Changes in Political Astuteness Following an Active Learning Experience in Health Policy for Undergraduate Nursing Students

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INTRODUCTION
Preparing nursing students to advocate for policies that improve health is a critical component of nursing education. However, the effect of academic learning experiences on students’ political awareness and skills is unclear.

DEFINITION OF POLITICAL ASTUTENESS
• Voting behaviors
• Participation in professional or student organizations
• Awareness of health policy issues
• Knowledge of elected officials and the legislative and policy process
• Involvement in the political process

RESULTS
• There was a significant increase in political astuteness at the end of the course (M = 23.1, SD = 5.7) as compared to the beginning (M = 10.5, SD = 5.1), t = - 3.89, df = 299, p < .000.

STUDY
• Describe changes in political astuteness after students have participated in a series of public policy learning activities.
• Senior nursing students enrolled in the public/community health nursing course sections completed the PAI at the beginning and end of the course.
• Sample was N=300 (65% participation rate) (260 basic and 40 RN students) (259 females and 41 males).

INSTRUMENT
• The Political Astuteness Inventory (PAI), a 40-item tool, about ten minutes to complete. Based on the total score, four levels of political astuteness are categorized (i.e., totally unaware politically; slightly more aware of the implications of political activity for nursing; beginning political astuteness; and politically astute, asset to nursing).

• The PAI adapted and used by permission of author (Clark, 1984, 2008) and publisher (Clark, 2008). Evidence of content validity of the instrument Primomo (2007) and internal consistency reliability Cronbach at .84 (from our study).


DISCUSSION
• BEFORE: for most part, undergraduate nursing students - totally unaware or only slightly aware of the implications of political activity for nursing.
• AFTER PARTICIPATION: Majority of students increased their scores to the levels beginning political astuteness or politically astute.
• ACTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE: significantly increased undergraduate nursing students’ political astuteness. Faulk & Morris (2001) found that completion of a political assessment inventory led to RN to BSN students’ awareness of the importance political involvement. Primomo (2007) demonstrated that academic course work in health policy increases the political astuteness of graduate students in nursing.

Limitations
A convenience sample from one undergraduate nursing program limits generalizability. Psychometric evaluation is needed to develop the instrument and to refine the underlying dimensions of political astuteness.

CONCLUSION
1. The PAI is a useful tool for measuring the political astuteness of nursing students.
2. Completion of the PAI was an effective learning activity that promoted self-reflection and raised students’ awareness of the importance of political involvement in nursing.
3. The PAI was an effective outcome measure for the public policy learning activities. Active learning experiences in health policy should be included in undergraduate nursing programs.