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A Unique Program Addresses a Serious Health Care Issue

By Dr. Ann Keller, Ed.D., RN, Director, Nurse Educator Track

We've heard it before: our aging population will begin to put a strain on the health care system. According to **Wanted Analytics**, job postings for Registered Nurses grew 46% from May 2010 to May 2011. And the demand is expected to increase.

Yet while demand grows U.S. nursing schools turned away 67,563 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2010 due in part to an insufficient number of faculty, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

The Institute of Medicine Report: The Future of Nursing Leading Change, Advancing Health, 2010 Report calls for doubling the number of nurses with a doctorate by 2020. This goal is complicated by the number of current nursing faculty nearing retirement age who will need to be replaced, concurrent with IOM call, with nursing faculty prepared at the doctoral level.

A Unique Collaboration to Train Nursing Educators

To address the shortage of prepared faculty, NKU's Doctor of Education has added an innovative Nurse Educator Track. The program has been created as a collaboration between the College of Education and Human Services and the College of Health Professions. Very few schools offer this unique perspective on nursing education, and there are none in the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky except the one at NKU.

The Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership Nurse Educator Track is a program that prepares nurses for diverse roles in academic, clinical, and community settings. The current healthcare environment requires nurse educators to facilitate learning in various settings and to be collaborative across disciplines. This interdisciplinary program's framework will prepare practicing nurses to be innovative problem solvers in the global community.

The coursework within the College of Education and Human Services provides the leadership skills necessary as healthcare organizations transform themselves to meet the challenges ahead. The College of Health Professions provides the cognate courses in nursing education that are so critical in schools, hospitals, community and other healthcare settings.

"This program combines the student's previous nursing expertise with the skills of an educator," states Dr. Ann Keller, program leader. Additionally, Dr. Keller points out, the Nurse Educator track allows the doctoral candidate to do research on issues critical to nursing practice, nursing education and health care.

The Doctor of Education Nurse Educator Track provides the nurse educators in academic institutions with expanded skills and creativity in nursing education and research who want to advance their faculty position and contribute to the scholarship of teaching. For the clinical nurse, the program will help them improve their patient education skills and allow them to perform healthcare research. Whether the nurse works with nursing students, current nurses or patients, education is an integral component of the nurse's function.

Blended Face-to-Face and Online Courses

A doctoral program is a huge time commitment. Most of the students in the program work full-time while also working toward their degree. The program has been designed to respond to the demands of the working professional – the nurse educator classes are fully online and the Ed.D. classes are a hybrid model that requires the students to attend face-to-face classes once every 3 to 4 weeks and the balance of the work is online. Most of the face-to-face meetings are held on the weekends.

Why meet face to face? Dr. Paul Wirtz, the Ed.D. program director explains, "Our faculty believe it is important for us to observe and participate with our students through direct interpersonal communications and in a variety of settings. There are many proven benefits to blending both face to face and online participation to the overall learning process."

Research

The Ed.D. is a practitioner degree. This program is designed to to enrich the research skills of the academic nurse educators who want to expand their skills and creativity in nursing education and research, academic nurse educators who want to contribute to the scholarship of teaching, and nurse educators who want to become proficient nurse researchers

NKU's Ed.D. program utilizes action research methods for their dissertation and projects. The students in the Nurse Educator Track will have the chance to study challenging issues in nursing and in nursing education. They will be part of a learning community of their peers and faculty engaged in research that contributes to better healthcare outcomes and enriches the outcomes of nursing education.

For information on the Doctor of Education Nurse Educator track contact Dr. Ann Keller at (859) 572-5553 or email to kelleran@nku.edu.

About NKU

Northern Kentucky University is a growing metropolitan university of more than 16,000 students served by nearly 2,400 faculty and staff on a thriving suburban campus near Cincinnati. To find more information about NKU, check out <http://www.nku.edu>.

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