

Title:

Fast Track to Success: MaricopaNursing's Concurrent Enrollment Program

College/University:

MaricopaNursing and Northern Arizona University

Team Members:

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Executive Summary:

The Concurrent Enrollment Program (CEP) is an innovative curricular collaboration between MaricopaNursing and Northern Arizona University which allows concurrent progression through associate degree and baccalaureate degree nursing curricula. This groundbreaking partnership has captured the attention and interest of students, the nursing education community, and the Arizona State Board of Nursing.

Descriptive Overview

MaricopaNursing is a consortium of associate degree nursing programs at eight Maricopa Community Colleges that prepare students to become registered nurses. These nursing programs share a common outcome-based integrated curriculum culminating in an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in nursing; common student admission requirements and placement procedures; shared agreements for academics and program standards including admission criteria, progression, and graduation. MaricopaNursing programs are highly regarded locally and nationally due to high NCLEX-RN pass rates and knowledgeable, well prepared graduates who are practice-ready and who readily transition into the health care workforce as registered nurses.

In recent years, however, for a variety of reasons, baccalaureate-prepared registered nurses are increasingly preferred over registered nurses with associate degrees, especially in today's depressed health care market. Healthcare costs and wellness initiatives have resulted in a shift from hospital-centered, inpatient care to community based care, a setting in which the BSN-prepared nurse is uniquely qualified to practice. The 2010 Institute of Medicine report *The Future of Nursing* recommends increasing the number of registered nurses with a BSN to 80% by 2020. A baccalaureate degree in nursing is required by the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force to practice as an active duty registered nurse. Magnet designated hospitals, known for quality patient care and lower mortality rates, are required to meet minimum percentages of BSN preparation among their nurse leaders and bedside nurses. A number of hospitals in the Phoenix area currently hold or are seeking Magnet status; therefore, preferential hiring of BSN prepared graduates is increasingly common. The Affordable Care Act will result in a need for more advanced practice nurses, including nurse practitioners and nurse midwives, and BSN nurses are educationally prepared to enter the graduate programs required for these roles.

In an effort to meet the workforce demands of the contemporary health care system, to provide an affordable pathway to a baccalaureate degree in nursing, to improve the ability of new graduates to secure employment, and to avert the potential loss of valuable partnerships with clinical partners, in 2010 MaricopaNursing partnered with Northern Arizona University to develop an innovative program of study, the

Concurrent Enrollment Program (CEP). By pairing the MaricopaNursing program with NAUs RN to BSN program in a concurrent model, students are able to complete their Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree either concurrent with or within one semester after graduating with their AAS degree. Additional partnerships have been created with ASU and the University of Phoenix and the program has been implemented at six colleges which offer the MaricopaNursing program, with two additional colleges set to implement CEP cohorts in fall 2013.

Existing articulation agreements facilitate degree progression for MaricopaNursing graduates who wish to pursue a BSN, but there are clear advantages to the CEP model. Alumni seeking employment who have earned the BSN credential or are within 10 credits of completion hold a distinct advantage for hiring managers. Preferential placement of BSN nursing students at Phoenix area health care agencies for clinical learning experiences has resulted in challenges for MaricopaNursing programs, so the ability to use the BSN advantage to compete for quality experiential learning placements is invaluable. National initiatives to increase the numbers of associate degree prepared RNs to earn their BSN are ongoing in Arizona as well, and the Arizona State Board of Nursing wholeheartedly endorses this movement. Therefore, during the approval process for the CEP, members of the Board of Nursing unanimously voiced support for the CEP and its potential to increase BSN prepared nurses in the state.

Finally—and most importantly—the biggest supporters of the CEP are Maricopa’s students. Before the inception of the CEP, pursuit of a BSN in Arizona was, for many students, cost-prohibitive and/or academically unfeasible. Securing placement in a nursing program at one of Arizona’s state universities is highly competitive, and many students are unable to follow the traditional class schedules offered by these universities. Private universities offer easier acceptance for students seeking a nursing degree, but tuition for a 4-year degree can exceed \$80,000. The CEP, which allows concurrent progression through the associate degree and BSN nursing curricula with a variety of schedule alternatives, is an affordable option for a BSN education. As one student noted, “This program was the answer to my prayers!” The CEP is an innovative educational option that promotes student achievement and success.