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Educating Nurses

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Delaunay, Jennifer Nen ’08 and Ashley Barram ’09 are surrounded by Vietnamese and Russian immigrants at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) in east Portland. Each Tuesday they spend at least three hours there, checking blood pressures, updating records and making referrals for about 50 patients. The students are honing their nursing skills, while learning about the challenges of communicating through language and cultural barriers.

In the three semesters since the nursing clinical was established at IRCO, students from the Linfield-Good Samaritan School of Nursing (LGSSN) have been merging social services and health care, said Sherry Archer, an assistant professor of nursing who teaches community health.

“The goal of the program is to help get the clients into the health-care system,” she said. “Each client carries a card with the name of their clinic in English and Vietnamese or Russian. Students often make referrals or call the doctor if a patient’s blood pressure spikes or they have other health needs.”

IRCO is a cacophony of sounds and different languages. Some people chat, some exercise, some pray and others sing in their native languages in the activity center. When clients meet with the students, they often are accompanied by husbands, wives or friends, each wanting to be a part of the process.

Nen said the biggest challenge is trying to communicate the information through an interpreter. But it’s a lesson that will serve her well.

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Diversity on the Portland Campus is defined broadly. Students today are from different racial, cultural, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. There are more men, as well as more gray hair. The changing face of nursing is reflected through students such as these: Ricardo Ojeda ’08, a musician who has toured the country as a nurse because of his interest in alternative healing and the opportunities in the profession; Catherine Rutledge-Gorman ’07, the married mother of two with a master of divinity degree; Michelle Gibson ’08, a single parent, began working on her degree several years ago and has since attended several institutions, including spending a year on the McMinnville Campus. Lucas Arocorvea ’07, a Brazilian who completed a bachelor’s degree in nursing at the University of Oregon and his master’s here, is now completing his master’s in health sciences at Lewis & Clark College, enrolled in nursing school after working as a certified nursing assistant.

LGSSN, the third largest nursing school in Oregon, has revised its nursing curriculum to meet those changing needs and as a result has doubled its number of nursing graduates in the last six years. The program offers a baccalaureate degree with a liberal arts emphasis and a focus on community health. Students can complete a BSN in one of three ways. An accelerated program, usually completed in 18 months, is for those students who have a prerequisite degree. The traditional program requires that students transfer in with two years of coursework on the McMinnville Campus or another accredited institution. The RN-BSN program is designed for currently licensed RNs who want to complete their baccalaureate degree while continuing to work full time. Beverly Epeneter has a long history with LGSSN. She graduated from the Good Samaritan School of Nursing diploma program, completing her master’s at Oregon Health and Science University before joining the faculty at Linfield merged with GSH. She earned her Ed.D. at Portland State University while working as a faculty member at Linfield.

Epeneter, who has guided the school as interim dean of nursing for three years and will return to the faculty ranks in the fall, said nurses must possess sharp critical thinking skills, show compassion and demonstrate a commitment to the profession.

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we can’t yet imagine in a world that we can’t even envision,” she said. “They must be prepared to confront issues as they arise and develop solutions as they appear.”

The liberal arts component, coupled with an emphasis on community health, gives Linfield nursing graduates an edge by honing their critical thinking and communication skills. “We think they take a more holistic approach to nursing education,” Epeneter said. “We care about the medical aspects, but we also focus on the caring aspect. Students learn how to connect with their patients in ways other than just their diagnoses.”

Leader in diversity

Changing demographics in Oregon and across the country mean there is a greater need for nurses to serve and understand the Latino, African American, Asian and Eastern European communities. Coupled with that is the need for all nurses, regardless of background, to understand how different cultures approach health care.

“Nurses need to be able to engage with and understand the complexities of different cultures, races, religions, genders and physical and mental abilities and how those can affect a patient’s care,” Epeneter said.

LGSSN has taken the lead in Oregon in developing successful recruitment and retention of students of color.

Although Linfield had focused on increasing the diversity of its student body for a decade, those efforts kicked into high gear in 2004 with a three-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to boost the number of Hispanic students.

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Wros credits much of the success to the addition of Ninfa Murillo, the director of multicultural programs, and Gerardo Ochoa, scholarship outreach administrator. They have developed bilingual marketing materials and a bilingual website, and support services that are critical to the success of the Latino students.

“There are different types of support,” Ochoa said. “There is financial, moral, academic and social support. We have realized that students need to have a balance of all four. Financial support can come from scholarships and loans. Moral support can come from parents, partners, husbands, wives or children. They need to have social support from peers, faculty and staff, and they need to have academic support from programs on campus.”

Ochoa works one-on-one with students, urging them to apply for as many scholarships as possible. He is relentless in encouraging students, said Ricardo Ojeda ’07, who toured as a musician before his interest in alternative healing eventually led him to nursing school. “He is very proactive,” Ojeda added. “I am always getting emails encouraging me to check out different scholarships and look into different financial aid packages. It’s a tremendous resource.”

Murillo’s and Ochoa’s service stretches beyond the Latino students.

“We’ve been successful in our recruitment and retention of Latinos,” Murillo said. “But we need to extend these strategies to others who are also underrepresented — Black, Native American, Asian and Eastern European students. The goal is to mirror the changing needs of the community.”

