





Handle With Care

NJCU Prepares Nurses for a Changing World

The tasks Florence Nightingale encountered as a nurse in the 1800s certainly differ from those of modern health providers, but her mission—to improve the quality of care for all—remains at the forefront of the profession. Today’s nurses work in an ever-changing environment, where they must not only keep up with best practices, but also be technically savvy and culturally astute. The Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at NJCU prepares graduates to excel in this current atmosphere by providing the necessary knowledge and skill sets, as well as fostering an understanding of the diverse population on and around campus.

As healthcare continues to evolve, so do the opportunities within the nursing profession. Once strictly perceived as a hospital-centered, inpatient care occupation, nursing has undergone a near-seismic shift to deliver more primary and preventive care within the community. “The aging of baby boomers and the fact that people are living longer with more chronic disease has created tremendous growth in community-based nursing jobs,” says Nursing Department Associate Dean Dr. Kimberly Dudas. “Nurses must work with the public to educate them so, as they age, they can age in a healthier way and avoid hospitalization.”

Given the complexities of today’s healthcare system, there is a great demand for professionals who are prepared at the baccalaureate and

higher degree levels. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing and other leading related organizations recognize the BSN degree as the minimum educational requirement for professional nursing practice. Through its efforts on the Jersey City and Wall campuses, NJCU fulfills the educational needs of registered nurses (RNs) and non-nurse college graduates seeking a BSN, and socializes them to serve their workplaces and communities effectively.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

NJCU began offering undergraduate nursing degrees 40 years ago, when it was one of the first colleges in the state to institute an RN to BSN program. Designed for individuals with an associate’s degree or diploma in nursing, the curriculum combines clinical experiences that focus on community health and leadership development with classroom learning that highlights the expanded role of the RN in today’s world.

Enrollment in the program has skyrocketed in recent years, thanks in part to the articulation agreements with Hudson County Community College/CarePoint Health School of Nursing, Essex County College, Passaic County Community College, and Brookdale Community College. The surge in students is also the result of the tireless efforts of the RN to BSN Program Coordinator Dr. Joyce Wright, who frequently recruits at the partner schools and elsewhere.

“Enrollment really started expanding once

By Sue Bruskin Clarke • Photographs By Bill Wittkop

Computerized mannequins can replicate a wide variety of pulmonary, respiratory, and neurological symptoms.



students could advance seamlessly from their associate's degree to a baccalaureate degree," she says. "I've worked hard to make this a vibrant program and I tell students they won't find a similar curriculum that gives them so much individualized attention and has such affordable tuition."

About half of the students in the RN to BSN program are experienced nurses who are pursuing a BSN for career advancement (or because their job mandates it), while the remainder are newly-graduated RNs. Since many are employed or have family commitments, there is flexibility with course scheduling, often requiring only one day per week on the Jersey City or Wall campus (in combination with online instruction).

In 2007, the Nursing Department introduced a second undergraduate track—an accelerated BSN—which is geared toward individuals who have earned a baccalaureate degree in another field and now want to obtain a nursing degree. A 12-month intensive course of study, it includes classroom learning supplemented by clinical experiences at healthcare agencies and community-based programs. "This is a very challenging full-time curriculum that prepares students for the licensure exam," says Dudas. "It's also a competitive program to be accepted into due to a limited number of available seats."

NJCU's accelerated BSN students arrive with a broad range of previous work experience. Past graduates range from a former associate editor of a prestigious financial magazine who is now a geriatric nurse practitioner to a tiger trainer from Six Flags Great Adventure who currently practices as a nurse anesthetist. Alysia Evans '11, who studied biology, chemistry, and marketing at The College of New Jersey, was doing medical research for Schering-Plough (later Merck), when she decided to pursue her BSN. "I was working in a lab and desired a job with more human interaction and a greater variety of experiences," she says. Evans applied for the accelerated program at the University because of

convenience, both in terms of location and time commitment. “When you’re leaving a job and a salary to go back to school, you want to get your degree as quickly as possible.”

After earning her BSN, Evans was immediately hired in the Emergency Department at Jersey City Medical Center, where she had completed some of her clinical work. “The NJCU accelerated program did such a great job preparing me for my nursing career. Its focus was not

only having us memorize material, but also understanding the principles being taught and learning critical thinking in regard to patient care. I truly believe it’s the best decision I ever made.”

THE IMITATION GAME

According to Dudas, for nursing education to be successful, it’s imperative that technology be incorporated into the curriculum. Several years ago, Nursing Department Chair Dr. Kevin



Building the Future

As NJCU’s nursing program continues to grow, so does the need for additional facilities. This summer, the University was the recipient of \$5.2 million in capital improvement funds, which will be used to establish a Nursing Education Center in an existing building on the West Campus. Approximately 18,000 square feet of space will house state-of-the-art simulation labs, low-fidelity bed labs, student project areas for formal and informal collaboration, user-friendly classrooms equipped with smart technology, computer labs, and office and support space for faculty and staff. There also will be a mock quarantine/clean room in which students will have to don personal protective equipment and follow the strict protocols required when working in a contaminated setting. “This new Education Center will not only provide us with the technology and tools that are invaluable to today’s nursing students, but also will afford us the space required to expand our offerings,” notes Associate Dean of Nursing Dr. Kimberly Dudas.

With the opening of the Nursing Education Center slated for 2018 and the Nursing Department facing the immediate challenge of outgrowing its existing space, the University funded renovations to its Rossey Hall location. Completed this summer, the project includes three dedicated classrooms and two additional labs, and will help to meet the needs of current students. In addition, a new office suite provides room for the new faculty joining the program.



