

SIUE School Of Nursing Joins National COVID-19 Community Engagement Pledge

by Megan Wieser

February 17 2021 1:04 PM



The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Nursing (SON) has pledged to safely engage in COVID-19 vaccine administration, a commitment made by more than

220 schools of nursing nationwide and led by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN).

“We are proud to join this national commitment to keep our communities safe,” said SON Dean Laura Bernaix, PhD, RN. “This initiative underscores the critical role schools of nursing play in immunization efforts.”

Throughout February, faculty and students of the SON’s course on The Care of Populations have been participating in immunization clinics hosted by the Madison County Health Department (MCHD) and the East Side Health District (ESHD).

SON students have vaccinated more than 1,000 community members in Phase 1a and Phase 1b, including individuals in long-term care residents, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, residential treatment centers, dentists, morticians, school nurses, EMS, first responders, grocery store workers and persons over 65.

“This course introduces students to nursing practice outside of the hospital setting,” said Amanda Ross, instructor in the Department of Family Health and Community Health Nursing. “While a fundamental knowledge of core nursing concepts is necessary, students also have to think about the community environment in which people live, including the limited resources and challenges that patients may face.”

“Participating in this community COVID-19 immunization clinic has allowed our nursing students the opportunity to see firsthand the difficult logistical challenges that vaccinating thousands of people can entail,” she added. “Through these clinic collaborations, students have the opportunity to serve the community by not only administering the vaccinations, but also providing patient education related to the vaccine.”

Ross and her colleague Cheryl Jackson, also an instructor in the Department of Family Health and Community Health Nursing, are leading students in the community health clinical. Jackson notes that students have had the opportunity to work with diverse populations of individuals from Cahokia, Fairmont City, Washington Park, Smithton, East St. Louis and nearby communities.

“Having SIUE nursing students participate in the vaccination clinics enables the public to get their vaccines in a timely manner. For example, a group of 8-10 students can safely provide more than 60 vaccines per hour,” Jackson explained. “The students have the opportunity to practice communication skills and health education skills with diverse populations. They’re also learning how to organize large immunization clinics at the agency and at other sites. They’ve worked with the National Guard, and volunteer nurses from nearby communities.”

Students have expressed how humbling this experience has been, and their dedication to doing the “most good for the most people.”

“I’ve always had a love of making people feel better, and nursing seemed like the best fit for me,” said senior nursing major Caitlynn Elliott, of Sorento. “This opportunity has solidified that decision, because I feel like I’m helping not only the whole world fight a pandemic, but also friends and family in my community.”

“Because of this experience, I feel like I am already a part of the medical workforce, and that I am doing my part in the fight against COVID-19,” said Cheniya Alston, a senior nursing major from Richton Park.

“What’s exciting about this experience is seeing how appreciative each patient is to be getting the COVID-19 vaccine,” added Livia Brown, a senior nursing major from Tolono. “They are thankful for those volunteering to administer the vaccine.”

“Nursing is an intense field that requires focus, intelligence and grit, combined with selflessness, compassion and courage,” noted Kylie Clemens, a senior nursing major from Rochester. “Nurses are there in the best times and in the most challenging times. COVID-19 has posed many challenges for people around the world, and providing a vaccine has given those people hope for the first time in over a year. I am nothing but grateful to have had this opportunity to vaccinate the people of Madison County. I am reminded of that every time an individual comes to my station, beaming with pride to be a part of this history-making moment.”

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 nearly 1,900 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 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.