

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

Mary E. Byrd, PhD, RN, Joanne Costello, PhD, RN, Lynn Blanchette, MS, RN, Kathleen Gremel, MS, RN, Jeanne Schwager, PhD, RN, Carol R. Shelton, PhD, RN and Patricia Thomas, PhD, RN. Rhode Island College School of Nursing, Providence, RI

## 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 ( $M = 10.5, SD = 5.1$ ),  $t = -38.904, df = 299, p = .000$ .

## Items with the Most Change

- Knowing the name of one's U.S. senator
- Knowing the name of one's U.S. representative
- Knowing the name one's state senator
- Knowing the name one's state representative
- Being acquainted with the voting record of at least one of the above in relation to a specific health issue
- Being aware of the stand taken by at least one of the above in relation to a specific health issue
- Knowing whom to contact for information about health-related issues at the state or federal level
- Knowing whether or not one's professional organization employs lobbyists at the state or federal level
- Knowing how to contact these lobbyists
- Having written to one state or national representative in the last year regarding a health issue
- Knowing the process by which a bill is introduced in the state legislature
- Knowing which senators or representatives are supportive of nursing
- Knowing which House and Senate committees usually deal with health-related issues
- Knowing the committees of which one's representatives are members
- Knowing of at least two issues related to the profession that are currently under discussion
- Knowing of at least two health-related issues that are currently under discussion at the state or national level

## Public Policy Learning Activities

- Information Sessions Rhode Island Department of Health and State House – Students dialogue with public health leaders and professional and community advocates.
- Legislative Assignment – Students evaluate their legislators' commitment to health-related legislation.
- Public Policy Group Project – Clinical groups analyze a public health problem, identify policy interventions, and present their findings.

## 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).

Clark, P. E. (1984). Political astuteness inventory. In M. J. D. Clark, *Community nursing: Health care today and tomorrow*. Reston, VA: Reston.

Clark, P. E. (2008). Political astuteness inventory. In M. J. Clark, *Community assessment reference guide for community health nursing* (pp. 1-2). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

**Survey Tool**

**What is Your Political Astuteness Quotient?**

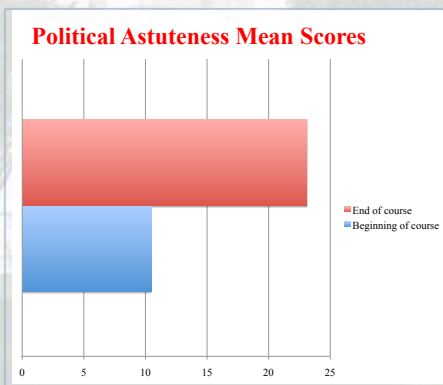
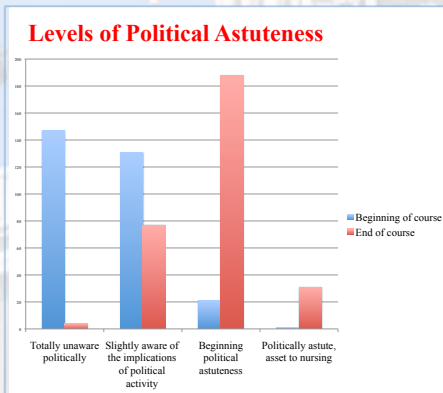
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**Political Astuteness Inventory**  
Read through each of the following items. Then give yourself one point for each one that you can answer with a "yes". After completing the inventory, compare your total score with the scoring criteria at the bottom of the page.

*Sample Questions*

I am registered to vote.  
I know where my voting precinct is located.  
I voted in the last general election.  
I recognized the names of the majority of candidates on the ballot and was acquainted with the majority of issues in the last election.  
I belong to the state professional or student organization.  
I know the names of my senators in Washington, D.C.  
I know the name of my representatives in Washington, D.C.  
I know the name of the state senator(s) from my district.  
I know the names of the state representative(s) from my district.  
I am acquainted with the voting record of at least one of the above in relation to a specific health issue.  
I am aware of the stand taken by at least one of the above in relation to a specific health issue.

*Other Questions Continue*



## 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.