

## **ITEM 148-2008-R0910: Proposal**

### **A Proposal to the Board of Regents of the Montana University System Requesting Approval to Initiate an Accelerated Alternative for Post-baccalaureate Students in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at Montana State University**

#### **1. Overview**

*Provide a one paragraph description of the proposed program. Be specific about what degree, major, minor or option is sought.*

The College of Nursing at Montana State University is seeking approval to begin offering an accelerated second degree alternative for students to earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing. This alternative would be available only to students who already have a baccalaureate degree in a discipline other than nursing. Students would be required to have completed the same or equivalent pre-requisite courses as basic students. Once admitted to the nursing major, they would be able to complete the nursing degree in approximately 16 months, as opposed to the 29 months it takes basic students. This alternative would not be a new program. The curriculum, number of credits earned, and degree would be the same as the basic BSN degree program.

#### **2. Need**

*a. To what specific need is the institution's response in developing the proposed program?*

This proposal responds to an ongoing need for more nurses to enter the workforce, both within the state and beyond. On December 4, 2009, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that "the healthcare sector of the economy is continuing to grow, despite significant job losses in nearly all major industries." The BLS went on to report that healthcare settings, "added 21,000 new jobs in November 2009, a month when 85,000 jobs were eliminated across the country" and that RNs, the largest segment of the healthcare workforce, will likely be recruited to fill these new positions. They also confirmed that 613,000 jobs have been added in the healthcare sector since the recession began. Predictions are that more than 581,500 new RN positions will be created through 2018, which would increase the size of the RN workforce by 22%.

In 2008, there were about 8315 RNs employed in Montana. The estimated growth rate for registered nurses in Montana between 2008 and 2018 is 9.5% or about 302 annual job openings which includes both new growth jobs (165) and replacements (137). In 2009, average starting salary for registered nurses in Montana was \$43,537; the mean salary was \$56,377; and the average salary for experienced nurses was \$62,797. There are jobs available, there is projected job growth, and nurse's salaries exceed the average salaries for Montanan's which linger at about \$32,000-\$33,000.

At the state level, according to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, Workforce Services Division, Gallatin County is Montana's fastest growing county, boasting a 28.8% growth from 2000-2007. In 2007, Gallatin County's population surpassed that of Flathead County, making it the state's third largest county, with an estimated 87,359 residents. Bozeman, the county seat, remains the state's fourth largest city, with an estimated population of

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37,981 as of July 1, 2007. According to the 2000 US Census Bureau, the population of Gallatin County has very high levels of education with 28.1% having a bachelor's degree compared with 17.2% of Montanan's with bachelor's degrees, and 15.5% of US citizens with bachelor's degrees. With those demographics, it makes sense that there are so many prospective nursing students with previous bachelor's degrees who are interested in an accelerated option. Bozeman Deaconess Hospital is the largest employer (over 1000 employees) of the top 20 private companies in Gallatin County. About half of the residents of Park County live in the county seat of Livingston which had a population of 7411 in 2007. The city of Livingston has a hospital and two clinics in addition to numerous other healthcare facilities.

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Issues Bulletin, May 2010, "one innovative approach to nursing education that is gaining momentum nationwide is the accelerated degree program for non-nursing graduates. . . . These programs build on previous learning experiences and transition individuals with undergraduate degrees in other disciplines into nursing." The challenge is to increase student capacity and reach out to new student populations in order to quickly produce competent nurses while maintaining the integrity and quality of the nursing education provided. Though not new to nursing education, accelerated programs have proliferated over the past fifteen years. Today, 230 accelerated BSN programs are operating in the US. Graduates of accelerated programs are prized by nurse employers who value the many layers of skill and education these graduates bring to the workplace. Employers report that these graduates are more mature, possess strong clinical skills, and are quick studies for the job. Montana is one of three states where such an alternative is not offered.

