

Creighton Nursing

Building with Care

How scholarships, faculty innovation and new facilities are forming the next generation of compassionate healthcare professionals.





A strong foundation,
with a focus on the future.

For 96 years, we have been guided by our Jesuit, Catholic tradition, leading discoveries in clinical and paramedicine research, creating healthier patient outcomes and forming talented learners into compassionate nursing and paramedicine leaders. We remain inspired by our past and carry this foundation into our exciting future.

I firmly believe we have the right people in place. We have a strong, mission-guided team of partners, faculty and staff who are dedicated to teaching and practicing transformative care.

“WE HAVE A STRONG, MISSION-GUIDED TEAM OF PARTNERS, FACULTY AND STAFF WHO ARE DEDICATED TO TEACHING AND PRACTICING TRANSFORMATIVE CARE.”

our new associate dean of research and innovation. The role would connect the college with Common-Spirit Health more than ever, opening new collaborations in research and education for our students and faculty. While a national search was underway, it became clear that the right person, Mandy Kirkpatrick, PhD, BSN'05, RN, was already here. She was already living the values, bringing new research to the table and inspiring students in her teaching.

After my first year at Creighton, I am deeply impressed by the traditions and vision that have guided the College of Nursing to this moment in history, helping us develop a new strategic plan and setting our sights on a focused mission and vision for the future. We have created more opportunities for research and scholarship, embraced our new learning spaces, made innovations to our curriculum and teaching practices, established a global presence for our Creighton Competency Evaluation Instrument (C-CEI) 2.0 evaluation tool and more. I am committed to this renewed mission and vision as the College of Nursing continues to evolve, with unwavering loyalty to our guiding principles as we build with care.

Jessica Clark

Jessica Clark, DNP, RN
Dean, College of Nursing



In the fall of 2024, 185 students enrolled in the College of Nursing’s BSN and EMS bachelor’s degree programs — a remarkable 32% increase from the previous year.

While this statistic is notable on its own, it’s even more impressive within the larger context of higher education: institutions have seen declining enrollment since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic — and the number of high school graduates in Nebraska and nationwide has steadily decreased.

But Creighton’s College of Nursing has flourished, despite these larger trends. Additionally, every admitted student is of the same high caliber that Creighton is known for attracting, which has helped the college maintain a ranking in the top 4% of programs nationwide.

What’s behind this impressive growth? According to Kimberly Zuzenak, BS’96, MS’15, EdD’22, assistant dean for student success in the College of Nursing, it’s not merely an isolated occurrence, but rather consistent effort and improvement over time. “It takes a village,” she says of Creighton’s success.

Here are a few key reasons students are drawn to the Creighton College of Nursing:

- ◆ **Dedicated faculty**, whose work has helped students achieve 96% first-time pass rate for the NCLEX over the past five years;
- ◆ **Groundbreaking research** on topics including cancer, palliative care and effective assessment that has garnered national recognition;
- ◆ **Robust student support**, including major scholarships for students who are both high academic achievers and empathetic individuals who embody Jesuit values;
- ◆ **Stunning new facilities** with cutting-edge technology and collaborative spaces;
- ◆ **A history of success**, including the paramedicine program, which is currently celebrating its 50th anniversary.

Zuzenak believes success is the result of many different pieces working in concert. The students who arrived as part of this year’s class will be poised to succeed in a few years’ time. “When our students graduate, they will have multiple opportunities for employment,” Zuzenak says. “And, while they are at Creighton, we are here for them, making sure they are successful.”

Scan to read our strategic plan.





DAVE WEAVER

Inaugural class of Harper Scholars.

We support students *who bring compassion to their work.*

The Harper Nursing Scholars Program draws exceptional students who are driven by a sense of compassion and care.



ANNE HARTY
EdD '19, RN, FNP

When Creighton and College of Nursing leadership began crafting the prestigious new Harper Nursing Scholars Program with the help of a \$5.2 million gift from the Harper Family Foundation, they aimed high. The college wanted to attract outstanding students who were eager to excel as nurse leaders — and who embraced Jesuit values of compassion and service.