Under the careful scrutiny of David Rabinowitsch, DNP, RN, nursing students practice dressing a wound.

O'Neill created the iNurse initiative for the accelerated BSN curriculum. All students are given an iPad Mini that has subscriptions to online medical and nursing references. It can also be used for viewing faculty power point and keynote presentations, as well as for note taking.

“Nursing is a very knowledge-intensive and information-intensive profession. And it’s forever changing,” explains O'Neill. “Having the latest information at one’s fingertips is not only beneficial for our students while in school and in the workplace, but also as they attempt to educate their patients once they begin practicing.”

A key technological advancement that is greatly aiding students in developing their clinical, critical thinking, and communication skills, is high-fidelity simulation. Life-like computerized mannequins mimic actual health situations—from an irregular heartbeat to a stroke or heart attack—and students must identify and react to these conditions appropriately. Controlled by a technician in another room, the mannequins are able to speak and make sounds. They also respond to student interventions with changes in heart rate, lung and heart sounds, and other vital signs. “The idea behind the simulation is learning by doing. Students

are placed in a practice environment, so that they can learn from mistakes with no one harmed.” says O’Neill.

Simulated scenarios can also be much more involved. In O’Neill’s geriatric nursing class, he creates a setting students may encounter when entering the home of an elderly patient. A mannequin dressed as an old woman is found on the floor. She lies next to a broken chair, skewed area rug, and several wires. Bruises at different stages of healing run up and down her legs, one of which is turned out at an unnatural angle. “I literally throw so many things at the students because I want them to process all the information they are given, hopefully pick up on potential elder abuse, and determine the correct course of care,” he says. “These types of simulations are invaluable for their future success.”

WISHES GRANTED

A main goal of the Nursing Department at NJCU is to prepare generalist registered nurses to deal with the unique health care realities found in the underserved, economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse urban environment

that surrounds the University. Dr. Gloria Boseman, a longtime NJCU nursing professor, has taken on this cause, not only as it relates to Jersey City, but also to other inner city regions of North Jersey. “It’s imperative that the nursing program remains focused on areas important to the health of the community and we produce nurses who change the health profile of Jersey City and surrounding areas,” she says. “We need to train healthcare professionals to understand how they can deliver more culturally competent care to individuals who come from different ethnic, economic, and geographic experiences.”

With more and more people from other countries settling in the area, the need for qualified nurses of varied ethnicities is paramount. In keeping with NJCU’s mission of providing high-quality education to a diverse community of students, the Nursing Department maintains a student population that is significantly more multicultural than the current national (and New Jersey) registered nurse population. Because of this, in recent years the University was able to secure two grants to support



Elizabeth Galetz, MSN, RN

Master Class

Nursing programs throughout the country have been forced to turn down qualified applicants due to a lack of faculty to educate them. The result is a nationwide shortage of nurses at a time when the need for qualified health professionals continues to grow. To address this dilemma, NJCU has established a Master of Science in Nursing Education (M.S.) degree, which was launched on the Wall campus this fall and, as of January 2017, will also be offered in Jersey City.

This part-time program is designed to provide a solid foundation for nurses to transition to careers as nurse educators. Students enrolled in the inaugural class are an eclectic group of adult learners with varying professional experiences including home healthcare administrators, staff nurses, and nursing unit managers. To accommodate their busy schedules, courses meet one Saturday per month and are supplemented with online work. It’s expected that students who take the suggested six credits each semester, inclusive of the summer, will be able to earn their master’s degree in two years.

Jennifer Larsen, who completed NJCU’s RN to BSN program in Wall, began the graduate degree program in September. Currently working as a population health manager with Meridian Health’s patient-centered medical home practices, she is involved in coordinating patient education and handles transitions of care to ensure patients’ needs are met upon hospital discharge. “The faculty at NJCU has been so supportive throughout my journey. They greatly prepared me for not only navigating critical care, but also for developing project work with regard to the patient discharge process,” she says. “I am thankful I have the opportunity to move ahead with my master’s at the University.”



**Nursing Department
Chair Kevin O'Neill**

the nursing education of traditionally underrepresented students.

To help nursing students obtain a better understanding of different cultures, two different study abroad opportunities are offered, typically during school breaks. The first is linked to a required course in the BSN curriculum that deals with diverse populations and the cultural implications of nursing practice. Past trips have been to Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. "While abroad, students visit historic sites, interact with locals and often have a discussion with foreign university students comparing curriculum," says Study Abroad Coordinator Dr. Debra Scardaville.

The other travel abroad experience offered to nursing students involves service learning. "These trips are similar to medical

volunteerism and incorporate direct clinical care in a variety of forums in conjunction with the physicians and nurses working there," says Scardaville. In past years, students traveled to Tanzania, where they visited hospitals and clinics and also taught health to schoolchildren. This March, a trip to Haiti is scheduled during which the NJCU students will witness firsthand the health implications of a natural disaster.

"The work our students do is so encouraging for the future of nursing and NJCU is committed to investing in high-quality programs that really benefit the community and beyond," says Dudas. "Sometimes we think that, to effect change, we have to do something in a big way. Nursing isn't about doing big things, however. It's about doing little things every day." **NJCU**

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Want to learn more about NJCU's nursing program? Check out the video on the NJCU Magazine website at www.njcu.edu/magazine.