### ***b. How will students and any other affected constituencies be served by the proposed program?***

The accelerated alternative will meet the needs of degreed students who seek to become registered nurses either because they are unable to find employment under their current credentials, are dissatisfied with their current employment, or simply because they have a desire to become a nurse. It will offer a route to a baccalaureate degree in nursing that is tailored to their needs as adults and their background of having an earned degree. There is not another second degree accelerated alternative in Montana so this option creates no competition with other nursing programs. Health care agencies will benefit from this program in that an additional 16 baccalaureate prepared nurses will enter the workforce every sixteen months. Students who graduate from accelerated programs often choose to go on to graduate school, thus this alternative could result in an increase in the number of master's prepared nurses, thus helping to alleviate the nursing faculty shortage in Montana.

### ***c. What is the anticipated demand for the program?***

The College of Nursing posted an online interest survey beginning in March 2010. The survey remained posted for three months. See Appendix B for a summary of interest survey results. Responses to the survey totaled 140 with 127 respondents stating they were very interested in a post-baccalaureate accelerated option; 12 interested; and 1 somewhat interested. The geographical areas of residence were primarily in Montana, but 39 non-resident prospective students also responded. The bachelor's degree was the highest degree of 118 of the

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respondents, the master's degree of 19, and two respondents had an earned doctoral degree. When asked "Why are you interested in a post-baccalaureate accelerated nursing option?" 127 out of 140 respondents stated "I want to be a nurse because I believe I can make a difference in peoples' lives." Anecdotally, since planning began for this alternative, College of Nursing admission personnel report a significant number of calls, letters, e-mails and visits from perspective students who express enthusiasm and interest in enrolling in this alternative. In the fall of 2009, of the 786 undergraduate (pre-nursing and nursing) students, 107 already had a degree. This high number of degreed students seeking a BSN via the traditional route indicates a strong potential demand for this alternative.

The College has begun accepting applications for the summer 2011 with the caveat clearly stated to all applicants that Board of Regents approval is still pending. It was necessary to initiate the application process to assure applicants would have time to complete the required pre-requisite courses prior to the beginning of the summer 2011 term. August 1, 2010 was the deadline established for students who are interested in this alternative to apply. Fifty three applications were submitted by that deadline. With more than three applicants per available slot it is evident that there is a strong demand for this alternative route to a baccalaureate degree in nursing.

### **3. Institutional and System Fit**

#### ***a. What is the connection between the proposed program and existing programs at the institution?***

This alternative will be offered through the College of Nursing on the Bozeman campus at MSU. The same administrative structure will oversee the accelerated alternative as the basic degree program and the same faculty on the Bozeman campus who teach basic students will teach the accelerated students. The physical space in Sherrick Hall that is used for classroom and lab (skills and simulation) instruction for the basic students on the Bozeman campus will be used for the accelerated students. The same contracted clinical agencies will be used for clinical instruction of the accelerated students as are used for basic students. Though no curriculum modifications are required for the accelerated alternative, the scheduling of the courses will be compressed to fit into four consecutive semesters (e.g. summer, fall, spring and summer) over 16 months rather than using five academic year semesters of 29 months total, hence the term "accelerated."

The anticipated student population for this proposed new accelerated option is 16 students to be admitted each year which would double the current number of upper division nursing students on the Bozeman campus to a total of 64 upper division students when fully implemented. As an explanation, currently 16 students are admitted each year resulting in 32 upper division (junior and senior) students on the Bozeman campus. With an additional 16 students admitted each year, the total student population on the Bozeman campus will increase to 64. These additional 16 students will begin the accelerated nursing alternative after they have completed all required pre-requisite courses at MSU or a transfer school. Impact on the current nursing courses will be

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nil given these students will be taking their nursing courses in a different sequence that utilizes two summer terms which are currently not being used for the generic students in the basic BSN program. Though they will be taking some nursing courses during the fall and spring semesters, they will be in the required courses with their own cohort rather than in courses with the basic students. The literature emphasizes that keeping accelerated students in their own cohort as planned by the College is recommended for the best outcomes. The accelerated students will have access to all of the student resources on the MSU-Bozeman campus including the library, student health, financial aid, advising, and all other student support services.