Creighton started with a generous \$40,000 annual scholarship, but that was only the beginning, says Anne Harty, BSN '97, MS '00, EdD '19, RN, FNP, Harper Nursing Scholars Program director. Students accepted to the program would also

participate in intentional activities to meet program objectives, such as a community health rotation at the ILAC campus in the Dominican Republic, an overnight leadership retreat and a legislative workshop at the Nebraska State Capitol to learn principles of advocacy. They would also have access to meaningful research opportunities.

"This is not just about a scholarship," says Harty, noting that the program, which will ultimately support a total of 30 students, will form and educate compassionate and ethical practitioners, innovative scholars and confident advocates. "This program is about authentic

leadership formation grounded in the Jesuit tradition."

With stringent academic qualifications and an essay requirement, Harty anticipated that about 50 applicants might meet the benchmarks for the eight scholarships offered this past year. Instead, more than 160 met those requirements.

Harty and her team extended interview invitations to each prospective student, conducting in-person and Zoom interviews. It was a chance for students to share what they could offer, but also an opportunity for them to learn what makes Creighton truly Creighton — a nurturing community where students flourish in their ability to reflect, grow and act. "Even if they didn't get the scholarship, I wanted to let them know that they belonged here at Creighton," she says.

In addition to the eight students who received the scholarship, 71 additional students who completed the interviews enrolled at Creighton.

For Harty, it's that number — the nearly 80 high-achieving students who found Creighton, saw alignment with their own goals and values and applied and enrolled in the program — that is one of the most powerful aspects of the Harper Nursing Scholars Program. "There may have been people in that group who were undecided about attending Creighton," she says. "But when we met with them and went through the interview process, they realized Creighton *was* for them. That's where the magic was."

We train students *to fill Arizona's critical nursing gap.*



PRESTON TRAUSSCH

university, which made me feel confident that my education would be well-rounded."

Before she started classes in early 2024, Cunningham learned that she was the recipient of a full tuition Ignite Scholarship. Funded by the Arizona Department of Health Services, the scholarship — one of 80 that were offered over three cohorts — is designed to help fill the critical gap of nurses in Arizona. Scholarship recipients agree to spend at least four years working in the state after graduation.

For Mike Lacey, assistant director of operations on the Phoenix campus, the \$5.9 million Ignite Scholars Program serves as a stamp of approval for Creighton's exceptional work (it was one of five institutions in the State of Arizona to receive the grant) and as an opportunity to instill Creighton's values of care and compassion into the world. He is proud to see Creighton playing a key role in supporting the healthcare of Arizonans.

For Cunningham, the program, scholarship and after-graduation commitment have felt like a perfect mix as she's aimed higher in her career and life. "It's sparked me to take charge of my life," she says. "It's setting me up for success."

The Ignite Scholars Program trains students committed to staying in the state to care for residents.

In 2023, San Diego native Jenna Cunningham, BSN '24, was working in a fulfilling role as an EMT. While she loved caring for others, she saw an opportunity in a career as a nurse, which would allow her to help others while offering her new experiences. When a Google search pointed her to Creighton's accelerated BSN program in Phoenix, she was immediately intrigued. "I liked that I could complete the program in about a year and that Creighton had a great reputation," she says. "I also knew Creighton was a Jesuit

