



# **SIUE School of Nursing Continues Explosive Growth: Health Sciences Complex to Fuel Continued Success**

by Megan Wieser

October 7 2020 10:56 AM



EDWARDSVILLE – The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Nursing (SON) saw record enrollment for the second consecutive year in fall 2020 with a 5% increase (1,877 students) from fall 2019. With the new Health Sciences Complex on the horizon for the SIUE campus, the foundation is in place for continued growth.

SON Dean Laura Bernaix, PhD, RN, points to the SON's faculty as the secret to their success. "Great faculty, who not only are great educators in the classroom but also experts at curriculum design, are the key," she said. "We pride ourselves with having the pulse of what prospective students want and what our clinical agency partners need."

That high-quality faculty instruction and student preparation led to a 94% pass rate in the School of Nursing National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) for undergraduate students during the 2020 second quarter. In addition, the SON's Family Nurse Practitioner Doctor of Nursing Practice graduate students scored a perfect 100% first-time pass rate on their national board exams.

Meanwhile at the graduate level, the SON broke fall 2019's record of 372 students with 437 graduate nursing students, an increase of almost 20%.

"Considering these record numbers along with recent regional and national accolades, I believe the future is extremely bright," said SON Assistant Dean for Graduate Programs Andrew Griffin, PhD, CRNA, APRN. "I am additionally encouraged by early applications for the 2021 spring and fall semesters. We are well ahead of last year's pace."

Undergraduate student enrollment in the traditional accelerated bachelor of science (ABS) program grew from 872 students in fall 2019 to 905 in fall 2020 (+3.6%). The accelerated Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science (RN to BS) program added 17 students from its fall 2019 total to reach 549 students enrolled in fall 2020.

Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Programs Ann Popkess, PhD, RN, CNE, points to a variety of factors for their growth. "We have an excellent reputation with southern Illinois regional agencies who hire and request our students practice in their organizations," she said. "Our exceptional faculty are master's and doctorate prepared, and most are certified in a specialty area. Combining this caliber of faculty with high-quality programs and curriculum, and our state-of-the-art simulation lab and virtual learning lab/experiences, highly prepares our students to excel in nursing as a career."

Popkess sees opportunity to continue the momentum. "In January 2021, we are piloting a spring ABS enrollment option," she said. "This is a 15-month program for students who have earned a bachelor's in another field to be able to earn a bachelor's in nursing. Additionally, an accelerated undergraduate to graduate option for qualified students is also proving to be attractive."

Applications for the spring ABS option are due Nov 1. For more information or to apply, contact Sarah Anderson at [saander@siue.edu](mailto:saander@siue.edu).

RN to BS Program Director Sheri Compton-McBride, DNP, RN, notes that the SON continues to work diligently with its community college and agency partners to increase the number of bachelor's prepared nurses in the workforce. "Our advantages have been our flexible 8-week course format, rolling enrollment with six enrollment entry points annually, and on-going evaluation of our curriculum and course content," she said.

According to Compton-McBride, the SON also adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic environment. "Even prior to COVID, we supplemented our recruitment activity with virtual sessions, the next of which is Thursday, Oct. 22 and we varied modalities for advising opportunities and addressing questions. Routine touchpoints with our internal and external partners assess how we can best meet the needs of those nurses who are interested in obtaining a bachelor's degree," she said.

Bernaix looks forward to the new \$105 million Health Sciences Complex as a key component to sustained growth. The complex will include approximately 221,000 square feet, making it the largest building on the SIUE campus.

Along with the SON, SIUE operates a School of Pharmacy (SOP), and the School of Dental Medicine (SDM) in Alton, and related health sciences programs in various disciplines serving central and southern Illinois. Currently, the SOP is primarily located in three buildings in University Park, while the SON is housed in Alumni Hall within the campus core. The SDM will remain in Alton.

"The Health Sciences Complex will definitely attract future students for the SON and the other health sciences on campus," Bernaix said. "It emphasizes a highly dedicated and comprehensive University mission for the preparation of nurses and other future healthcare providers.

"For nursing, it will offer a full spectrum of state-of-the-art primary care and advanced practice nursing clinical simulation programs that will prepare undergraduate and graduate nursing students, and returning nurse professionals, to provide high-tech, high-quality patient care throughout their careers."

SIUE's location and affordability will also continue to positively impact the SON's future.

The SIUE School of Nursing's programs are committed to creating excellence in nursing leadership through innovative teaching, evidence-based practice, quality research, patient advocacy and community service. Enrolling more than 1,800 students

in its baccalaureate, master's and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders in pursuit of shaping the nursing profession and impacting the health care environment. SIUE's undergraduate nursing programs on the Edwardsville campus and the regional campus in Carbondale help to solve the region's shortage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and enhance the quality of nursing practice within all patient service venues. The School's graduate programs prepare nurses for advanced roles in clinical practice, administration and education.