***b. Will approval of the proposed program require changes to any existing programs at the institution?***

There will be no changes required of any existing programs at MSU. Because there will be an additional cohort of 16 students enrolling in the upper division of the College of Nursing annually, there will also be an additional cohort of 16 students enrolling in lower division pre-requisite courses if applicants do not complete those courses at a transfer institution.

***c. Describe what differentiates this program from other, closely related programs at the institution (if appropriate).***

Students enrolled in the post-baccalaureate accelerated alternative will complete the same curriculum as basic undergraduate nursing students – the same courses, the same number of credits, and the same number of clinical hours. A differentiating factor is that applicants to the accelerated option must have an earned baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university. Applicants for this alternative will be interviewed, write an essay, and provide two professional references prior to admission to assess their readiness and commitment for this intense option. Additionally, an admission requirement is a minimal cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 as opposed to basic students who have a minimal cumulative GPA requirement of 2.5. These additional and more rigorous admission requirements are designed to help assure those accepted to the program will be successful.

***d. How does the proposed program serve to advance the strategic goals of the institution?***

The Vision of MSU is: “Montana State University will be the university of choice for those seeking a student-centered learning environment distinguished by innovation and discovery in a Rocky Mountain setting.” The proposed accelerated alternative is designed to meet needs of adult learners not only because it offers them a career option in an expeditious manner, but it will be offered in a manner consistent with adult learning principles and theory. Specifically, the program will advance the following “MSU Five Year Outlook – FY 09 to 14” goals:

**Student Body**

- “Montana State University will increase enrollment to approximately 13,000 students” - This alternative will result in an increase in enrollment of 16 nursing students each academic year”
- “The student body will be more diverse than it is today.” All students enrolling in this alternative must have an earned baccalaureate degree thus they will bring more life

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experiences and educational background to the College increasing the diversity of the student body.

### Curriculum

- “MSU will be nationally recognized as a leader in the integration of learning and discovery at the undergraduate level”- The curriculum for undergraduate and graduate students emphasizes the importance of evidenced based practice which is essential if learning and discovery are to be integrated. The accelerated option will continue with that tradition and also serve to further establish the College of Nursing as a leader in nursing education.
- e. Describe the relationship between the proposed program and any similar programs within the Montana University System. In cases of substantial duplication, explain the need for the proposed program at an additional institution. Describe any efforts that were made to collaborate with these similar programs; and if no efforts were made, explain why. If articulation or transfer agreements have been developed for the substantially duplicated programs, please include the agreement(s) as part of the documentation.*

Since this accelerated alternative will be offered on the Bozeman campus initially, the expansion should not have any effect on the other nursing programs in the state for two reasons: 1) None of the other nursing programs currently utilize Bozeman and the surrounding area of Gallatin and Park Counties for clinical placements so there will not be any competition for clinical placements for their students; and 2) None of the other nursing programs offer an accelerated alternative, so there will not be any competition for students seeking an accelerated option in Montana. A letter was sent to each of the program directors providing the results of the feasibility study and asking for their support. Those letters are found in the Appendix A to this document.

If the College were to seek approval in the future to offer this alternative on some of the other campuses, we would negotiate with the other programs as we have always done to work out a clinical schedule that would accommodate the needs of all the students from each school. Since this proposal heavily utilizes summer terms in addition to the academic year, it is likely there would be few, if any, issues with clinical placements during summers. It is also possible for clinical sites to be used on week-ends and evenings as is currently done for some courses. In Bozeman, the generic BSN program only offers each course once a year leaving the option of teaching the accelerated courses in the opposite semesters, if needed.

#### 4. Program Details

- a. Provide a detailed description of the proposed curriculum. Where possible, present the information in the form intended to appear in the catalog or other publications. NOTE: In case of two-year degree programs and certificates of applied science, the curriculum should include enough detail to determine if the characteristics set out in Regents' Policy 301.12 have been met.*

Currently, MSU-Bozeman offers a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing (BSN). The curriculum is based on The American Association of Colleges of Nursing's *Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice* (2008). The program has been accredited by The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and approved by the

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Montana State Board of Nursing (MSBON) for many years. In the fall of 2008 the school was visited by both CCNE and the MSBON and received 10 more years of full accreditation by CCNE and full approval by the MSBON.

