

ON THE RECORD

Neighbors working together

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New collaborative program helps WCC, EMU meet the community's demand for bachelor-degreed nurses

As if Washtenaw Community College and Eastern Michigan University weren't close enough – they're separated by just a two-mile stretch of Huron River Drive – a new collaboration is bringing the two schools even closer.

To address the growing demand for bachelor's degree-prepared nurses, WCC and EMU are offering a collaborative nursing program. After completing five semesters at WCC, students will be able to seamlessly transfer to EMU and graduate with a bachelor of science degree in nursing (BSN). Students selected for this new collaborative program must first apply to EMU's School of Nursing.

"Many times, the biggest hold up for students to get a BSN is the simple fact that there aren't enough available seats for all the qualified candidates," said Valerie Greaves, dean of WCC's Health Services. "Typically, EMU receives more than 300 applications a year for its nursing program, but they can only take approximately 80 of those applicants, so now WCC will be taking 24-36 of the additional qualified applicants. This collaborative relationship addresses a need in the community by allowing more students to complete their bachelors of science in nursing."

According to a 2011 report from the Institute of Medicine, it's recommended that the nursing profession move toward a proportion of 80 percent of all registered nurses earning bachelor's degrees by 2020.

The goal is for WCC to accept around 24-36 students per year in an effort to push more EMU students through the nursing program, so they can graduate and begin working in the field sooner. Greaves called it a "win-win for everyone."

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Last fall served as a test drive for the new program with a pilot group of 24 students, one of them being Jim Abraham. At 47, Abraham recently decided to change careers and is expected to graduate from WCC in May 2017 with an associate degree in applied science. He will also have obtained the knowledge necessary to take the NCLEX-RN state exam to become a registered nurse. Then he's off to EMU, where he will complete his last four semesters.

"This new collaborative program between WCC and EMU is terrific because I'll be able to transfer with 94 credits," he said. "As a family man, I need to be out and working in the field right away so this helps."

Students will graduate from the program having learned valuable skills, including leadership, health policy, system improvement, research and evidence-based practice, teamwork and collaboration.

WCC has articulation agreements with five other universities, but this collaboration is different. The two schools have worked hard to ensure that the transition is seamless for students.

"This collaborative program capitalizes on the strengths of both schools," said Michael Williams, Director of EMU's School of Nursing. "WCC's nursing department has been a strong partner of EMU for a very long time and this partnership simply reinforces our desire for high-quality nurses."