

Walden Helps Nurses Keep Education, Skills Up in Evolving Field

by Erica Tortorella

Applications to nursing programs are up nationwide, and registered nurses remain in demand despite an ailing economy. Dr. Peter Buerhaus, author of *The Future of the Nursing Workforce in the United States*, predicts that the nursing shortage could reach nearly 500,000, with a 40 percent nationwide RN vacancy rate by 2025.

Despite these serious shortages, nurses must keep their skill levels up and continue to provide quality patient care in today's evolving health care industry. The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) now recommend the Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree as the minimal preparation to practice nursing in the U.S.

The trend toward a minimal bachelor's education for registered nurses has negatively affected the opportunities available for current RNs who are diploma or associate degree certified, and has created disparity in income. Opportunities in most managerial positions, education and certain clinical positions now require a bachelor's degree and, in many cases, a master's or doctorate.

"About 80 percent of RNs do not have a bachelor's degree," said Dr. Doris Milton, program coordinator of Walden University's new Bachelor of Science in Nursing Completion Program (RN-B.S.N.).

Walden University, an online university specializing in career professionals, created the RN-B.S.N. program to help prepare current RNs for career advancement.

"We don't duplicate their education – we prepare them for positions of leadership in clinical settings, the private sector and education," said Milton.

All students admitted to the RN-B.S.N. program must have a current, active nursing license and may be awarded up to 50 quarter credits of the 180 credit requirement required to achieve the nursing license, through either a diploma program or an associate degree program.

Classes run one at a time in six-week ses-

sions and are taught exclusively by doctorally prepared faculty. Because an overwhelming majority of the students work full time, all of the information is presented at the beginning of the session so that students can pace it out according to their individual schedules. There is no requirement that they log in everyday, however, they must log in three times per week.

The 10 core courses range in topics from clinical training and research and scholarship to trends in nursing (which includes a diversity element), family, community, public and global health, and leadership competencies.

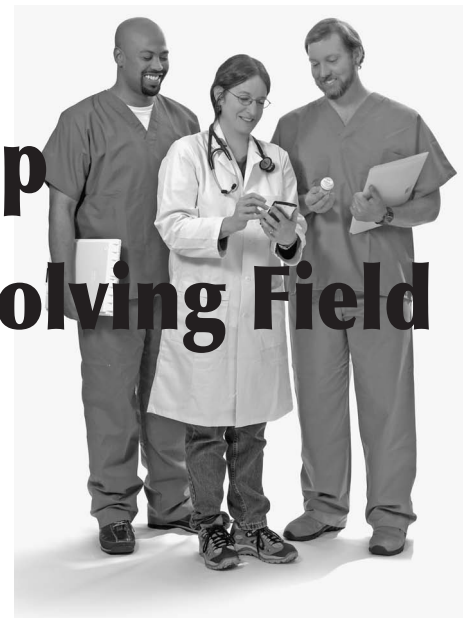


Dr. Doris Milton, program coordinator, Bachelor of Science in Nursing Completion Program, Walden University

Reaching Out to Hispanic Nurses

Hispanics – the largest minority group in the U.S. – comprise 15 percent of the population and are projected to reach 25 percent by 2050. Yet, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, less than 2 percent of RNs are Hispanic, indicating a severe shortage of Hispanic nurses able to provide bilingual and culturally sensitive care.

Hispanics lag behind Whites and African-Americans in enrollment in entry-level baccalaureate, master's and doctoral programs, encom-



passing 6.1 percent, 4.9 percent and 4.0 percent, respectively, according to 2009 data from AACN. Whites are disproportionately represented in enrollments in bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs, comprising 74 percent, 76 percent and 77.8 percent, respectively. African-Americans account for 11 percent, 11.9 percent and 11 percent, respectively. Hispanic enrollment declines as the degree levels increase, contrary to that of Whites and, in some cases, African-Americans.

The lack of Hispanic enrollment in advanced degree programs indicates a lack in Hispanic nurse educators and policy makers that contributes to the growing disparities in health care.

To address a growing need to diversify the faculty population, AACN and Johnson & Johnson created the Minority Nurse Faculty Scholars Program. The program provides financial support to graduate nursing students from minority backgrounds who agree to teach in a school of nursing after graduation.

As part of its Hispanic-focused recruitment efforts, Walden hosts bilingual information sessions in key Hispanic cities throughout the U.S., is affiliated with the National Association of Hispanic Nurses, and submits point-of-view pieces to *Minority Nurse Magazine*.

"We desperately need Hispanic nurses," said Milton. Speaking of her home state of Arizona, she said, "We have many people who are Spanish speaking only and a massive shortage of bilingual nurses. ... We need nurses to provide services to the people and be able to speak the language and understand the culture."



"Care to comment?
[Click here](#)"