

Hope Nursing Writes Rx for Addressing Shortage



In response to strong national need and student interest, Hope's nursing program has expanded and added a partnership.

The nation is facing an increasingly critical national shortage of Registered Nurses, according to Dr. Susan Dunn, associate professor of nursing and chairperson of the department. According to projections in 2007 by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than one million new and replacement nurses will be needed by 2016, with government analysts projecting that more than 587,000 new nursing positions will be created through 2016, making nursing the nation's top profession in terms of projected job growth.

"The need is already here, and it's going to increase," Dr. Dunn said. "America is aging, and along with that the nursing work force is aging. Many nurses are going to be retiring at the same time that more Americans will need health care."

Students begin studies in Hope's program as sophomores, and since starting in 2002 the department has enrolled 36 students per year, for a total of 108 students in the nursing program at any given time. The program, which leads to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, is growing to 45 students per class

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The recent expansion of the nursing program and a new graduate-school partnership help respond to the national need for more nurses—and student interest in the major. Left to right above, juniors Lauren Dice of Grand Rapids, Mich., and Amanda Meekhof of Zeeland, Mich., work with faculty member Vicki Voskuil.

year, a 25 percent increase being phased in beginning with this year's sophomore class.

In addition, a unique new partnership between Hope and Michigan State University will play a role in reducing the shortage by increasing the number of faculty educating the desperately needed health care professionals. Hope and MSU have signed an agreement that guarantees admission to the university's accelerated BSN-to Ph.D. nursing program to two qualified Hope graduates each year. The accelerated program provides graduate students the opportunity to complete a nursing doctorate a year early, in as little as four years instead of the usual five.

Nursing education at Hope began in 1982 through a program that the college operated jointly with Calvin College through 2003. When the two schools decided to establish independent programs, Hope set its 36-per-entering-class size based on projected student interest, and gained accreditation and state-board approval according to that total. Consistently, however, student interest has outstripped capacity.

"Unfortunately, each year we have to turn down some very good students because of the limit on our class size to meet accreditation standards," said Dr. James Boelkins '66, provost at Hope. "By making some modest staffing adjustments we will now be able to accept more of these excellent students, retain them at Hope and help them achieve their vision of becoming nurses."

The college has obtained approval for the increase from both the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and the Michigan Board of Nursing. Hope recently received 10-year continuing accreditation—

the maximum possible duration—from the CCNE. Hope had previously received five-year accreditation—the maximum available to a new program—in 2004.

Even as Hope has been able to accommodate additional students, Dr. Dunn noted that there is a critical need for nursing faculty nationally if the nursing shortage is to be addressed comprehensively. Across the country, she said, nursing programs lack the capacity to handle additional students in large part because there are not enough professors to teach them.

Dr. Dunn believes that the Hope-MSU partnership is the first of its kind in the state and could serve as a model for other nursing programs.

"This is a very unique partnership. Certainly it's the first of its kind that I'm aware of in the state of Michigan," she said. "We're hoping that it will serve as a model for the development of future partnerships between private baccalaureate nursing programs and public research-intensive university nursing programs across the nation."

Dr. Dunn said that Hope nursing graduates are well positioned to do graduate work. As part of their training, all Hope students participate in a research methodology course and a research practicum in addition to studying statistics, background that prepares them for the demands of graduate school beyond the education they are receiving for nursing practice itself.

She is in turn pleased by the partnership with MSU specifically, which she noted is ranked as one of the top 100 research universities in the nation and has one of only three Ph.D. nursing programs in Michigan. 📖