CREIGHTON GRADUATE PROGRAM CELEBRATES 30 YEARS
FROM GRADUATE SCHOOL TO FACULTY...CREIGHTON’S MISSION CONTINUES.

Graduate nursing program slated for January ’81

The groundwork is being prepared for a graduate program in nursing slated to begin in January of 1981, said Sheila Ciciulla, acting dean of nursing.

A feasibility study conducted in 1977 indicated there is a serious need in Nebraska and bordering states for nurses with masters degrees, Ciciulla said.

Of those people in nursing education and administration, only about 15 percent are educationally prepared for the position they hold, said Laura MacLachlan, associate dean of nursing. This demonstrates the need for a graduate program, she said.

“With the master of science in nursing designed to produce educators, researchers, primary care clinicians and advanced clinical specialists,” MacLachlan said.

We expect our graduates to have the ability to do research in clinical, practical and administrative settings. They will have the ability to enter society and find their own role and function in the health care system,” she said.

This role is not a nurse practitioner role, she said. Nurse practitioner skills are but a small piece of the knowledge that should be incorporated into a general masters program, she said.

A bachelor’s in nursing is required before acceptance into the graduate program. Students can receive the BSN from one of three programs offered at Creighton.

The traditional “generic” program is geared toward high school graduates with no nursing background. This four-year program includes courses in biology, anatomy and biochemistry. The required clinical experience is acquired at St. Joseph Hospital, Ciciulla said.

The second route is sponsored by St. Joseph Hospital. Those graduates with some nursing background, but who did not receive college credit for nursing science courses, follow this program, she said.

The same courses as in the generic program are required, although those students meeting the freshman level requirements can earn up to 31 credit hours in a nursing major by passing a curriculum exam, Ciciulla said.

The third program is the Accelerated Curriculum in nursing. This is a one-year program for graduates with a baccalaureate degree who have completed generic program prerequisites. This program condenses four years of nursing into one year-round program divided into three terms, each of which is equal to one generic year of study, Ciciulla said.

In essence, the three programs are the same curriculum at different paces, Ciciulla said, with students of each program gaining the same background and skills.

CALLED “HOME” BY MANY FACULTY

“Growing your own faculty!” is not a new concept for Creighton. When Creighton embarked on establishing a graduate program in the mid-1970s, the National League of Nursing mandated all graduate faculty to have master’s degrees or higher.

A clever approach to recruit and retain faculty was devised and has worked well for the School of Nursing for 30 years.

A national search was conducted and Dr. Laura MacLachlan was hired to initiate and implement the new graduate program. Having both her master’s and doctoral degrees from State University of New York, she was well-qualified to meet the challenge.

In order not to duplicate specialties offered at other nursing schools, Creighton explored unmet needs that could be addressed by nurses prepared for advance practice.

Creighton noted that there was an emerging need for nurses to work in rehabilitation, ambulatory care, and long-term care settings.

A Department of Health and Human Services grant was secured to begin a program focusing on those needs, and Federal monies were made available to provide tuition assistance.

Mary Jo Sanders was the first person to receive her master’s degree at Creighton. She received a fellowship that enabled her to go full time. All other members of the first class of 13 were part time.

“I learned so much in my undergraduate program at Creighton, graduate school at Creighton seemed a natural progression,” said Sanders. “We had a great group in that first class—and we had a lot of fun together. Dr. MacLachlan was wonderful—she was a great mentor to us.”

Sanders is semi-retired and lives in California. She recalled several of her classmates—most going on to distinguished careers: Dr. Roxanne Westendorf McDaniel is an associate dean for the University of Missouri; Dr. Brenda Faith Bergman-Evans is an executive with Alegent Health in Omaha; Dr. Colleen Casey Goode is a professor at the University of Colorado; and Dr. Virginia Fulton Davidsaver, now retired.

A CHANCE TO BALANCE GRADUATE SCHOOL, WORK AND FAMILY — THE IDEA TOOK OFF.

