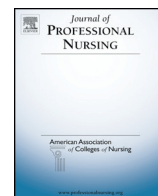




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Thirteen years and counting. Outcomes of a concurrent ASN/BSN enrollment program

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ABSTRACT

In their 2011 report, *The Future of Nursing*, the Institute of Medicine called for 80% of the nursing workforce to be comprised of baccalaureate prepared Registered Nurses by the year 2020. One suggested approach to achieve this goal is the creation of programs that allow students to progress through associate and baccalaureate nursing preparation simultaneously. This paper describes the University of Central Florida's 13-year experience after implementing a Concurrent Enrollment Program. Development and structure of the program, advisement and curriculum details, facilitators and barriers are described. Data on National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses pass rates, completion rates, comparison with traditional RN-BSN students, and progression to graduate school are also included. The Concurrent Program model described here between a specific university and state college partners, demonstrated positive outcomes that support achievement of the Institute of Medicine's goals.

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Introduction

The landmark 2011 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on the future of nursing recommended that nursing professionals achieve “higher

levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression” (Institute of Medicine, 2011, p. 163). The report went on to recommend that by 2020, 80% of registered nurses (RNs) hold at least the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and the number of doctorally prepared nurses be doubled (Institute of Medicine, 2011). In order for the nursing profession to accomplish these goals, an increased number of BSN educated nurses is necessary to meet current professional nursing needs. The BSN is also the foundation for advanced practice roles and to become a doctorally prepared researcher or educator (Aiken, 2011). The realization of these goals is a major focus of the national initiative, *The Future of*

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Nursing: Campaign for Action at the recently established *Center to Champion Nursing in America* (Gorski et al., 2015).

The need for nursing education programs to promote progression of Associate of Science in Nursing (ASN) prepared nurses to the BSN is supported by findings that nurses with the BSN report higher professional values and patient outcomes are better when the majority of nurses are BSN prepared (Aiken et al., 2003; Aiken et al., 2014; Kutney-Lee et al., 2013). These studies are further summarized in other varied sources (American Association of College of Nursing, 2015; Conner and Thielemann, 2013; Giddens et al., 2015; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2013). Market demands also support BSN preparation, as many hospitals now express a preference for hiring nurses with the BSN (American Association of College of Nursing, 2014; Florida Center for Nursing Report, 2014) and two states (New York and New Jersey) have considered legislation that would mandate achievement of a BSN within a fixed number of years after initial RN licensure (Maneval and Teeter, 2010).

There has been a small but steady increase in the percentage of hospital employed RNs with the BSN and a corresponding decline in ASN nurses (Auerbach et al., 2015). The number and size of BSN programs are increasing and the number of BSN graduates is growing, primarily due to increased numbers of graduates of BSN completion programs. Regardless, the ASN remains the entry level for most nurses across the United States (Buerhaus et al., 2016; National Council of State Boards of Nursing, (NCSBN), 2016). In 2012–2013, of the 11,302 new enrollees in nursing programs in the state of Florida, only 18% were in pre-licensure or traditional BSN programs. Over 60% of qualified applicants to these programs were not admitted. In that year, 78% of the 10,851 graduates of all nursing programs earned only the ASN (Florida Center for Nursing Report, 2014).

After achievement of the ASN, barriers to completion of the BSN include work-life issues, cost, time constraints, not seeing the value of advanced education, and a lack of knowledge about programs and options (Duffy et al., 2014). Additional barriers include differences in requirements related to prerequisite, co-requisite and general education course requirements. Inadequate advisement can further complicate the process for the student seeking a BSN (Close et al., 2015; Duffy et al., 2014; Giddens and Meyer, 2016).

A shared ASN-BSN concurrent curriculum enrollment program has been suggested as a way to facilitate progression of ASN nurses to the BSN while also addressing some of the logistic issues, such as limited seats in BSN nursing programs and inadequate numbers of faculty (Close et al., 2015; Gerardi, 2015; Giddens et al., 2015; Goode et al., 2016; Gorski et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2012). While specific characteristics of these programs vary, all seek to increase the number of students admitted to ASN programs who progress to the BSN. They do this by addressing barriers to smooth academic progression and facilitating completion of BSN courses while students are still in the ASN program.

