Growth, New Opportunities Abound

One of the many benefits of nursing is there are endless paths both into and within the profession. Unique in Arizona is our Master’s Entry to the Profession of Nursing program, an accelerated route to becoming a registered nurse for people holding university degrees in other fields. In May, we proudly welcomed a record 113 students into this program.

We are also forging new pathways in integrative health to transform nursing education. This spring, 11 of our faculty began their yearlong journey as the first participants in our Integrative Nursing Faculty Fellowship, the only program of its kind in the world.

In this issue, you’ll learn more about these milestones as well as meet students whose unique experiences prior to nursing (from firefighting to coping with acne) helped shape them into the successful Wildcat Nurses they are today.

As we look ahead, I hope you’ll join us for Homecoming, Oct. 28 & 29: see nursing.arizona.edu/homecoming

Wildland Firefighter Becomes Wildcat Nurse

Prior to pursuing nursing, 25-year-old Eric Smith spent four seasons working as a wildland firefighter, followed by a two-year, volunteer mission to Argentina. He says both experiences were life-changing and helped set him up for success in nursing school.

"After high school, I needed some time to grow up," said Eric, a recipient of the Robert and Jeannette Barnes Undergraduate Nursing Scholarship. "I don’t think I would have gotten into nursing school at age 20 or 21. I really learned how to work hard while firefighting, and how to study while on the mission. Both skills helped me be successful as a student.”

Although firefighting and nursing may seem like very different professions, Eric says they share many similarities.

“A person’s health and a fire are both very dynamic. They change rapidly, and there are a lot of factors that you may or may not be able to anticipate. In both cases, personal safety and the safety of others is paramount,” said Eric. “The teamwork is similar too. You have doctors and nurse practitioners giving directions for treatment, and you’re there to follow through with the plan. In firefighting, you have your captain or the engine leader giving directions, and you have to communicate with your team to complete the assignment. Being able to adapt to change is also important. When one tactic doesn’t work, you have to be prepared to switch to something else.”

Eric is now a licensed RN caring for patients in the medical-surgical intensive care unit at Northwest Medical Center. Congratulations, Eric!
Eleven of our faculty members have begun charting a new course for nursing education as the first participants in our Integrative Nursing Faculty Fellowship (INFF). Funded through the generous support of The David and Lura Lovell Foundation, this fellowship is the first-of-its-kind for preparing faculty to transform nursing education using the science, theory and practice of integrative nursing.

“Integrative nursing is a whole-person approach to health and wellbeing,” said Dr. Mary Koithan, Anne Furrow Professor of Integrative Nursing and director of the INFF. “During this fellowship, faculty will learn to use and teach the full range of evidence-informed therapeutics, such as acupressure and massage, to manage symptoms commonly seen across healthcare settings like pain, fatigue, nausea and insomnia.”

Our first INFF cohort will complete the fellowship in May 2017. For the second cohort, we will reach beyond the UA and invite 30 faculty from nursing schools across the nation to become fellows.

“Integrative approaches to health and wellness resonate with many of our students, and they are eager to know more,” said faculty fellow Ruth Carlson, who teaches mental health nursing in our BSN program. “Our patients also increasingly expect to have integrative therapies provided as part of their care. Nursing education must evolve accordingly, and it is imperative for us as faculty to develop, excite, challenge, teach and model integrative nursing practice for our students.”

Please join us in congratulating our faculty fellows:

- Kim Blumenfeld, clinical instructor
- Ruth Carlson, clinical instructor
- Melissa Goldsmith, clinical associate professor
- Sharon Hom (BSN ’09), clinical instructor
- Michelle Kahn-John, assistant professor
- Pamela Lusk, clinical associate professor
- Connie Miller (MSN ’95), clinical assistant professor
- Megan Munson, clinical instructor
- Mary O’Connell, clinical instructor
- Elizabeth Spinks, clinical instructor
- Debbie Williams (PhD ’15), clinical assistant professor

Applications for the second cohort will open on Feb. 1. For more information, please visit nursing.arizona.edu/inff.

A mid a projected need to fill more than 1 million job openings for registered nurses by 2022, we’ve welcomed a record 113 students into our Master’s Entry to the Profession of Nursing (MEPN) program, the only program of its kind in Arizona.