The curriculum for the accelerated alternative is no different than the approved curriculum that the basic students take – same courses, same number of credits, and the same number of clinical hours. The schedule of courses is different in that students will complete the accelerated alternative in four academic terms, as opposed to the five academic terms that a basic student needs to complete. See Appendix C for a comparison of the schedule of classes in the accelerated alternative versus the traditional program. Appendix C includes a listing of the approved curriculum in terms of required pre-requisite and nursing courses.

- b. Describe the planned implementation of the proposed program, including estimates of numbers of students at each stage.***

If approved, the accelerated alternative will be offered beginning summer, 2011. A cohort of 16 students will be admitted to the Bozeman campus at that time with studies continuing for four consecutive academic terms (summer 2011 → fall 2011 → spring 2012 → summer 2012). Upon conclusion of the summer term, 2012, the students will graduate and at that time will be eligible to sit for the NCLEX-RN, the national licensing examination to enter professional nursing practice, and to become licensed in Montana or any other state.

The plan at this time is to admit another cohort of 16 students to begin classes each summer on the Bozeman campus. Depending on evaluative data and approval processes, the option may be expanded in future years to include additional College of Nursing campuses.

### **5. Resources**

- a. Will additional faculty resources be required to implement this program? If yes, please describe the need and indicate the plan for meeting this need.***

Additional faculty will be needed to teach some summer courses as well as extra sections of courses during the academic year as the accelerated students will be taught in separate classes as a cohort as opposed to mixing them with basic students. As previously stated, this segregation of the accelerated students is supported by the literature which indicates that students in accelerated options do best when they are taught in their own cohort rather than having them in classes with the basic generic students. Thus, they will move through the curriculum as a cohort of highly motivated students who have already experienced success in previous college degree programs and are anxious to enter the workforce to provide professional nursing care to the citizens of Montana and beyond. Additionally, these students will be taking courses on a somewhat different schedule than basic students, so it would be logistically challenging if not impossible to combine the two groups of students. To address the need for additional faculty in the summer, several current College of Nursing faculty (who do not currently teach in the summer) have expressed interest in teaching students enrolled in this alternative. Additional course sections during the academic year will be covered by increasing part-time faculty to full-time (if desired), use of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) and Clinical Resource Registered Nurses (CRRNs) in college and clinical labs, and recruitment of additional full or part-time faculty as may be

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needed. Faculty/student ratios never exceed 1:10 in any clinical nursing courses as required by MT Board of Nursing rules.

- b. Are other additional resources required to ensure the success of the proposed program? If yes, please describe the need and indicate the plan for meeting this need.*

Additional resources are needed to ensure the success of the proposed accelerated alternative. Nursing is inherently an expensive program due to three main factors: 1) faculty can earn more in the practice environment, thus to recruit them, higher salaries must be offered; 2) the equipment and expendable supplies required to provide realistic and adequate training is expensive, and 3) the mandated low faculty/student ratios (1/10) for clinical experiences require additional faculty be hired for clinical courses. Because of these factors, the cost of educating nursing students is slightly greater than the total revenue generated in tuition dollars. One way to conceive of it is that for the group of 16 additional accelerated students being proposed, we will have to pay for 93 credits of instruction, while each student pays for only 70 credits (each cohort of 16 students needs to be split into two sections of eight students). These 93 credits of instruction above and beyond the number of credits currently offered at the Bozeman campus equates to approximately 4.5 to 5 faculty full-time equivalents, dependent on faculty qualifications. Additionally, MSU's tuition "flat spot" kicks in at 12 credits. This means that for any given semester students only pay up to 12 credits worth of tuition regardless of how many credits they may be enrolled for above that number. In order to compress the basic five semester program into four semesters, students will essentially be taking more credits (five to nine credits above the 12 credit flat spot for three of the four semesters) that they will not have to pay for. Finally, for every tuition dollar that comes into the university through the standard registration process, 45 cents goes to pay for administrative overhead thus is not available to pay for the instructional costs.

