

**NURSING SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2009 AWARD ALLOCATION**

Submitted for: Action.

Summary: This item presents recommended grant awards under the Nursing School Grant Program. The purpose of the Nursing School Grant Program is to increase the number of nurses graduating from Illinois institutions of higher learning prepared for careers as registered nurses. This program provides for competitive grants in two categories: (1) Expansion Grants that support high-performing nursing schools for the purpose of expanding nursing program capacity and increasing the number of students preparing for careers as registered nurses, and (2) Improvement Grants that support nursing schools in need of program improvements aimed at increasing institutional pass rates on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX).

After a comprehensive review using an external grant evaluator, staff recommends the allocation of \$1.0 million in support of three Expansion Grant renewals and three Improvement Grants to six eligible entities under the Fiscal Year 2009 Nursing School Grant Program.

Action Requested: That the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) approve the Fiscal Year 2009 allocation of \$1.0 million for Expansion and Improvement Grant projects under the Nursing School Grant Program.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**NURSING SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2009 AWARD ALLOCATION**

The purpose of the Nursing School Grant Program is to increase the number of nurses graduating from Illinois institutions of higher learning prepared for careers as registered nurses. In Fiscal Year 2009, the \$1.0 million appropriation for the program will support grant projects aimed at expanding and improving nursing programs at six eligible institutions.

Application/Eligibility Process

On September 15, 2008, the Board released the competitive application materials for the Fiscal Year 2009 Nursing School Grant Program. Participation is open to Illinois institutions of higher learning offering Associate and Baccalaureate level registered nursing degree programs. All institutions that participate in the Nursing School Grant Program must meet specific eligibility requirements.

Institutions offering Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) programs must: (1) be approved by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR); (2) be accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC); and (3) have an articulation agreement in place with at least one institution of higher learning that offers a baccalaureate degree in nursing.

Institutions offering Baccalaureate (BSN) programs must be approved by IDFPR and be accredited by either the NLNAC or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). Institutions offering Baccalaureate completion (RN-BSN) programs must be accredited by the NLNAC or the CCNE.

Grant Categories

The Nursing School Grant Program offers competitive grants in two categories: Expansion and Improvement Grants.

Expansion Grants

In September 2008, the IBHE sent renewal application packets to the three institutions that were awarded Expansion Grants in Fiscal Year 2008. All three institutions immediately indicated an interest in renewing their grants. In order to continue the prior year Expansion Grants projects, the institutions provided the following information for consideration:

- Ability to maintain the minimum eligibility requirements. The ADN and BSN programs must maintain NCLEX-RN pass rates for first-time test-takers that are equal to or greater than 90 percent and must maintain program attrition rates that are

equal to or less than 15 percent. The RN-BSN completion programs must have a program attrition rate equal to or less than 15 percent; and

- Basic application information including the proposed Fiscal Year 2009 budget with justifications, an evaluation plan, comments on institutional support and sustainability of project, and a comprehensive description regarding current research and best practices; and
- An interim evaluation report conducted by an external evaluator. The evaluation report provides findings regarding expansion of the nursing program capacity and increases in the number of students preparing for careers as registered nurses; explains what has been done, what is not completed, and what will be done before the end of the grant period; indicates the use of performance measures and funds; conveys any challenges faced by the institution along with the response; and supplies basic demographic data from the institution.

Fiscal Year 2009 renewal grants recommended under the Expansion Grant category will continue to support high-performing nursing schools by expanding nursing program capacity and increasing the number of students preparing for careers as registered nurses.

Improvement Grants

In order to participate under the Improvement Grant category, ADN and BSN programs must have NCLEX-RN pass rates for first-time test-takers that are less than 90 percent or program attrition rates that exceed 15 percent. Under the Improvement Grant category, RN-BSN completion programs must have a program attrition rate that exceeds 15 percent.

Improvement Grants will support lower-performing nursing schools by assisting programs to make improvements aimed at increasing licensure examination (NCLEX) pass rates. Grants awards made under the Improvement Grant category will be awarded on an annual basis. Improvement projects will be permitted to conduct an in-house program evaluation focused on measuring progress in meeting objectives and outcomes. Improvement grant funds may be used to:

- Develop or expand instructional programs;
- Develop or expand academic support services;
- Improve existing classroom space;
- Purchase equipment and instructional materials; and
- Conduct program audits and evaluations.

Review Process

Three Expansion Grant renewals and 12 Improvement Grant proposals requesting more than \$1.4 million were received for the Fiscal Year 2009 program. Board staff completed an internal review of each grant proposal. In addition, an out-of-state nursing consultant was selected to examine each application and make recommendations to assist Board staff in developing award recommendations.

The three Expansion Grant renewal proposals submitted by the prior recipients were evaluated using the following review criteria:

- **Budget Requirements.** How well does the budget clearly describe that the proposed use of funds for the Expansion Grant Program is allowable and cost-effective?
- **Interim Evaluation Plan.** Does the Interim Evaluation Report indicate that the institution is making progress and that the activities align with the goals and objectives of the Expansion Grant program?
- **Institutional Support and Sustainability.** How well does the application provide evidence of the institution's willingness to support and sustain the program during and following the end of state program funding?
- **Performance Measures.** Has the institution maintained or improved specific performance measures (NCLEX pass rates, retention rates, job placement rates, and number of degrees conferred)?