Although initial outcome data from these programs indicates they are successful in increasing the number of ASN students moving toward the BSN (Giddens et al., 2015), there are few comprehensive, long-term studies on these programs. This paper describes the 13-year experience of the University of Central Florida (UCF) College of Nursing after implementing a Concurrent ASN-BSN Enrollment Program (Concurrent Program) that allows simultaneous progression of students through the associate and baccalaureate degree programs. Facilitators and barriers to program success are described with attention given to the development and structure of the program. Curriculum details are provided along with data on number of enrollees, student completion rates, impact on National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) pass rates, and percentage of graduates progressing to graduate education.

The concurrent ASN-BSN enrollment option program

History

The UCF BSN program graduated its first pre-licensure class of just over 30 students in 1981. Since that time, pre-licensure BSN program enrollment has grown nearly ten-fold through the admission of more students on the main campus, duplication of the program on two regional campuses and the creation of an accelerated second degree program for students with a bachelors degree or higher in non-nursing fields. Further increases were impeded by a shortage of qualified faculty, limited clinical sites and inadequate resources in the state supported higher education budget.

Initially, RNs seeking the BSN were admitted to the RN to BSN program. They quickly became the largest number of students earning the BSN degree at UCF. Applicants to the RN to BSN program must be licensed as a Professional Registered Nurse, meet the university's general education requirements and complete the same nursing program pre-requisite courses as students in the pre-licensure program.

Starting in 2002, nursing program leaders at UCF and Seminole Community College (now Seminole State College) recognized that consecutive progression from the ASN to the BSN was unnecessarily long. They also recognized that the number and quality of applicants to both schools was high and that many students sought the ASN after they could not be admitted to the BSN program at UCF due to enrollment limitations.

To address the need for educational alternatives to accommodate more students, faculty at both institutions worked together to create a Concurrent Program. Faculty reviewed both curricula and identified subject matter to be delivered by each school. Admission criteria and pre-requisite courses for both programs were compared and refined with consideration of professional curriculum standards, state mandated requirements for ASN and BSN programs and the unique requirements of each school. A memorandum of understanding outlining responsibilities of both schools was developed and signed.

Initially, students were admitted only once per year with twenty seats (20) in each Seminole State College (SSC) cohort reserved for students who were on the UCF BSN program wait list. This was quickly changed so that any individual who meets admission requirements to both schools can apply to the Concurrent Program in any of three yearly admission cycles. Within five years, the percentage of concurrent students at SSC grew to 85% of each ASN cohort.

In 2010, a second state college, Valencia College (VC), sought to duplicate the success witnessed at SSC. This second collaboration has also met with success and growth. The first admission cohort consisted of 16 students admitted once per year. This program now admits at least 40 Concurrent Program students twice a year.

Neither SSC nor VC experienced an increase in enrollment as a direct result of the program. As such, neither school was faced with the requirement to add to the number of faculty to accommodate the program. In contrast, adding a new program to the offerings of UCF immediately resulted in increased student credit hours generated. Initially, altering the academic assignment of a single faculty member supported the increased enrollment of students at UCF. As the number of student credit hours generated increased, additional faculty members were hired with those funds. Metered growth and deft financial management contributed to the success of the program.

Student advisement

An important facet of admitting students into separate schools simultaneously is the recognition of and advising for the varied requirements of each school to prevent additional or unneeded course work. Assuring that the major advising resources (online, print and personnel) are clear and easy to access is essential. Advising is tailored to meet the specific needs of each student. UCF and its state college

partners work together to clearly explain the prerequisite requirements for the BSN and ASN programs so students choose courses that result in meeting requirements at both institutions. At least one UCF faculty member is based at each state college campus to help market the program, recruit qualified students, provide ongoing academic advising and teach select BSN level UCF classes.

The general education and prerequisite course requirements have been repeatedly identified as barriers to progression of ASN graduates to the BSN (Close et al., 2015; Giddens et al., 2015; Giddens and Meyer, 2016). Such requirements have been issues in the implementation of this Concurrent Program. As illustrated in Table 1, the State University System of Florida has a set of nursing prerequisites common to all BSN programs at public universities: anatomy, physiology, microbiology, psychology, human growth and development, nutrition, statistics and a 4th life science (ex. biology, chemistry, or physics). The state college system of Florida, which governs SSC and VC, requires all these courses except the 4th life science course and statistics. However, they both specifically require English composition and a state college approved general education humanities course. In addition, SSC specifically requires Biology 1 and College Algebra. Because of these differences, advisors work closely with students to ensure that all courses required for admission at both institutions are completed.