Offered in both Tucson and Phoenix, this 15-month, accelerated program is open to students holding university degrees in other fields who want to pursue careers in nursing. Representing diverse backgrounds, students in the newest class hold degrees in disciplines such as fashion design, Spanish translation, English literature, journalism and neuroscience.

“MEPN students bring rich depth and breadth from their previous careers to nursing,” said Dr. Terry Badger, administrative lead for the MEPN program. “They are our future leaders and change agents in health care. Through this unique program, we are strengthening the nursing workforce and improving patient care in Arizona and beyond.”

MEPN student Mayra Alvarez, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Earth and Space Exploration from Arizona State University in 2012, says she began rethinking her career path after she realized that volunteering at a nursing home was more fulfilling than her work as a data analyst.

A nursing home volunteer since age 8, Mayra had never considered becoming a nurse until one of her residents told her she should.

“She asked me, ‘Are you a nurse? You should become a nurse and stay here with me,’” said Mayra. “That was the click. I didn’t see myself as a nurse at that time, even though I love to help. But to her, even though I didn’t have the degree, I was that nurse she wanted me to be.”

Mayra and her classmates, who began the MEPN program on May 16, will graduate in August 2017. After earning their degrees, they will be eligible to take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN).

After graduation, Mayra hopes to work as a nurse for a few years, then return to the UA to earn her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree and become a nurse practitioner. Down the road, she and her husband, an internal medicine resident in Sierra Vista, would like to open a practice together in a rural community.
Despite nurse practitioners being the health-care providers of choice for millions of patients in the United States, research on their abilities to detect skin cancer and subsequently help reduce morbidity and mortality is scarce. Passionate about addressing this knowledge deficit, Delaney Stratton (BSN ’15) is pursuing both her PhD to become a nurse-scientist and her DNP to become a family nurse practitioner with the goal of joining a dermatology practice.

Dermatology played a significant role in Delaney’s life at an early age. A self-described “go-getter with a Type A personality” today, Delaney says that in middle school, she spent much of her time looking at her feet and avoiding eye contact with others due to severe acne and psoriasis.

“Acne may seem like a very trivial thing, but it destroyed my self-confidence,” she said. “I would have to put on a mask of makeup before I was able to go out in public. When I finally visited a dermatology office and the physician assistant said, ‘I’m going to help you,’ the sense of relief I felt was really indescribable.”

Since that initial life-changing experience, Delaney says the more she’s learned in nursing, the more her interest in dermatology has expanded. “Now my interest lies in skin cancer detection, because it’s a disease process that is easy to prevent and detect, yet continues to be a major public health problem in the United States,” she said.

Delaney knew she wanted to become a nurse practitioner early on, but was first introduced to nursing research as a BSN honors student. Under the guidance of her faculty mentor Dr. Lois Loescher (PhD ’01, MSN ’80), for her honors thesis, Delaney conducted a survey of nurse practitioners in Arizona to assess their acceptance of mobile teledermoscopy (MTD), a novel technology used to help detect skin cancer.

A combination of a smart phone and a handheld device called a dermatoscope, primary care providers can use MTD to take a photo of a suspicious lesion and send it to an expert for diagnosis. If the lesion is deemed benign, patients avoid unnecessary biopsy or travel to a specialist, saving them time, money and stress.

Although most NP participants had never used MTD, they expressed a high level of interest and perceived the technology as a way to greatly improve diagnosis and positively impact their practice.

As a BSN student, Delaney disseminated her work at the Western Institute of Nursing annual research conference in 2015, and earlier this year, published her findings in the Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners.

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Norria Brice (DNP ‘16)

“I just want to encourage everyone who is in school to continue their education. You’ll get through it, so stay with it, and you’ll be able to achieve your goals.”

Norria’s DNP project was titled, The Acute Coronary Syndrome Experience Among Native American Adults in Northern Arizona.

**Historic Funding**

The UA Health Sciences and Banner Health have been awarded a $4 million grant from the NIH to participate in the Precision Medicine Initiative® Cohort Program. The award totals $43.3 million over five years and is the largest NIH peer-reviewed grant in Arizona history.

**Because of your generosity and support,** we are pushing boundaries in nursing education, research and practice to improve the health of our communities in Arizona and beyond. At our annual Scholarship Donor Appreciation Tea on April 5, we celebrated our amazing donors who are helping us make this happen. View photos

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