%
	unable to work full-time	7	15.2%
	uncertain about nursing	3	6.5%
	accepted non-nursing job	1	2.2%
	other	15	32.6%
q5 Do you plan to pursue nursing?	yes	35	79.5%
	no	9	20.5%
q6 Anything to persuade you to do differently?	yes	19	59.4%
	no	13	40.6%

Survey D: Accepted Scholarship and Currently in Service Obligation Phase (n=169)

		<u>Count</u>	<u>Column %</u>
q1. Why did you accept the award?	needed the money	137	81.1%
	planned to be a nurse	123	72.8%
	parents urged	6	3.6%
	other	12	7.1%
q2. Plan to complete service obligation?	yes	165	98.8%
	no	2	1.2%
q3. Plan to continue nursing after obligation completed?	yes	161	96.4%
	yes, but not in Maryland	5	3.0%
	no	1	.6%

Survey E: Accepted Scholarship and Completed Service Obligation (n=278)

		<u>Count</u>	<u>Column %</u>
q1. Why did you accept the award?	needed the money	249	89.6%
	planned to become a nurse	209	75.2%
	parents urged	12	4.3%
	other	18	6.5%
q2. Still working as a nurse in MD?	yes	265	95.3%
	no, still nursing, but not in Maryland	8	2.9%
	no, not nursing	5	1.8%

Appendix C. Questionnaires

A 2003 Survey on the Impact of the Maryland Nursing Scholarship

Please Help Plan Maryland's Future!

The Maryland Nursing Scholarship Program provides awards to students pursuing a career in nursing. The program is open to all full- and part-time undergraduate and graduate students who are Maryland residents and are enrolled in a course of study leading to a nursing degree. Recipients must have earned a "B" average in high school and must maintain a "B" average in college. Awards cover a maximum of \$3,000 per year in tuition and mandatory fees; a living expenses grant of up to \$3,000 annually is available based on need.

1. Why did you choose to accept the Maryland Nursing Scholarship? (circle all that apply)

- a. needed the money
- b. planned to become a nurse
- c. parents urged me to accept it
- d. Other

2. To what extent did the Maryland Nursing Scholarship influence your decision to pursue a career in nursing?

- a. a great deal
- b. somewhat
- c. a little
- d. not at all

3. Would you have enrolled in a nursing preparatory program if you had not received the Maryland Nursing Scholarship?

- a. yes
- b. no

4. Are you satisfied with the Maryland Nursing Scholarship program?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. unsure

--if no, please explain: _____

5. Do you plan to continue with the Maryland Nursing Scholarship next year?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. unsure
- d. not eligible to apply

--if no, please explain: _____

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1. Why did you choose not to accept the Maryland Nursing Scholarship? (circle all that apply)

- a. enrolled at out-of-state college
- b. didn't consider it a reputable program
- c. didn't need the money
- d. didn't want to perform the service obligation
- e. concerned about meeting the academic requirements to keep the award
- f. scholarship amount too small
- g. wasn't certain I wanted to be a nurse
- h. other _____

2. Which ONE of the factors circled above was the most important in your decision not to accept the Maryland Nursing Scholarship?

write letter here _____

3. Do you plan to apply for a Maryland Nursing Scholarship next year?

- a. yes
- b. no

4. Do you plan to enter the nursing profession following graduation?

- a. yes, in Maryland
- b. yes, but not in Maryland
- c. no

5. You chose not to accept the Maryland Nursing Scholarship, but would you recommend the program to others?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. unsure

6. Were there any actions that could have been taken to persuade you to *not* give up the Maryland Nursing Scholarship?

- a. yes
- b. no

--if yes, please explain

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1. Why did you initially choose to accept the Maryland Nursing Scholarship?

(circle all that apply)

- a. needed the money
- b. planned to become a nurse
- c. parents urged me to apply for the scholarship
- d. other _____

2. At the time, did you expect to enter the nursing profession in Maryland following graduation?

- a. yes
- b. no

3. Why did you choose to pay back the scholarship?

- a. unhappy with the program
- b. did not want to perform service obligation
- c. was unable to be a nurse full-time
- d. was not certain I wanted to be a nurse
- e. accepted a non-nursing job
- f. other _____

4. Which one of the factors circled above was most important in your decision to give up the scholarship?

write letter here _____

5. Do you plan to pursue a career in nursing in the future?

- a. yes
- b. no

6. Were there any actions that could have been taken to persuade you to become a nurse rather than pay back the scholarship?

- a. yes
- b. no

--if yes, please explain

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1. Why did you choose to accept the Maryland Nursing Scholarship? (circle all that apply)

- a. needed the money
- b. planned to become a nurse
- c. parents urged me to apply for the scholarship
- d. other _____

2. Do you plan to complete the service obligation required by the Maryland Nursing Scholarship?

- a. yes
- b. no

If no, please explain: _____

3. Do you plan to continue in the nursing profession once you have completed your obligation?

- a. yes, in Maryland
- b. yes, but not in Maryland
- c. no

If no, please explain: _____

4. Is there anything you would suggest to make the Maryland Nursing Scholarship Program more beneficial to future students?

Thank You for your participation in this survey. Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

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1. Why did you choose to accept the Maryland Nursing Scholarship? (circle all that apply)

- a. needed the money
- b. planned to become a nurse
- c. parents urged me to apply for the scholarship
- d. other _____

2. Are you still working in the nursing profession in Maryland?

- a. yes
 - b. no—I am working in the nursing profession, but not in Maryland
 - c. no—I am no longer working in the nursing profession
- if you are no longer in the nursing profession, please explain:

3. Is there anything you would suggest to make the Maryland Nursing Scholarship Program more beneficial to future students?

Thank You for your participation in this survey. Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