Another example of a prerequisite challenge has been the human nutrition requirement. Because of the state university common prerequisite course rules, UCF must accept all human nutrition courses with specific course numbers taken at any state public institution to meet the university's prerequisite requirement. However, SSC and VC require a human nutrition with diet therapy course and the most commonly offered nutrition courses do not include diet therapy. To address this challenge, both VC and SSC agreed to accept a higher-level nutrition course taken at UCF. Both schools also offer a one-credit diet therapy course that students may complete if they took a course without the required diet therapy content rather than retaking an entire course.

Admission, enrollment and progression

There are a variety of ways by which a student may be admitted to the Concurrent Program. Students may start as freshmen at UCF and take the first two years of general education courses and nursing prerequisites. Alternately, students may enroll at a state college to take their general education and nursing prerequisite courses and earn the Associate of Arts (AA), a liberal arts degree. Students who attend private or non-Florida schools must document that they meet the general education and nursing prerequisite requirements at both UCF and the state college. Course substitutions, waivers and transfers are common for students who took courses outside of the state system.

All students must be admitted to UCF and the state college prior to submitting applications to the Concurrent Program at both institutions. The nursing application windows are open at the same time at both schools. Administrators at both UCF and the state college meet to

identify eligible applicants who are then admitted to the Concurrent Program. Students attend mandatory nursing orientations for both institutions. These are usually held on the same day at the state college campus.

Student advisement continues while the student is in the Concurrent Program. Two members of the UCF faculty are available at each state college campus and are available for individual consultation. This includes helping students modify the BSN component of their plan of study both before and after the student earns the ASN.

Financial aid

For students enrolled in a Concurrent Program, receiving federal financial aid can be a challenge because certain types can only be disbursed by one educational institution at a time. To address this problem in the semesters when students are enrolled at both institutions, financial aid is disbursed by the state college and students are responsible for payment to each institution separately. At the end of the concurrent enrollment period, financial aid is dispersed by the university. Because the dates for financial aid disbursement by the state colleges do not always accommodate fee deadlines at the university, UCF set up a payment deadline extension specifically for students in the Concurrent Program. A late fee waiver can also be requested to prevent additional charges or being dropped from a class for non-payment.

Course delivery

During the first 4 or 5 semesters, students are simultaneously enrolled at both UCF and the state college. Faculty of both schools works closely to schedule classes and clinical rotations. At the end of the concurrent enrollment period students finish the ASN program and are eligible to sit for the NCLEX-RN. In the two semesters immediately following the ASN, students enroll in the remaining five UCF nursing courses required to finish the BSN. During this time, students must obtain the RN license as an additional graduation requirement. Once obtained, students are awarded 29 h of upper division credit from UCF in recognition of the lower division course work completed for the ASN degree.

While students are enrolled at both schools, all of the BSN courses are offered either at the state college face-to-face or in a fully online format. Once the ASN coursework has been completed, classes are delivered online. In the final semester, students complete the course, *Practicum in Community and Public Health Nursing for RNs*, which meets the AACN White Paper (2012) recommendations related to practice experiences. In this course, students work in a variety of agencies in the community. They assess the direct and indirect needs for nursing services. From such assessments, each student designs and implements improvements to existing nursing services or introduces innovative solutions. Outcome based assessments are completed by faculty members for these practice experiences as recommended in the AACN White Paper. As an example of student progression, Table 2 outlines the curriculum and credit hours for the UCF/SSC Concurrent Program.

Outcomes

Positive Concurrent Program outcomes have been documented in the areas of completion rates when compared to a traditional RN-BSN program, overall completion numbers and rates as well as NCLEX-RN pass rates but not percentages of students completing graduate study after completion of the Concurrent Program.

UCF did not designate a program code to track all Concurrent Program students until fall 2008. A College of Nursing tracking system, which made it possible to more precisely track student progress was started in 2010. Therefore, it is difficult to retrieve admission and graduation data between the years 2003–2010. However, data collected manually during this time indicates that 80% of students enrolled in

Table 1
Prerequisite courses by school.

