

# Exploring Student Attitudes About a Social Justice and Health Equity Course: Do Difficult Conversations Regarding Social Justice in Healthcare Better Prepare Student Nurses?

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*In healthcare, it is vital to foster an inclusive environment among employees and patients. One factor that goes into nondiscriminatory foundations is one's ability, as a nurse, to recognize and respond appropriately to microaggressions. This ongoing study is a descriptive, qualitative research study focusing on rising sophomores and juniors in Villanova University's M. Louis Fitzpatrick College of Nursing who have completed Nursing 1105. The purpose is to explore, via interviews, how taking a course on social justice has impacted students' comfort levels with recognizing and responding to microaggressions, how students' attitudes regarding social justice changed over the course, and whether student nurses who completed the course on social justice feel more prepared to engage in discussions about social justice in healthcare.*

Today, one of the most pressing issues in the realm of nursing and healthcare is health inequities among marginalized individuals. To effectively counteract such discrimination, a student nurse's education needs to incorporate certain core classes that address these issues. Introduced in the Fall of 2023 to Villanova's traditional 4-year Bachelor of Science program as a first-year course was "Social Justice and Health Equity." Students reported that they had little background and were uncomfortable with recognizing and responding to microaggressions, which are subtle discriminatory remarks directed towards marginalized individuals or groups. This course incorporates extensive content dedicated to student engagement, including addressing microaggressions. This core course, NUR 1105, is unique in that it is the first documented required first-year course on social justice in a nursing program in the United States (1).

Previous research, completed in the course, has demonstrated quantitative improvement in student attitudes towards social justice following completion of the course (2). However, to date, no qualitative research has been conducted to explore students' perceptions of the course and its impact on their attitudes towards social justice and comfort in recognizing and responding to microaggressions. To better fill this gap, I propose to explore how taking a course on social justice has impacted students' comfort levels with recognizing and responding to microaggressions, explore how students' attitudes regarding social justice changed over the course, and explore whether student nurses who completed the course

on social justice feel more prepared to engage in discussions about social justice in healthcare.

This ongoing study, approved by the Institutional Review Board, is a descriptive, qualitative research study focusing on rising sophomores and juniors in Villanova University's M. Louis Fitzpatrick College of Nursing who completed NUR 1105. Qualifying students received an email invitation to participate in this study. Participation requires engagement in a thirty-minute interview, consisting of five open-ended questions regarding one's experience in NUR 1105. Before the interview, participants completed a Qualtrics survey and an informed consent form; the demographics of each student surveyor are illustrated in Table 1. A sample of fourteen students was used, and their transcripts are currently being reviewed and coded for three general themes and subthemes as needed. Themes will then be compared and iteratively synthesized into major themes.

A similar qualitative study was conducted in Iran that interviewed a sample of thirteen nursing students and ultimately found a weakness in social justice education in nursing curriculum (4). Upon completion of the interview, a transcription process was undertaken to encode, label, and categorize themes. The research article, "Social Justice in health system; a neglected component of Academic Nursing Education: A qualitative study," published with BMC, has a similar methodology outline to this study and ultimately presents the need for improvement in social justice education in nursing-related curricula.

The primary goal of this study is to obtain

students’ authentic opinions about how NUR 1105 has impacted their journeys as student nurses and assess the importance of social justice in nursing curricula. Results and conclusions have not yet been drawn, but based on several complete interviews, it is expected that themes will entail positive outlooks on the course’s curriculum and student experiences.

**REFERENCES**

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**APPENDIX**

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Demographics of surveys</b>	<b>N(%)</b>
Total survey responses	25
Total interviewed	14(56)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	13(92.9)
Male	1(7.1)
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	
Caucasian	5(35.7)
Asian Descent	6(42.9)
Non-white origins	2(14.3)
Unknown	1(7.1)
<b>Graduating Year</b>	
2028	13(92.9)
2027	1(7.1)



**Author**  
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I, Emily Barber, am an undergraduate student from New Jersey, in the Class of 2028, pursuing my BSN. I am pursuing a secondary degree in Humanities and a minor in Peace and Justice. As a first-generation student, opportunities such as the first-year MATCH program and the Villanova Undergraduate Research Fellowship have been incredible experiences. My interest in social justice is what encouraged me to accept a MATCH position with Dr. Meredith MacKenzie Greenle, whose study focused on students' abilities to recognize and respond to microaggressions. This took place during NUR 1105: Social Justice and Health Equity, and after MATCH, I was able to pursue an independent qualitative study focusing on this same class. Research has been a great contributor to my academic enrichment, and I have ambitions to one day achieve a DNP and/or PhD.



**Mentor**  
**Dr. Meredith MacKenzie Greenle**

Negotiating end-of-life care can leave many family members and loved-ones of the elderly searching for support. Meredith MacKenzie Greenle, PhD, RN, ANP-BC, CNE focuses her research on end of life outcomes and support for family caregivers, as well as how to provide the best care for aging adults. Dr. MacKenzie is an expert on a number of end-of-life healthcare issues including end-of-life treatment preferences, costs of care for chronically ill aging adults, and hospice care outcomes.