Creighton offered yet another unique advantage. Graduate classes were taught part-time, evenings and weekends, enabling nurses to work, attend classes, and raise a family. The new graduate students were older, some well into their 40s. Some traveled a great distance to attend classes.

Pat Nilsson and Sue Tinley were in the first class. Both Pat and Sue had small children and were working full-time.
Laura MacLachlan was wonderful. She really understood how difficult it was to work, raise a family and go to school,” said Ms. Nilsson. “She intentionally structured the curriculum to enable us to gain excellent education, yet have energy left over for work and family.”

Sue Tinley was rejected when she applied at another school. She was told, “You can’t possibly be a student and have children!” Creighton accepted her and not only did she raise her family, she delivered her sixth baby during her first semester in graduate school.

Were they successful? Absolutely. Both Tinley and Nilsson are faculty members today at the nursing school. Tinley attained her doctorate and is well known in the field of genetics. Dr. Tinley has served as president of the International Society of Nurses in Genetics. Finding prepared faculty was a challenge.

Dean Emerita Sheila Ciciulla recalls the early days. “We knew we needed faculty members. It made perfect sense to offer a nurse educator option. With luck, they would enjoy their time at Creighton and stay on with us as faculty members. We prided ourselves on being ‘student friendly.’”

Thus was the case with Dr. Janet Graves. She was working at Clarkson Hospital. Going to school part-time appealed to her. Shortly after graduating, she was recruited to Creighton to teach. In 1996, Dr. Graves turned her emphasis toward the implementation of technology. Technology offered the faculty new and better ways to teach. Today Dr. Graves is the director of eLearning for the school.

In 1986, Creighton opened the Hastings campus. Instructors were hired with the stipulation they would complete their master’s degrees.

THE BAR IS RAISED.

In the late 90s, the bar was raised higher by national nursing leadership. Faculty members teaching in graduate schools were expected to hold doctoral degrees. Once again, Creighton offered students what few nursing schools did—flexibility and creativity.

“Over the years, Creighton has remained nimble and able to lead and respond quickly to changes in health care—modifying our curriculum to meet new challenges. Creighton was among the first schools piloting the Clinical Nurse Leader roles and curriculum, and offering the BSN to DNP program,” observed Dean Eleanor Howell. “Creighton is able to provide premier nursing programs because of the faculty’s vision and commitment to excellence in nursing and nursing education.”

Dr. Cindy Costanzo is the program chair for the Master’s programs at Creighton.

“We fully realize the pressure placed on nurses today. Going back for a master’s degree or a doctoral degree can be daunting. The leadership at Creighton is committed to developing a curriculum that is cutting edge and still allows students to enjoy their families.”

There are currently 99 students enrolled in Creighton’s Master’s program. Creighton School of Nursing’s newest degree program, the Doctorate of Nursing Practice has 65 students enrolled.

“We have a ‘hybrid program’ in many ways. Students come to campus for some classes; however many of our classes are on-line. A unique component to our graduate program is the courses offered through Creighton’s Werner Institute of Negotiation and Dispute Resolution. Earlier in my career, I was a chief nursing officer. Settling conflict was a big focus of my job. Finding common ground enabled everyone to move on and take care of business for the greater good,” Costanzo added.

This fall, the faculty welcomed Jill Isaacs. She graduated with her BSN in 1999 and her Masters from Creighton in 2006. While she enjoyed working as an adult nurse practitioner, becoming an instructor appealed to her. Jill is receiving tuition support and release time to pursue her doctorate.

“I am so excited to be back at Creighton as a faculty member! I find it an incredible honor and privilege to care for others. Creighton instilled that in me. What better way to give back than to share my passion for nursing here at Creighton University. This program, these wonderful people, and this community have had such a great influence in shaping not only the nurse I am today, but the person I am today. I am thrilled to be home!”

Evolution in nursing will continue. Creighton will remain well-positioned to accept the challenges of change. One thing remains constant. Just as Dr. Ciciulla reflected, “A great graduate program will draw them to Creighton. Once they were here, we hoped they would stay.” And many did. ■