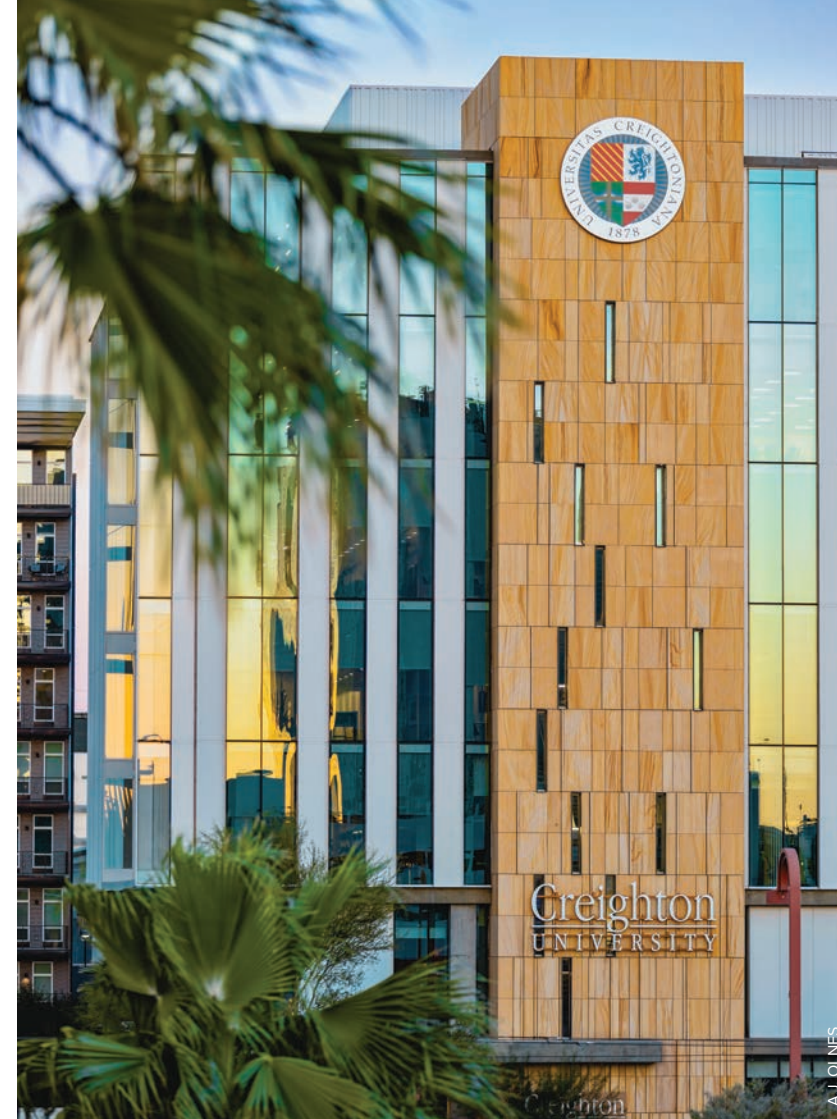
Catalyze nursing student research with SPARK.

Students as Professionals Acquiring Research and Knowledge (SPARK) gives high-performing undergraduate nursing students an opportunity to develop research projects and receive mentorship from expert faculty members.

Scan to support these talented scholars.



Our cutting-edge facilities *are built with collaboration in mind.*



The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust Health Sciences Building in Phoenix plays a critical role in training medical professionals, which is estimated to need 50,000 nurses by 2030.

The 195,000 square-foot facility, completed in 2021, is designed to support 1,000 students in nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, pharmacy, medicine and physician assistant programs.

The facility was named Higher Education Project of the Year by *AZRE Magazine* and was a 2023 IDEA Award Finalist.

Helen Hurst, DNP, RNC-OB, APRN-CNM, associate dean of the College of Nursing in Phoenix, says that Creighton nursing students have a unique advantage. “Learning alongside other health professionals in spaces that mirror real-world healthcare settings, our students are prepared to be leaders in improving patient outcomes,” she says.

To support virtual reality simulations, new programming is being developed along with the purchase of headsets and other equipment to enhance learning opportunities.

The CL and Rachel Werner Center for Health Sciences Education, which opened on Creighton’s Omaha campus in August 2023, has improved recruitment and enriched student learning.

The 145,000-square-foot facility brings together future nurses, physicians, occupational therapists, physical therapists, pharmacists, physician assistants and paramedics.

The Werner Center includes two assessment and skills labs, a task training lab, 10 acute care rooms, a simulated operating room and a simulated apartment.

“The centralized space gives more opportunities for all of our students to interact, and for faculty to incorporate the different professions into student learning and experiences,” says Lucas Manning, DNP, RN, CHSE, simulation lab coordinator.

“Nursing education is transitioning to be more competency-based, and the new simulation spaces give students opportunities to practice and show that competency, rather than describe it in an exam,” Manning says.



We have a legacy of care — *guided by purpose.*



Eric Pagnano, BS-PMC'22, MS-EMS'23, NRP, FP-C, clinical instructor of paramedicine (left), and paramedicine student Ava Brandt, NRP, Class of 2025 (right).

The paramedicine program marks a 50-year milestone with a memorable event — and a promising path forward.