Prerequisite course	Requiring institution		
Microbiology with lab	UCF	SSC	VC
Anatomy (AP1) with lab	UCF	SSC	VC
Physiology (AP2) with lab	UCF	SSC	VC
4th Life Science	UCF	–	–
General Psychology	UCF	SSC	VC
Human Growth & Development	UCF	SSC	VC
Human Nutrition	UCF	–	–
Human Nutrition with Diet Therapy	–	SSC	VC
Statistics	UCF	–	–
English Composition	–	SSC	VC
School Approved Humanities	–	SSC	VC
Biology 1	–	SSC	–
College Algebra	–	SSC	–

Table 2
Sample plan of study UCF/SSC.

Semesters 1–6	
Complete general education and nursing prerequisites	
Semester 5	
Apply to UCF and SSC nursing programs	
Semesters 7–10	
Complete nursing courses concurrently at UCF and SSC (Financial aid disbursed by SSC)	
Semester 7	Credits
(SSC) Foundations of Nursing	5
(SSC) Health Assessment	3
(SSC) Nursing Skills Lab	2
(UCF) Pathophysiology for Nursing Practice	3
Total	13
Semester 8	Credits
(SSC) Basic Concepts in Medical Surgical Nursing	6
(SSC) Concepts in Mental Health Nursing	3
(UCF) Dimensions of Professional Practice	3
(UCF) Professional Socialization Seminar	1
Total	13
Semester 9	Credits
(SSC) Concepts in Maternal/Child Nursing	6
(SSC) Advance Concepts in Medical Surgical Nursing	6
(UCF) Health Promotion Across the Lifespan	2
Total	14
Semester 10	Credits
(SSC) Complex Concepts in Med/Surgical Nursing	4
(SSC) Practicum & Client Care Management	3
(UCF) Intro to Critical Care Nursing	3
(UCF) Nursing Research	3
Total	13
Graduate from SSC with ASN and continue as UCF to complete BSN (Financial aid disbursed by UCF)	
Semester 11	Credits
(UCF) Health Care Issues, Policy & Economics	3
(UCF) Nursing Elective	3
(UCF) Leadership, Management & Role Development	3
Total	9
Pass NCLEX-RN and obtain RN license	
Semester 12	Credits
(UCF) Public Health Nursing	3
(UCF) Practicum in Community and Public Health for RN's	4
Total	7
Graduate from UCF with BSN	

the Concurrent Program graduated on time and achieved a high rate of progression to graduate studies (Leuner et al., 2011).

Students in the Concurrent Program can complete the BSN three to four semesters quicker than a student in an RN-BSN program because upon earning the ASN, they have already completed at least 50% of the courses for the BSN. This resulted in higher persistence in completing the BSN degree for Concurrent Program students when compared with students in the RN-BSN program (Table 3). In the last four admission cohorts, graduation rates for concurrent students have been between seven and 17.4 percentage points higher each year.

Since 2010 the percentage of students graduating from each admission cohort has steadily increased and is now above 80%. During the same time, the percentage of students who withdrew or were dismissed has fallen from 35% to 18.3% (Fig. 1). If a student withdraws from the Concurrent Program, they retain all of the BSN coursework, which

Table 3
BSN graduation rates for concurrent and RN-BSN students.

Admission year	Percentage of graduates from concurrent program	Percentage of graduates from RN-BSN program
2010	65.2%	55.7%
2011	79.7%	72.7%
2012	80.6%	64.2%
2013	81.7%	66% (2 still enrolled)

facilitates completion of the RN-BSN program if they choose to return within seven years. As a result, 18 of the 148 students (12%) who were academically dismissed or voluntarily withdrew during this time, returned to complete the RN-BSN program at UCF.

NCLEX-RN pass rates have also increased. At the start of the Concurrent Program, NCLEX-RN passing rates for one of the partnering ASN programs was 81% while both the university and national pass rates were 87%. After initiation of the Concurrent Program SSC's pass rates increased steadily as did UCF's. VC had, and still has; pass rates equivalent to UCF's (Table 4). In the last five years, the national pass rate for first time test takers from the university and both state colleges participating in the Concurrent Program ranged from 93 to 97% while the national NCLEX-RN pass rate fell to as low as 82% (Florida Board of Nursing, 2016; National Council of State Boards of Nursing, NCSBN, 2016).

