

A History of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Nursing

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Roots

Nevada's first nursing shortage began in 1962 from rapid population growth. The lack of educational programs in Nevada caused many health practitioners to rely on educational institutions outside the state. To fill vacant positions, clinical facilities relied on nurses moving to Nevada. With the rapid population growth in the 1960s, state stakeholders recognized that the nursing shortage could become an acute problem in Southern Nevada. It was necessary that Nevada establish educational programs for health practitioners. Immediately, planning began to develop an additional nursing program. The Nevada Public Health Association (NPHA) assumed primary responsibility for planning the nursing program. With the assistance of representatives from the Nevada Nurses Association, the Nevada Hospital Association, the Nevada State Medical Association, the Department of Vocational Education, and the U.S. Public Health Service, the NPHA created a survey to document the need for a program.

During the data gathering and planning phase of the survey, controversy emerged because no one could agree on the length of the new nursing program: program lengths considered were two-, three- or four-year programs. Proponents and opponents of each program length discussed and fought for their preferred program. Historical records do not detail the rationale for the decision; however, they made the decision to pursue an associate degree program. A statewide subcommittee planning group's minutes stated, "An associate of arts program is an interim step to the ultimate aim of baccalaureate preparation of professional nurses."

Shortly thereafter, the Nevada State Board of Nursing sought the necessary legislative changes to accommodate an associate degree program. The planning group approached the Board of Regents in March of 1964. In June of that same year, the Board of Regents gave preliminary approval for the implementation of an associate degree program. This program was contingent upon the availability of sufficient private funds to cover the first year (1964-65) of operation. In March 1965, the Board of Regents gave final approval for the associate degree program.

The Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program operated under the General University Program of the University of Nevada at Reno (UNR) campus. The Orvis School of Nursing at UNR, which began in 1957, sponsored the program. The first program director, Regina Schreiber Jacobsen, spent approximately six months planning the initial curriculum. The initial planning made provisions for

interested students to pursue a bachelor's in nursing via a cooperative transfer and challenge arrangement with the Orvis School of Nursing. In the summer of 1965, the program hired Elizabeth Franklin as director. The ADN program admitted the first class of 48 students into the program in the fall of 1965. Two years later, 19 students graduated the first class.

In January 1966, administrative control of the program transferred to Nevada Southern University (former name of UNLV). In March 1966, the Department of Nursing was placed in the newly formed Nevada Technical Institute. In the fall of 1966, Margaret Simon became the new director. Administratively, the program relocated to the College of General and Technical Studies, with Dwight Marshall serving as dean. During this time, the nursing program became involved in the Intercampus Television Project. This project was designed for UNR faculty to teach baccalaureate-level nursing classes in Las Vegas and for Nevada Southern faculty to teach associate degree classes in Reno via television. This concept allowed students from each city to enroll in the type of nursing program they preferred without moving away from home. The Intercampus Television project existed for four years while it was federally funded. The primary reason the project disbanded was the opening of an associate degree program in the northern part of the state. In 1969, Nevada Southern became an independent university campus known today as UNLV.

In 1970, the College of General and Technical Studies changed to the College of Allied Health Professions. The rationale was to initiate a baccalaureate program in nursing. In the following year, Mary Ann Kedzuff was appointed chair of the Department of Nursing. Dr. Kedzuff and the faculty strongly believed in educational mobility and worked to develop a curriculum with multiple entry and exit points that culminated in a baccalaureate degree. The Board of Regents approved this "career-ladder" concept for the 1971-72 school year.

During the early years of the nursing program, community support grew. Organizations such as the Auxiliaries of the Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital, Sunrise Hospital, St. Rose de Lima Hospital, Home of the Good Shepherd, and the Clark County Medical Society held teas, fashion shows and other fundraisers to support the school, purchase equipment and develop scholarships. Additionally, faculty reached back to the community. They developed and taught workshops and sponsored continuing education classes for Nevada registered nurses.

In 1973, Dr. Kedzuff became dean of the College of Allied Health professions while retaining her responsibilities as chair of the Department of Nursing. In 1974, Dr. Rosemary Witt was selected chair of the Department of Nursing. That same year, associate degree faculty sought and achieved full accreditation status by the National League for Nurses (NLN). The NLN accreditation is a voluntary

procedure by which a school is judged using criteria developed by schools throughout the nation. In 1975, the department initiated the "2 plus 2" curricular plan. This program allowed students with associate degrees in nursing to continue their education at UNLV and receive bachelor's degrees. In 1976-77, the "upper two" baccalaureate program received accreditation by the NLN. After that time, both the associate degree and the baccalaureate programs maintained their accreditation. During Dr. Witt's absence from 1976 to 1977, Vicky Onyett served as chair of the department. As enrollment increased in both degree programs, the department recognized that a coordinator of the Associate Degree Program would facilitate student progress and appointed Mary Watson as coordinator of the Associate Degree program. After a year, Dr. Myrlene LaMancusa accepted the role and served in that capacity until the ADN program was phased out. Dr. LaMancusa then became the PreNursing Advisor.

