



Degree Completion Initiative: Expanding and Improving Opportunities for Baccalaureate Education in Nursing for Maryland Nurses

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The 2010 IOM Future of Nursing report set forth the goal to have 80% of the nursing workforce educated at the baccalaureate level by the year 2020, and healthcare institutions with Magnet® recognition are striving to have sufficient numbers of baccalaureate educated nurses to meet accreditation requirements. Clearly, there is a mandate that academic institutions need to provide the multiple generations of nurses who are currently in practice or enrolled in nursing education programs avenues to attain the desired education.

Although fully online degree completion programs are well developed and readily accessible, nurses in practice cross a great expanse of generations and display a wide variety of preferences for education. Additionally, nursing students currently enrolled in Associate Degree nursing programs recognize the need for baccalaureate education and are seeking ways to efficiently continue their educational journey. In order to meet the needs of these nurses and nursing students, creativity, flexibility and innovation are required.

Through MHEC NSP II grant support, Towson University is now providing an avenue for nurses to achieve their BS degree through a curricular design that includes both a pre-licensure dual enrollment plan with partner Associate Degree nursing programs as well as a degree completion plan for experienced licensed registered nurses. For students who wish to have face-to-face interactions with teachers and peers, while also having the flexibility of online education, traditional classroom teaching has been combined with online and distance learning to optimize educational experiences. Faculty commitment to 'meeting the students where they are' is demonstrated as nurse educators connect with students - both literally and virtually - at multiple sites throughout the state.

This flexible and innovative Degree Completion curriculum allows RN2BS and ATB (Associate-to-Bachelor) students the opportunity to complete their baccalaureate degree in as little as six months after receiving their AS degree when dually enrolled and less than one calendar year full time or about 18 months part time for students in the RN2BS option. Additionally, this flexible approach allows students who may 'step out' after starting in the dual enrollment ATB program the ability to resume their studies in the RN2BS program when they graduate - the courses cross the options!

To support these motivated students, academic advising that starts during the application process and continues throughout the program is provided and meets the students where they are and when they need it. Graduate and practicing nurses provide additional academic support through educational enhancement with mentoring and tutoring on site at the three locations or virtually using technology. Using dedicated student resources and retention strategies, student persistence will lead to higher completion rates and decreased time to graduation for the 300 Degree Completion students currently enrolled. The redesigned curriculum built with an innovative course delivery design that provides greater access and flexibility allows the Towson University Nursing Degree Completion Initiative (DCI) to play a significant role in increasing the number of BSN nurses in Maryland.