

Concordia Tackles Nursing Shortage Crisis

Work cut out for graduating nurses

BY RAYMOND RENDELMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Concordia University's first nursing graduates knew that their profession would be a struggle when they signed up for a program that was created in response to an emerging public-health failure.

"In some ways nursing can be a pretty thankless job," says Concordia nursing graduate Ellen Council, "but the people who go through nursing school have the passion."

Graduating enough committed students is a growing problem, especially among at-risk and minority populations, but Oregon's top nursing advocate cites Concordia as a prime example of a program working to make a difference.

Joining an Oregon nursing workforce with an average age over 50, the average 20-something-year-old Concordia graduate will have to contend with a generation gap in addition to a widening gap between a growing population and the health care that serves it.

This crisis will worsen as more nurses retire, and the increasing costs and declining quality of nursing services are a direct result of education



PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDELMAN/ THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
One of Concordia University's 24 nursing graduates, Ellen Council, practices on a specialized manikin used for teaching in the medical professions that's worth about \$7,000.

gaps, affirms Kristine Campbell, executive director of the Oregon Center for Nursing, which the state's nursing leaders established in 2001 to counteract the shortage of both nurses and teachers of nursing.

"In this state, we've made quite a concerted effort to increase graduation rates," she says, "but I'm worried it all might not be enough to head off disaster."

Citing the six applicants for every slot in the state's nursing schools, she says, "The nursing-faculty shortage is huge for us in Oregon, and we're expecting a need for 65 more full-time teachers in the next three years."

Another study by Oregon Nursing Leadership Council found that the educational systems in place are inadequate for the 15,700 more nurses that the state will need in the next 15 years.

Campbell has helped organize recruitment campaigns for minority and male populations. The slogan for men, "Are you man enough to be nurse?" has successfully increased the proportion of male nurses in Oregon to 14 percent, more than twice the national average.

The "Caring knows no boundaries" campaign targeting people of color, however, has disappointed Campbell by not keeping up with the increasing proportion of minorities in the state.

At Concordia, the three nursing graduates of color out of 24 do not reflect Portland's minority population, let alone the more diverse population of its northeast neighborhood.

The director of Concordia's nursing school, Joyce Zerwekh, laments the fact that just two blacks from Africa have applied to her program.

By reaching out to organizations like Salvation Army, Dignity Village and the Rosemary Anderson High School, Zerwekh hopes to attract more diversity to the historically white, Christian college.

"We start out with this image of a little German-Lutheran enclave, and now it's like, here we are, what can we do for you?" she says.

The outreach programs have inspired many students, Ellen Council included, to use newly minted nursing skills to serve vulnerable segments of society. Council was nevertheless disappointed that there were no African Americans in her graduating class.

To get more minority representation, Zerwekh is willing to overlook her applicants' academic mishaps to some degree.

"I'm looking for who these people are as human beings and not just grades, and someday I hope that will bring me leaders from the black, locally grown community," she says.

PCC Boosts Diversity in Trades

Pre-apprenticeship classes give boost

The Joint Apprenticeship Training Council, a collection of statewide apprenticeship programs, has approved Portland Community College's new pre-apprenticeship class, Trade Extension 9000.

PCC graduates now have the same direct-entry approval to get into an apprenticeship program as Portland Youth Builders, Oregon Tradeswomen, and the Evening Trade Apprenticeship Preparation program run by the Housing Authority of Portland.

Some programs will allow graduates to apply almost immediately for apprenticeship slots rather than wait for the few times a year when apprentice programs host their open application periods.

The class will use a \$150,000 contract from the Oregon Department of Transportation to encourage more women and minorities to enter the trades. The funding will go toward paying

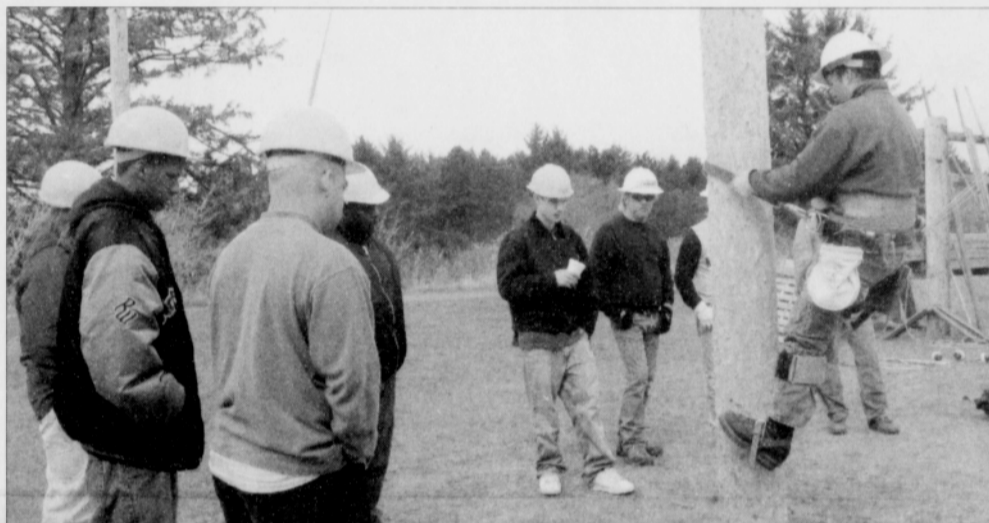
tuition for approved applicants.

The PCC Skill Center, located at the Cascade Campus, 705 N. Killingsworth St., will bring potential applicants to a minimum educational level to meet all apprenticeship minimum standards for education. A contract with ODOT calls for PCC to deliver 50 people ready to apply for apprenticeship slots.

PCC Cascade was chosen because of its location to a diverse workforce. The objective is to recruit candidates from the local area with an emphasis on minorities and females. However, the TE 9000 class is available to anyone who wishes to attend.

For more information, call Dwight Page at 503-978-5657 (dwight.page@pcc.edu) or Katrina Cloud at 503-978-5651 (kcloud@pcc.edu).

Pre-apprentice students tour training centers and job sites, like this PGE line worker's site, to learn about working conditions in the trades.



Construction Apprenticeships at South Waterfront
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Portland Youth Builders

At the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME)
4134 N. Vancouver Ave. at Skidmore. Come by anytime. No cost to participate.

MHCC Summer Jump Start

Registration is open for Summer Fastpass classes at Mt. Hood Community College giving students a jump start on their careers by developing their skills and knowledge in a variety of college credit classes, such as business management and ad-

ministration, computer information systems, retail or office management, integrated media and welding.

In addition, a Bundle Your Basics offering provides an opportunity for students to take care of their general education classes.

Summer Fastpass classes begin June 25 and are available morning, afternoon, evening or online. New students can contact the Academic Advising and Transfer Center at 503-491-7315. Continuing students can register online.

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