Between 1975 and 1984, the structure of the program within the department stayed relatively stable. The nursing "program contract" was introduced. The faculty adopted a new conceptual framework (based on Neuman and Hall) and completed curricular revisions to reflect this framework. The college was renamed the College of Health Sciences. The faculty also initiated a local Honor Society as a forerunner to a chapter of Sigma Theta Tau, the International Honor Society of Nursing. In 1981, UNLV Department of Nursing was granted a charter to establish Zeta Kappa Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau. Dr. Witt was instrumental in founding UNLV's Sigma Theta Tau chapter. The department held the first induction of candidates in April of 1982. During this same period, the faculty designed a new Master of Science in nursing program. The Board of Regents approved the program in 1983. In anticipation of approval, the faculty submitted a grant seeking funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to assist in the development and implementation of the program. In 1984, the grant was funded for three years and the program admitted the first four students. Dr. Vicky Carwein was coordinator of the program. The initial focus of the graduate program was Adult Health, Chronic (Tertiary) Care. In 1985, the program added Adult Health, Acute (Secondary) Care as an additional focus. The program received initial accreditation in 1989.

The department admitted the first basic baccalaureate degree students in the fall of 1987. The final associate degree students entered the spring class of 1987. The associate and baccalaureate degree programs ran simultaneously until the last associate degree student completed coursework in 1989. The conversion dates collaborated with Clark County Community College (later the Community College of Southern Nevada) which initiated an associate degree program that same year. The UNLV faculty strongly believed that the "upper-two" pathway for registered nurses should remain intact for the previous ADN graduates. The two pathways, "basic" and "upper-two," shared similar classes and outcome objectives,

but achievement was accomplished by varying means of learning experiences.

Graduates and faculty from UNLV's nursing program established the Nursing Alumni Association in 1991 under the parent body of the UNLV Alumni Association. Alumni contribute to current students through awards and scholarships.

As the department grew and student enrollment increased, space became a problem. Plans for a new building existed, but the funding never materialized. As the 1980s turned into the 1990s, the Health Sciences building finally became a reality. Many local dignitaries and university administrators attended the groundbreaking. The building was dedicated on September 26, 1992. The department moved to the new Rod Lee Bigelow Health Sciences building, where it occupied the entire fourth floor.

To add more program options, the department created the Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) graduate program in 1992. Dr. Janet Quillian, a member of the first ADN class, returned to her alma mater to serve as the director of the FNP program. The same year, the department used audio conferencing and computer linkage for distance learning in Elko, Nevada. The distance education program in Elko continued until 2002 and graduated three groups of students. The faculty continued to analyze and modify programs to reflect accreditation requirements and student issues. In 1996-97, the department revised the FNP program and added the CNS pathway.

Continuing through the 1990s, both undergraduate and graduate nursing programs maintained accreditation. In 2008, the school will seek accreditation from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) via its autonomous accreditation body, the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

A New Century for Nursing

The new century brought many changes to the department. During 1999-2000, the Pediatric NP program began admitting students. In addition, the design and approval of a post-baccalaureate certificate program in Case Management occurred. The BSN program streamlined courses to combine theory and clinical classes into one grade and strengthened the students' science base. By the fall of 2000, the program required students to have a minimum of a "B" grade in certain courses (Phil 100, Math 124, Bio 223, 224, and 251, and Nur 250). Responding to public inquiries and faculty interests, an "RN to MSN" was developed and approved in 2000-2001. This program allowed students, who graduated with an ADN or diploma and a Registered Nurse License, but without a bachelor's degree, to pursue their educational goals.

During 2001-2002, the national and statewide nursing shortage reached crisis levels. Not only did Nevada need more nurses, but the department faced a shortage of nurse educators. In 2003, the Nevada Legislature reacted to the nursing shortage by issuing a legislative mandate to double nursing student enrollments. As part of this mandate, the program faced some complex issues. After scrutinizing and reviewing of the program, a huge curriculum change occurred. The Board of Regents approved year-round classes. The summer semester shortened the students' total commitment to four semesters. Classes were combined, realigned, and repositioned to be compressed into four semesters rather than the previous five-semester nursing program. These changes allowed students to complete their nursing classes in 16 months. Along with these changes, the university approved a salary package that encouraged year-round faculty participation.

With UNLV program and college realignments, the Department of Nursing became the UNLV School of Nursing in the fall of 2004 and hired Dr. Carolyn Yucha as the first dean. That same year, the school implemented the new BSN curriculum. The final five-semester class graduated in summer 2005. To address the faculty shortage, the first class for the MS Education track was admitted in fall of 2004. Simultaneously, the faculty worked feverishly to design and get approval for a Ph.D. program. One facet of a Ph.D. candidate's education would be to teach baccalaureate students as part of their class requirement. The first Ph.D. students were admitted in fall 2005. Also in 2005, the university approved three 15-week semesters rather than the uneven 16, 16 and 13 weeks. This moved the school to a different calendar from the rest of the university, but provided more consistency among semesters. The Board of Regents also approved the creation of two departments within the School of Nursing: Physiological Nursing and Psychosocial Nursing.

The UNLV School of Nursing provides the initial educational experience for many of the nurses practicing in Southern Nevada. Many nurses with graduate degrees work as health care leaders in the Las Vegas area. The school benefits from a mixture of faculty whose backgrounds and educational preparation is remarkably diverse. The faculty continues to serve the community and to the university. Many have extensive publications to their credit and pursue research interests that will benefit the community and society. The school has high expectations of our students, our graduates and our faculty. As the school forges ahead, we will keep in mind our mission: To educate nurses who will stand as a symbol to all — intelligent, caring, and respected.