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Lonnie Wederski

Northern Arizona University, USA

A new approach to educating nurses with the baccalaureate degree (BSN): Arizona's concurrent education program (CEP)

In the United States the most common pathway to prepare for licensure as a Registered Nurse (RN) is through technical community college programs for an Associate Degree (AD). Research and professional organizations have recommended an increase in the number of baccalaureate-educated nurses (BSN) to improve patient outcomes, professional mobility, and preparation for leadership roles. The Institute of Medicine (2011) called for an increase of BSN nurses from 50% of the workforce to 80% by 2020, and encouraged innovative educational pathways and opportunities. But repeated studies demonstrate numerous barriers RNs encounter when they attempt to complete the BSN after the AD. In the state of Arizona, our response has been to develop partnerships between the state university BSN program and community college AD nursing programs in a new approach to nursing education. While dually enrolled in both community college and university, students complete all AD and BSN program requirements concurrently. Using existing curricula for both AD and BSN completion programs, a new sequence of courses was developed that included all pre-requisite science and math, social science and humanities courses, as well as nursing courses in both college and university settings. The result is a pathway that has provided many benefits to students, community college AD nursing faculty and programs, and the population of the state of Arizona. While there were certainly challenges to work out admission and advisement processes, financial aid issues, and the logistics of growth, the outcomes of the program have been gratifying. Since admitting the first 30 students in the summer of 2011, more than 750 students have completed both the AD and BSN degrees concurrently, have passed licensing exams and gained employment. More than 800 students are in progress of earning their BSN in 12 partner community colleges in rural and urban Arizona communities.

Biography

Wederski is an Associate Clinical Professor and the current program coordinator for RN/BSN education in the School of Nursing at Northern Arizona University.

Lonnie.Wederski@nau.edu

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