



August 25, 2003

TO: University of Montana Board of Regents

FROM: Dr. James Trudnowski, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Carroll College
Dr. Cynthia Gustafson, Chair of the Department of Nursing, Carroll College

RE: The University of Montana-Helena COT to establish an Associate of Science Degree in Nursing leading to Licensure as a Registered Nurse (Item No: 119-1901-R0503)

We have been asked to provide comments regarding the proposal indicated above and appreciate the invitation and opportunity. While we recognize the desire of colleagues at the University of Montana-Helena COT to offer the proposed program, we wish to express our concern with the proposal to establish an ASN-RN degree. Our overriding concern focuses on the need for continued high quality nursing education in this immediate area. We believe that the Helena community does not have sufficient clinical facilities to support the addition of this program and that this addition would compromise the quality of the clinical experience of our RN-baccalaureate students. Without quality clinical experiences, a nursing program cannot adequately prepare students, and thereby cannot meet state and national accreditation guidelines. Students in the nursing major at Carroll College spend a minimum of 12 hours per week at clinical sites caring for patients; this experience has been critically important in the education of these students and in the successful outcome of their required examinations following graduation.

Specifically we note the following concerns:

- The health care community in Helena is presently saturated with student nurses. We will place 100 nursing students in clinical experiences in Helena for the academic year 2003-2004. This number will increase to 120 students for 2004-2005 due to our increase in enrollments in the nursing major. Clinical agencies in the community have expressed concern with an increased need for student learning experiences because of the demand it places on their personnel and their patients.
- Increased enrollments in our program alone have made it necessary for us to make modifications to our current curriculum because of limited clinical placements in the Helena community. We find that patients as well as nurses in the facilities experience "burn-out" with a constant student presence and this decreases the quality of the clinical experience.
- With the current nursing programs as they are, Carroll College and UM-Helena have been able to coordinate clinical experiences because each program does not need the same experiences to prepare students due to the difference in nursing practice between an RN and LPN. If UM-Helena's ASN-RN program is established, they will need the same type of experiences that we do for our RN program and this will cause overload to the agency personnel, especially the RNs. We currently have difficulty placing all of our students with RNs in the community, and adding more RN students will potentially diminish the quality of the clinical experience both schools can offer.

The State Board of Nursing at their meeting on July 23, 2003 denied the request for expansion by UM-Helena and made the following motion: *Charter an independent study of the proposal submitted by UM-Helena COT; specifically the quantity and quality of available clinical sites and the impact on other nursing programs in the state.*

We welcome this motion from the Board and will fully cooperate with this study. We feel that until that study is completed and the results made known, we cannot support the expansion of the UM-Helena ASN-RN program.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns. As we've indicated in the past, we are certainly committed to exploring and developing valuable collaborative efforts with the UM-Helena to assure that quality nursing education is available in the Helena area.

