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Nursing Program
Central Oregon Community College

Dear Nursing Faculty:

Thank you for taking part in Department & Program Review (DPR) this year. The DPR process reveals critical connections that link your strengths, needs, values, priorities, and plans to those of the College. Further, it supports our commitment to innovation through continual improvement. We commend your dedication to empowering our students, engaging our communities, and supporting our values.

Successes

First, we congratulate you on your success in winning a significant monetary amount as part of the statewide Renew grant, which you have used to attract and retain Nursing faculty, as well as bolster the program in various ways. We laud the sustained student success over time that the Nursing program has achieved. Not only is there a high rate of student retention but also a high rate of student success on the critical measures of NCLEX scores and job placement. Undoubtedly, your faculty's deep experience and diverse specialties contribute to this success.

Commendably, Nursing students exceed the overall success rate of COCC students while key student populations such as BILAPOC students, those receiving financial assistance, and veteran students are succeeding at comparable rates. Your fostering of an accepting, inclusive culture for all clearly is felt by students and the program team. On a related note, the creation of a team player atmosphere for faculty by program leaders has aided the program as well when faculty have needed time away or faced other transitions.

The Nursing program has also done an admirable job in growing the program to respond to community needs – such as adjusting the Bend cohort size and adding cohort seats for Madras, Jefferson and Crook Counties, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

Finally, launching the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program launch as part of a shared resource six-school consortium is a huge achievement, and we are excited to see its progress. The BSN also may lay the groundwork for other programs that may pursue BS degrees and/or consortia models.

Challenges

Even with the support provided through the Renew grant, faculty recruitment and retention remain significant challenges. A primary factor is the disparity between nursing faculty salaries and the compensation nurses can earn in clinical practice. Oregon consistently offers some of the highest nursing salaries in the nation, and nurses at St. Charles are now among the highest paid in the state. We appreciate the efforts to maintain open part-time

instructor pools and to actively recruit new faculty members; however, faculty capacity remains just sufficient to sustain program operations. We also recognize that you have begun exploring differential pay options and have shared this information with the faculty union. This work may provide a more sustainable strategy for faculty recruitment and retention once grant funding concludes.

We also understand that securing clinical placements for students has become increasingly challenging as additional nursing programs, including OHSU and Sumner College, expand their presence in Central Oregon. Maintaining a strong partnership with the St. Charles Clinical Education Department will be a critical priority for the incoming Instructional Dean and Nursing Department Chair. We are pleased to hear that Amy Wheary is being trained as a Simulation Coordinator, as simulation-based learning will likely play an increasingly important role in supplementing clinical experiences in the future. We also appreciate the collaborative efforts with OHSU: coordinating clinical placements and minimize strain on specific St. Charles departments and sharing nursing instructional space within the Health Careers Center to support OHSU's accelerated BSN program.

The addition of the Madras cohort this past year increased enrollment to 64 total first-year nursing students, placing additional demands on faculty time and resources. These challenges were compounded by technology and streaming issues that created frustration for both students and faculty. The college's decision to reduce the first-year nursing cohort by eight students, bringing the total enrollment to 56 students, should help ease some of these pressures. We are hopeful that, combined with the experience gained during the first year of implementation in Madras, the coming year will be more manageable for nursing faculty.

Goals and needs

1. **Improve faculty recruitment and retention to better serve students and maintain consistency and quality teaching in theory and clinical. This aligns with achieving excellence.**

Faculty retention is a significant concern, particularly among part-time faculty, where turnover since approximately 2015 has been substantial. While full-time searches have not formally failed in recent years (more faculty have retired than left mid-career), candidate pools have been uncomfortably small. The program is working to emphasize what it can control, including benefits, work culture, summers off, and other perks. Information worth pursuing includes retention data by employee type and whether conversations with the forum negotiating team about differential pay have taken place. The end of the Renew grant, specifically used for retention, will add further pressure and so act proactively with your dean to prepare for the sunseting of that extra funding which cannot be replicated within the COCC budget.

2. **Reevaluate and adjust non-instructional workload to be appropriate for corresponding tasks to better support the evolving needs of the program and needs of the students; particularly for clinical coordinators where the greatest discrepancy lies. Or hire additional administrative assistance to balance workload.**

We recommend working with the dean to analyze current load release and develop a sustainable balance that meets both faculty and college needs. Current arrangements include one Bend faculty member carrying two units of non-instructional load to support Madras, and a pending non-instructional load request from the Madras faculty member. With Madras continuing through another transitional year, the LRC coordinator role for that campus needs to be clearly defined. Julie will set up a non-instructional load request for that position, and a one-year overlap will likely be needed to support both first- and second-year cohorts simultaneously.

3. **Maintain positive and collaborative relationships with clinical/community partners.**

- a. Decrease our footprint in acute care clinical settings by purchasing laptops or tablets for students and instructors to complete patient charting and medication administration to relieve the growing burden on partner computers.
- b. Continue to respond directly to Madras community needs; reflecting community engagement and workforce development in a feasible and sustainable way.

With the Renew grant ending next year, Carmen is focused on finding efficiencies and reducing the workload burden on clinical coordinators. Several large projects are being prioritized now to get them completed under current grant funding, with the hope of creating some breathing room going forward. Decreasing the program's footprint in clinical settings is also seen as beneficial to partners. Additionally, the administrative assistant in this area has been receptive to taking on more of the administrative tasks associated with clinical coordination. Tracking data related to clinical requests and progress would be valuable, and support from Institutional Effectiveness may be needed to establish a reliable system. Updating the spreadsheet to include definitions of each load allocation is also a recommended near-term step which will benefit the incoming dean and the VPAA's office.

4. **Support and recognize faculty time and energy dedicated to the success of the Madras Cohort (technology setup, theory materials, course facilitation). Also, when the number of Madras students doubles in Fall 2026, increase staff to support the Madras Learning Resource Center (LRC). This aligns with achieving excellence, supporting colleagues, and empowering students.**

We urge you to work with your instructional dean to determine the cost of ideal staffing and support levels, and to identify realistic modifications where budget expansion is not possible. A comprehensive list of current and new non-instructional load requests for Nursing should be compiled and submitted as part of that conversation.

5. **Encourage and foster student engagement, belonging and inclusion. This aligns with empowering students and championing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.**

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to student learning. Together, we can build on our achievements, address the challenges ahead, and meet the evolving needs of our students. If you have any questions or need further clarification, please reach out. We look forward to working collaboratively to enhance the quality and impact of the Nursing program.

Sincerely yours,



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