Preparing nursing professionals for graduate study is another goal of the Institute of Medicine (2011) recommendations. As of May 2016, data on students who graduated from an undergraduate program at UCF starting in 2008 (Table 5) shows that 177 (3.73%) earned a graduate degree from UCF. The BSN track with the highest graduate degree completion rate was the RN-MSN program. These students complete three graduate courses as part of their post-license BSN plan of study but must apply separately for the desired graduate program. Upon acceptance, the three graduate classes are credited toward the MSN degree. Concurrent Program alumni earned the lowest percentage of graduate degrees from UCF during this time.

Facilitators of success

This Concurrent Program benefits from a number of factors that contribute to the success of the program. Faculty members of nursing programs in the Central Florida region have a long history of close collaboration when negotiating clinical placements at area hospitals, clinics and long term care facilities. Many of the staff, faculty, administrators and community partners know one another and have worked together outside of academia. In addition, the UCF College of Nursing had a long-standing practice of assigning faculty to teach and advise students at sites remote from the main campus before the start of the Concurrent Program. UCF also had a long history of online teaching, having created the first fully online RN-BSN program in the state.

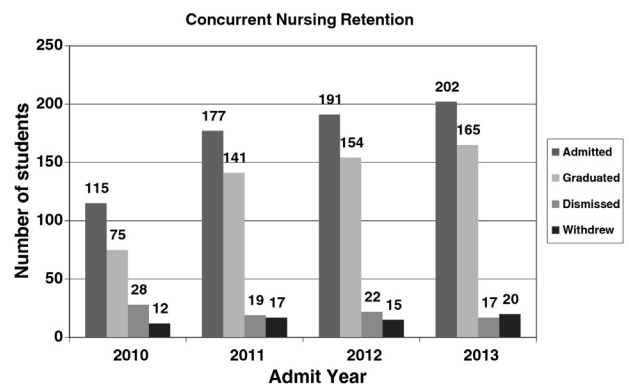


Fig. 1. Concurrent nursing retention.

Table 4
NCLEX-RN pass rate comparison.

Year	SSC	VC	UCF	National average
2003	81.4	–	87.7	87.0
2004	81.1	–	92.0	85.3
2005	84.6*	–	94.6	87.3
2006	91.4	–	93.1	88.1
2007	89.5	–	87.0	85.5
2008	95.1	–	95.1	86.7
2009	93.4	–	98.2	88.4
2010	90.7	94.4	94.7	87.4
2011	96.8	93.9	95.8	87.9
2012	99.3	94.7 ^a	96.2	87.9
2013	95.6	94.1	95.5	83.0
2014	93.2	93.8	97.9	81.8
2015	95.6	95.9	97.1	84.5

^a First time Concurrent Program enrollees took NCLEX-RN.

Collaboration between the state colleges and the university is smoother due to articulation agreements and the use of common course numbers at the Florida state colleges and universities. In addition, students who complete the AA degree at a Florida state college automatically meet the UCF general education course requirements and all the nursing prerequisites taken at a state college automatically transfer to UCF. The ability of UCF to award 29 h of upper division credit to students upon obtaining the RN license reduces the amount of required upper division coursework.

Faculty and professional advising staff from UCF and the state colleges also meet each semester to confirm deadlines and important dates, review applications and select candidates for the program. Advisors collaborate to develop advising handouts, website information, and present joint information sessions.

A major advantage of this Concurrent Program is the fact that the length of time to the BSN degree is shorter than if a student had completed the ASN and RN-BSN separately. Student advisement is developed collaboratively and includes printed and web documents as well as face-to-face, digital and phone conversations. Staff members at both state colleges and the university help students navigate the prerequisite coursework. This student-centered support continues after admission especially when students need to alter their plan of study, something not allowed in the early years of the program. This may be a contributing factor in the higher overall completion rates.

Discussion

Partnerships between associate and baccalaureate degree granting institutions in order to implement a concurrent enrollment program can result in an increase in the number of nurses with the BSN. Coordination and collaboration that includes pre-planning with faculty and other departments can result in the seamless progression from the ASN to the BSN degree. Enrollments in the Concurrent Program described in this paper have steadily increased along with the percentage

Table 5
Initial tracks of UCF students who earned a BSN from UCF in Spring 2008 or later who earned a nursing Graduate Degree from UCF by Spring 2016.