In the fall of 2023, Eric Pagnano, BS-PMC'22, MS-EMS'23, NRP, FP-C, clinical instructor of paramedicine, and paramedicine student Ava Brandt, NRP, Class of 2025, had just wrapped up Creighton's Blessing of Hands Ceremony, an event that helps students and faculty reflect on the privilege to be called to a profession of service. The two were on their way to start their shift at the Carter Lake, Iowa, fire station, where they both volunteered, when they got an emergency call: a man had gone into cardiac arrest at a nearby location.

Four minutes later, the pair were on the scene, providing CPR and defibrillations to the man before transferring him to the hospital.

Thanks to their interventions, bystander CPR and the receiving hospital's continuation of care, he fully recovered. "You get into this profession because you want to help people," Brandt says. "So, to save someone's life after the Blessing of Hands felt almost monumental."

While few students have the kind of introduction to the field that Brandt had, her early successful efforts encapsulate the very best of the paramedicine program at Creighton: high-impact and mission-driven.

As the paramedicine program marks its 50th anniversary this academic year, it has both a history and future worth celebrating.

One of the first, one of the best.

Creighton has long been at the leading edge of the field of paramedicine, says Andrew Eckart, MS'24, NRP, interim director for the paramedicine program.

The University was among the first institutions to offer paramedicine training, accepting paramedics starting in 1974. The program was also part of the first cohort of institutions to earn accreditation in 1984, nearly three decades before it was required.

Today, paramedicine programming ranges from a semester-long EMT certification to a robust master's degree program that is one of just five such programs nationwide.

Eckart says that the core paramedicine bachelor's degree program has long earned notice from prospective students. "We have students enrolling from all over the country, including California and Hawaii, in part because we have impressive national registry pass rates," he says.

While the 50th anniversary marks a meaningful milestone, the program is not resting on its past successes. It is ramping up research efforts, addressing a critical need in a field where research remains scarce. Creighton Paramedicine received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control to fund an immersive reality room for interprofessional education, and other grant opportunities are in progress. In 2023, it forged a partnership with the Omaha Fire Department to provide paramedic training to its firefighters and EMTs.

A career designed for care.

Brandt, who is now a nationally registered paramedic, says she's proud to contribute to the paramedicine program's impactful work and legacy.

But she's also quick to add that she particularly appreciates that her work is propelled by a larger purpose. "From day one, we talk about the Jesuit core values, including *men and women for and with others*," she says. "To me, that aligns with being a paramedic. I enjoy putting that higher purpose into the profession."



We're earning recognition *that underscores a culture designed for success.*

Martha Todd's FAAN recognition reflects Creighton's larger commitment to innovation and impact.

In recent decades, high-fidelity simulators — lifelike manikins capable of replicating lung sounds, pulses and even bodily fluids — have become a staple in nursing education. While they have long been used to teach nursing skills and build student confidence, educators have faced an increasingly urgent question: Could the right tools also allow them to assess a student's *competence* at a specific skill?

Thanks to an instrument known as the Creighton Competency Evaluation Instrument (C-CEI) co-created by Martha Todd, PhD, MS'07, APRN-NP, associate professor and the O'Brien Endowed Chair in Health Sciences, and other Creighton-linked experts*, the answer is a resounding yes.

Today, the instrument is used at hundreds of institutions worldwide; Creighton has also forged an international partnership with Laerdal Medical, which will expand the reach of the C-CEI 2.0 framework, bringing competency-based simulation to many more institutions. In late 2024, Todd was recognized as a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing (FAAN) for her work on the influential tool, and her sustained contributions to nursing education, research and service. Todd was

the only Nebraskan to be recognized in the 2024 class.

Todd follows in the footsteps of other College of Nursing faculty who recently received this recognition, including Mandy Kirkpatrick, PhD, BSN'05, RN, associate dean for research and innovation and professor of nursing, who was named a fellow in 2023; and Professor Ann Laughlin, PhD, BSN'76, MS'94, RN, professor of nursing, who received the honor in 2018.

While just a fraction of nursing experts receive FAAN recognition, Todd says there's a reason Creighton faculty have consistently been recognized. "I think that while many universities can be very competitive, we've always had a very collaborative environment," she says, noting that such collaboration has been essential for the success of the C-CEI, which took years to develop and refine.

