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DNP program prepares nurses to educate future workforce

By Alice Rhein, contributing writer

Marisa Ferrari knew at 10 that she wanted to follow in her mother's footsteps and become a nurse. As a witness to a horrific car accident, Ferrari also observed her mother provide emergency lifesaving care to an infant whose mother would later die from injuries sustained in the accident.

"I felt both admiration for my mother's skills and a devastating feeling of helplessness," said Ferrari, an Oakland University graduate with a doctorate in nursing practice (DNP).

Early in her nursing education, Ferrari recognized that teaching nurses was essential to the strength of the profession. Though a dedicated bedside practitioner, Ferrari has committed herself to educating future nurses, and she may be saving more lives than she'll ever know.

Through the DNP, OU is looking to address a critical nursing shortage by offering accelerated programs providing the highest level of preparation for clinical practice recognized by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN).

As a nursing professor, Ferrari teaches several courses as part of the university's online RN to BSN program and wanted to pursue the DNP to help her excel as a nurse and educator.

"I am already able to use the information that I have learned in my daily practice. The courses have expanded my knowledge and advanced the way that I process information and troubleshoot problems," said Ferrari, who started a Ph.D. program at another university before transferring to OU for the DNP, which is the first of its kind in the state.

Program Director Frances Jackson, Ph.D., emphasizes that this program is critical for training more nurse educators to fill the nursing shortage gaps, as well as improve the overall quality of patient care. "This program will allow our graduates to function in leadership roles in the health care system, have increased ability to implement change in clinical settings and to do clinical teaching," she said.

The DNP, which can be completed in two years of full-time study, builds upon master's-level content while providing doctoral-level courses in advanced research methods, theory, leadership, systems management and nursing informatics.

"The program is ideal for full-time work and full-time study. Students in the program are completing it without difficulty," Ferrari said. "Most students are working full time and attending part time."

The 32-credit, 16-month accelerated program, introduced in fall 2006, prepares nurses for positions as clinical professors in academic institutions, clinical leaders in health care systems, policy makers in government and entrepreneurs in the health care industry.

Jackson notes that courses use a combination of online and synchronous Web-based format leading to a culminating research project that can be implemented in a student's own hospital or work setting. For Ferrari, that means continuing her examination of the relationship between impulsivity and falls in the hospital environment, a project she's been working on in cooperation with William Beaumont Hospital.

"The program flexibility is terrific and offers a great mix of online courses and face-to-face interaction. Anyone can do this program. It is structured in such a way that any full-time nurse with a million and two things going on can participate and succeed," Ferrari said. "The faculty at OU will support you in every way."

SUMMARY

The Doctoral in Nursing Practice helps address a critical nursing shortage by offering accelerated programs providing the highest level of preparation for clinical practice.

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