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- **Richardo Ojeda ’08**, a musician who has toured the country playing guitar while pursuing a nursing degree due to his interest in alternative healing and the opportunities it presents.
- **Catherine Rutledge ’08**, a career in alternative healing and the opportunities it presents.
- **Michele Gibson ’07**, a single parent, began working on her degree several years ago and has attended several schools, including spending a year at the University of Oregon.
- **Lucas Arcoverde ’07**, a Brazilian who completed a bachelor’s degree in educational and cultural affairs at Lewis & Clark College, enrolled in nursing school after working as a certified nursing assistant.

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Linfield merged with Good Samaritan School of Nursing to establish a nursing bac-
calaureate program, the challenges nurses and educators face are vastly different. Although diseases such as typhoid fever, malaria, tuberculosis and diphtheria are no longer prevalent in the United States, more people are living longer with chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and HIV/AIDS. Changing demographics and an aging population require that today’s nurses be culturally competent to better serve a more diverse society. Nurses must navigate an increasingly complex healthcare system and learn rapidly changing technologies. Strong critical thinking and communication skills are required to help them address not only the health needs of their patients, but also their emotional and spiritual needs.

**Soft skills** are vital to help nurses care for complex patients who need more than just their diagnoses. For example, nurses need to understand how different cultures approach health care. The need for all nurses, regardless of background, to stand the complexities of different cultures, races, religions, genders and physical and mental abilities and how those can affect a patient’s care,” Epeneter said.

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**Leader in diversity**

Changing demographics in Oregon and across the country mean there is a greater need for nurses to serve and understand the Latino, African American, Asian and Eastern European communities. Coupled with that is the need for all nurses, regardless of background, to understand how different cultures approach health care. “Nurses need to be engaged in all aspects of care. Considering how those can affect a patient’s care,” Epeneter said. Los GSSN has taken the lead in Oregon in developing successful recruitment and retention of students of color.

Although Linfield has focused on increasing the diversity of its student body for a decade, those efforts kicked into high gear in 2004 with a three-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to boost the number of Hispanic students. Since then, the number of Latinos at LGSSN has tripled, from nine in 2004 to 28, or 8 percent of nursing students, according to Peggy Wros, professor of nursing and associate dean of nursing, who is project co-director along with Professors Rebecca Boehne and Barbara May.

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We’ve been successful in our recruitment and retention of Latinos,” Murillo said. “But we need to extend these strategies to others who are also under-represented—Black, Native American, Asian and Eastern European students. The goal is to mirror the changing needs of the community.”

IRCO is just one of dozens of sites where Linfield students today are from different racial, cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. There are more men, as well as more gray hair. The changing face of nursing is reflected through students such as these:

- **Stacy Griffin ’08**, enrolled at the nursing school right out of high school and will spend fall semester in an internship at the Walt Disney World College Program in Florida.
- **Anthonette “Nat” Guy ’07**, the married mother of four, left a career in the insurance industry to pursue her dream of being a nurse.
- **Megan Rodgers ’07**, commuted to McMinnville for four years to compete on the award-winning Linfield tennis team while pursuing her nursing degree.

**“Because of the diversity of America, I am going to be working with translations throughout my career,” she said. “This is really good practice.”**

Linfield Nursing students complete nearly 1,000 hours of clinical practice in addition to their nursing, science and humanities course requirements. Ask any nursing student and he or she will tell you that the LGSSN nursing curriculum is grueling.

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Enrollment

Nursing 351  
Traditional 267  
Accelerated 80  
RN to BSN 4

Health Science 21  
Total 372

Faculty

Nursing 21  
Science 7  
Humanities 3  
Total 31

Student Profile

Gender:  
Female 87%  
Male 13%

Age:  
18-21 25%  
22-29 38%  
30 and over 37%

Average GPA: 3.64

Ethnicity:  
White 79%  
Hispanic 6%  
Asian 6%  
Unknown 9%

Pass Rate

NCLEX licensing exam  
2001-02: 81%  
2005-06: 93%
Nursing/Portland
Campus Facts

Enrollment

Nursing
351
Traditional
267
Accelerated
80
RN to BSN
4

Health Science
21
Total
372

Faculty

Nursing
21
Science
7
Humanities
3
Total
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The life experiences of the older students bring so much to our nursing classes,” Stacy Griffin ‘08 said. “Those of us who are traditional age don’t have that much experience, so we learn by listening to their stories. They bring in ideas we would have never thought of.”

Ojeda said his nursing education has made him look at his own humanity in a way he had not previously.

“It’s kind of a crash course in compassion, and it’s making me continually redefine myself,” he said. “It’s an opportunity to make some kind of difference at a point in someone’s life when it is most needed. If it were me, I would want a well-educated, compassionate nurse there. I want to be that kind of nurse.”

— Mardi Mileham

Ricardo Ojeda ’07, left, Heather Fruhling ’08, Chris Nowatzki ’07 and Sherry Archer, professor of nursing, were among 18 students and faculty who participated in the Health Care Action Day at the state Capitol in Salem in April. The event included a rally and meetings with legislators and their aides. The daylong event was part of a community health nursing course and gave students an inside look at legislative action and lobbying.