Indeed, says Todd, FAAN recognition was never the goal of this project, but the byproduct of a successful process and Jesuit mission that has fueled her work — and Creighton's mission — from the beginning. "We have a sincere desire to do our part to help nursing education," she says.

*Contributors include: Julie Manz, PhD, BSN'98, MS'05, RN, CNE; Maribeth Hercinger, PhD, BSN'76, RN; Kimberly Hawkins, PhD, MS'07, APRN; Mary Tracy, PhD, BSN'76, RN; Lindsay Iverson, BSN'05, MSN'09, DNP'11, APRN, ACNP; Sarah Ball, PhD, RNC-OB, C-EFM, CHSE; Lucas Manning, DNP, RN, CHSE.

At a Glance

Paramedicine Program Certifications:

EMT, pre-hospital care EMT for nurses, EMS instructor, EMS management, paramedic, critical care paramedic, paramedic certification course for healthcare professionals

Degrees:

BS online degree completion pathway, bachelor's degree, master's degree

100%

of 2023 graduates are employed or continuing their education

98%

cumulative pass rate on the 2023 paramedic national registry exam for certificate and bachelor's students



We all need someone who inspires us to *take on new challenges.*

Recently retired professor and associate dean of research Joan Lappe, PhD, MS'85, RN (left), is recognized for her groundbreaking research on bone health and vitamin D — and she paved the way for the next generation of national leaders at Creighton. Mandy Kirkpatrick, PhD, BSN'05, RN (right), associate dean for research and innovation and professor of nursing, who has a joint appointment with CHI Health and is nationally recognized for her research in palliative care, is committed to mentoring Creighton's next group of pathbreaking researchers. Here, we talk to them about their work.

Joan, how did mentors support your work?

LAPPE: My primary mentors, professors emeriti Robert P. Heaney, BS'47, MD'51, and Robert R. Recker, MD'63, taught me how to conduct research and introduced me to other researchers in our field. My mentors encouraged me to reach out to scientists throughout the world if I thought they could help with my work.

Joan and Mandy, what did the mentor-mentee relationship look like for you?

LAPPE: Mandy would often ask me to review her proposals. Sometimes, she just needed confirmation that she was on the right track. At other times, I suggested changes or referred her to someone who could help her with a specific aspect of her work. As a mentor, I encourage individuals to set lofty goals, and I expect them to follow through on their efforts to attain them. We all need someone who demonstrates confidence in our ability and inspires us to take on new challenges.

KIRKPATRICK: I have so much gratitude for Joan. She purposefully encouraged me, and her mentorship helped me consider my own role as a champion and cheerleader for scholarship.

Mandy, how do you think about helping train the next generation of high-achieving Creighton nursing researchers?

KIRKPATRICK: I meet with all faculty one-on-one to support them in achieving their goals. With research, that might mean connecting them with grant-funding mechanisms, providing guidance on writing for publication or helping them develop leadership skills. I help them articulate small goals and chart their larger path.

Ignite faculty innovation through FIRE.

Faculty, including Todd, Kirkpatrick and Lappe, received support from Creighton to pursue their most ambitious ideas. Now you can help too. The Center for Faculty Innovation, Research and Education (FIRE) at the College of Nursing supports faculty members' promising research, from treatments to healthcare safety.

Scan to support these efforts.



Creighton UNIVERSITY

College of Nursing

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College of Nursing students spend years sharpening their minds, the most important tool for their future success.

But as they begin to apply their knowledge in hands-on settings, they receive what is perhaps the most visible and symbolic tool to recognize their growth as future nursing and paramedicine professionals: a stethoscope.

Starting this year, alumni, parents and friends can support these talented students with a \$150 gift to the Stethoscope Program. The gift provides a high-quality, beautifully engraved stethoscope to a student at the Blessing of Hands Ceremony and a card that recognizes the donors.

It is a gift that eases a financial burden for current students, strengthens the bond between current and future nurses and paramedics at Creighton and recognizes the significant accomplishments that students have already made.

The hearts of Creighton.

Support the gift of a stethoscope for a nursing or paramedicine student.

Scan the QR code to support a current student with the gift of a stethoscope.