It is with these issues in mind that we are proposing to register students through Extended University at MSU. Extended University operates on a cost recovery basis outside of the standard university registration and funding process. This allows us to set student tuition so that the instructional costs are covered. The estimated cost of instruction for the accelerated program is approximately \$324,145 per cohort of 16 students. Thus for each student, we propose to charge approximately \$20,260 for the entire program, or \$289/credit. While this is more than the \$235/credit current in-state, post-baccalaureate students pay, it is significantly less than the \$717/credit paid by out-of-state, post baccalaureate students.<sup>1</sup> This will cover only the direct cost of instruction (faculty salaries). We propose to cover any additional administrative "costs" internally. As with the current nursing students, additional program fees also apply which cover, for example, the cost of non-reusable supplies, educational materials, maintenance and upkeep of simulation equipment. Program fees for 2010-2011 are \$193/semester.

Even though students in the accelerated alternative will pay a higher per credit tuition (relative to other in-state nursing students), because the time to program completion is 12 months shorter, they will enter the workforce more quickly than basic students. When considering the additional year of employment earnings, the tuition disparity would be eliminated after approximately two

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<sup>1</sup> All figures based on FY10 tuition and salary rates.

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months, and those accelerated students would have earned an additional \$23,688 (approximately), after taxes.

### **6. Assessment**

*How will success of the program be measured?*

The accelerated option will be evaluated using the same criteria as all other academic programs in the College. The College has a Master Evaluation Plan (see Appendix D) which is formatted according to the four standards that must be met for ongoing national accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. Standard III refers to the “Program Quality: Curriculum and Teaching-Learning Practices” and Standard IV refers to “Program Effectiveness: Student Performance and Faculty Accomplishments.” Student outcomes will be assessed by: conducting surveys of employers as to their level of satisfaction with our graduates’ work performance; tracking success rates of graduates on the NCLEX-RN, the licensing exam for entry into professional practice; conducting exit surveys of graduating students; collecting job placement data; and conducting alumni satisfaction surveys. Application numbers and adequacy of clinical resources will also be assessed annually.

### **7. Process Leading to Submission**

*Describe the process of developing and approving the proposed program. Indicate, where appropriate, involvement by faculty, students, community members, potential employers, accrediting agencies etc.*

The alternative has been discussed extensively in the College of Nursing among faculty and administrators. During the 2009-2010 academic year, this option was an agenda item on at least two meetings of the entire nursing faculty. The Associate Dean for the Undergraduate Program charged an ad hoc group of faculty on each of the four campuses to develop a proposed course schedule. Each campus group did just that and brought back proposed plans to the entire faculty. More discussion ensued. The faculty voted on the option at an all-faculty retreat in May, 2010. The results of the vote were: 46 in favor; 6 opposed; and 0 abstentions.

The incoming chair of the Faculty Senate at MSU has been consulted as has the Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education. Both are supportive of the alternative and both concurred this option does not need approval from the university Undergraduate Studies Committee at MSU in that it is not a new program – rather simply a condensing or change of course schedule of an existing program or curriculum.

As previously stated, in the fall of 2009, of the 786 undergraduate (pre-nursing and nursing) students, 107 already had a degree. Those students would have been excellent candidates for this alternative. Informal discussions were held with some of these students who enthusiastically expressed support for this alternative. Many stated they wished it had been available for them as they most likely would have been interested.

The proposal was reviewed by the Montana State Board of Nursing at their July 2010 meeting and approval was received (see Appendix E letter of approval from the Board of Nursing). The Commission on Collegiate Education (CCNE) requires notification of a change such as this, but



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states that “the substantive change report must be submitted to CCNE no earlier than 90 days prior to implementation or occurrence of the change, but no later than 90 days after implementation or occurrence of the change” (CCNE; 2009; *Procedures for Accreditation of Baccalaureate and Graduate Degree Programs*). Thus the College will notify CCNE of this proposal in spring 2011.