Program	Number of students in each undergraduate degree track	Number of graduate program graduates	Percent graduated
Basic (generic)	1485	46	3.09%
Accelerated	408	13	3.19%
second baccalaureate			
Concurrent enrollment	777	12	1.54%
RN-BSN	2009	91	4.50%
RN-MSN	80	27	33.80%
All	4759	177	3.72%

of students who obtain nursing licensure and complete the BSN degree requirements.

The major key to success of a Concurrent Program is for all persons involved to be fully committed to the success of students and the support of the profession in efforts to meet the goals set by the *Institute of Medicine* (2011). Examples of this over the past 13 years include collaborative governance of the programs, cooperative advising, curriculum progression planning and unified guidance of students with academic difficulties. Advisors from all schools regularly consult one another. Locating UCF faculty members at the state college campuses supports informal discussions of program issues beyond advisory board and combined faculty meetings and supports student access to program faculty members.

One significant key to the success of this program is that all individuals involved with this program understand and appreciate the goals of the Concurrent Program and share the vision of success. When a partner school makes a curriculum change, faculty from both schools evaluates the effect on course flow in relation to student success and program outcomes.

A successful partnership between associate and baccalaureate degree granting institutions to implement a concurrent enrollment program requires pre-planning and collaboration with multiple offices such as financial aid, admissions, student support, and administration. Ultimately, the creation of a memorandum of understanding serves as a document to facilitate the program and each school's responsibilities as well as a timeline for program evaluation. Regular meetings are scheduled for program discussion, scheduling of classes and identifying classroom space in the state college for the university courses. Collaborative discussions have also focused on identifying donors to support students in this unique program offering.

While the rate of students achieving a BSN in this Concurrent Program is high, there is a need for better tracking and follow up with individuals who withdraw or are dismissed. Reasons for not completing the BSN need to be identified. A process to systematically reach out to these students is also needed to ensure students know they can complete the BSN even if they take a break from classes after completing the ASN degree.

While the cause of any change in NCLEX-RN pass rate is multifactorial, the competitive nature of the Concurrent Program admission process and the resulting increase in academic credentials of the student body may be influential factors. In addition, the improved collaboration between the university and state colleges likely resulted in enhanced integration of the curriculum in all the programs.

However, the data does not show that this Concurrent Program results in a nursing professional who is more likely to complete their MSN than students attending other types of BSN programs. It is possible that Concurrent Program students are less likely to have graduate study as a goal upon entering the program. Unlike the RN-BSN and accelerated second degree students, they may be more likely to see practice at the BSN level as a goal. The non-traditional student in an ASN program may also have more family obligations making the financial and human cost of graduate school more challenging. In addition, the nursing employment marketplace publicly makes it clear there is a need for BSN nurses. There is less focus on graduate degrees.

Faculty at UCF and partner schools are discussing this finding and developing a plan they hope will result in a higher percentage of Concurrent Program students progressing to graduate study. Course content about the importance of additional education and both verbal and non-verbal messages from faculty are being examined. A graduate program advisor has begun visiting Concurrent Program classes to present information on graduate programs and a study to explore these and other outcomes of the Concurrent Program is in development.

Challenges previously reported as barriers to the development of collaborative programs leading to the BSN still remain (Close et al., 2015; Giddens and Meyer, 2016; Hall et al., 2012). The Concurrent Program reported here requires constant ongoing collaboration and

adjustments for situations such as when the individual programs modify admission requirements and curriculum plans to reflect changes in the profession, teaching approaches, state education standards, and accreditation agency requirements.

A major issue continues to be the complexity of the admission process because of seemingly constant changes in state education standards and accreditation guidelines. In most states, individual state colleges and their nursing programs also determine general education requirements and prerequisite course requirements. Each change creates a ripple of mandatory changes in Concurrent Program design and advising. Standardization of prerequisite and other admission requirements across all nursing programs is clearly needed.

A future challenge will result if ASN degree granting institutions attempt to reduce the time to complete the degree. If this results in a compression of all current ASN degree content into a shorter period of time, there will be a need for substantial alteration of the ASN and BSN plans of study for the Concurrent Program because of the limited time available for students to complete the concurrent courses at the university.

Looking to the future, a Concurrent Program model is one that has demonstrated positive outcomes and supports achievement of the Institute of Medicine (2011) goals. The program described here was developed between a specific university and state college partners. However, such a program could be implemented more broadly by offering admission to any student in a state college or other approved ASN nursing program who wishes to take BSN course work while pursuing their initial nursing education.

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