The 12 Improvement Grant proposals submitted by the nursing schools were evaluated using the following review criteria:

- **Comprehensive Program Description.** How well does the proposal provide a clear description of strategies to improve the quality of instruction, increase student retention and increase licensure examination (NCLEX-RN) pass rates leading to an increase in the number of ADN or BSN prepared Registered Nurses in Illinois?
- **Budget Requirements.** How well does the budget clearly describe that the proposed use of funds for the Improvement Grant Program is allowable and cost-effective?
- **Evaluation Plan.** How well does the proposed evaluation process describe the assessment of program effectiveness in relation to the goals and objectives of the Improvement Grant program?
- **Institutional Support and Sustainability.** How well does the proposal provide evidence of the institution's willingness to support and sustain the program during and following the end of state program funding?
- **Performance Measures.** How well does the proposal reflect performance measures including: NCLEX pass rates, retention rates, job placement rates, and number of degrees conferred?

Nursing School Grant Recommendations

For Fiscal Year 2009, \$1.0 million is being recommended to be allocated to support three Expansion Renewals and three Improvement Grant projects selected for the Nursing School Grant Program. As set forth in the Nursing School Grant Program rules, approximately 90 percent of the appropriation will be available to support projects under the Expansion Grant Renewal category and up to 10 percent will be available to support Improvement Grant projects.

Expansion Grant Renewal Projects

CCC - Harry S Truman College, \$300,000 (awarded \$450,680 in 2007 and \$300,000 in 2008). This grant has allowed Truman to expand the capacity of the ADN program by 80 students in 2007 and 2008 through the creation of an evening/weekend option. Grant funds will help to complete and stabilize this expansion. This final renewal grant will provide funds to increase the number of faculty, purchase an additional simulator, purchase additional smart

classroom technology, and monitor ongoing implementation and evaluation of evening/weekend option.

Truman's interim evaluation shows that the implementation plan to increase capacity is on schedule: (1) Support staff is in place, including clerical support, tech support, and BSN lab management. Clerical support and BSN lab management will need to increase to fully realize long term quality goals for the project. (2) Full time faculty continued to provide clinical coordination and mentoring for new and second year faculty members. In addition, the orientation program for new faculty and adjuncts continues to be refined based on feedback from participants. A faculty liaison for the new Simulation Lab continues to provide support for all faculty members. The liaison focuses on curriculum adaptation and maximizing the instructional value of the Simulation Lab. (3) Lab expansion and upgrades are in process and on schedule with regard to remodeling, electrical upgrade, and purchase of equipment.

Loyola University of Chicago, \$300,000 (awarded \$450,680 in 2007 and \$300,000 in 2008). Loyola's Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing (MNSON) has expanded the enrollment in the accelerated BSN program by 117 students (total for 2007 and 2008). This grant request is for faculty salaries to accommodate two program modifications. The MNSON is implementing a twice-a-year admission cycle (fall and spring semesters) to admit 60 ABSN students twice a year yielding approximately 120 ABSN graduates in a given academic year. Also, the curriculum will be revised to change the length of the program from 13 months to 16 months to provide a less intense, more manageable learning experience for the ABSN students. Implementation of these changes will continue after the end of the grant period but will be supported and sustained by MNSON.

The interim evaluation indicates that MNSON has built on the strengths evidenced in last year's project and made adaptations based on lessons learned. They have improved their organizational structure, added full-time faculty necessary to meet the administrative needs of the students and faculty, enhanced communication vehicles, improved educational and clinical opportunities, and embarked on a pilot designed to increase the number of masters prepared nurses.

Northern Illinois University, \$300,000 (awarded \$450,680 in 2007 and \$300,000 in 2008). Northern Illinois University's (NIU) School of Nursing increased its capacity by 40 students in the BSN program and 12 in the RN-BSN program with an emphasis on recruiting and retaining underrepresented groups. Renewal grant funds will be used to retain three full-time and one half-time faculty members, provide students with graduate student tutors, and acquire a second pediatric human patient simulator.

The interim evaluation indicates that NIU continues to successfully expand the capacity of its basic and degree-completion nursing programs. Northern Illinois University plans to continue enrollment of 40 additional BSN students at the Provena Mercy Medical Center in Aurora but to change the admission cycle to 10 new admits every semester. The RN-BS degree completion program continues to offer classes but has moved from the hospital site to the Elgin Community College. The new Human Patient Simulation Laboratory has been completed and is operational on the NIU campus.

Improvement Grant Projects

Lewis University, Romeoville, \$35,240. Lewis University proposes to develop a remediation plan using clinical simulation to improve student retention in the BSN program.

Lewis has identified a two-phase strategy to provide additional instructional support through simulation enhanced remediation. Initially, first semester sophomore II students who are identified to be at risk of failure will attend weekly simulation scenarios conducted by faculty in the lab during open hours. Phase two will involve offering faculty in all other clinical courses the ability to refer students to the lab for remediation or clinical makeup time.

Grant funds will be used to purchase basic simulation lab equipment, provide stipends for project management and faculty training, and attendance at a conference on nursing skill labs. Research has shown that simulators have been valuable in remediation. Connecting didactic learning in the classroom to clinical simulation is believed to improve student acquisition and retention of knowledge better than the traditional lecture format.

Triton College, River Grove, \$30,750. Triton proposes improvement in student retention by providing additional resources during the pre-clinical and first clinical courses. During the first five weeks of the program the college will host a structured orientation for students and families. Participants will learn about the time constraints and study needs of nursing students, including the importance of study groups. This will coincide with the classroom activities where students will be learning and practicing basic skills. Also, during the first semester, students who are either identified as at-risk students or fail the first basic skills exam will be required to participate in the Nursing 125 Advantage Program while enrolled in the first clinical course. This is a structured intervention to facilitate professional socialization and academic awareness.

Grant funds will be used primarily for stipends to faculty facilitators for three semesters of weekly mentoring and tutoring of nursing students. Additional expenditures include training materials, assessment and testing tutorial based software, and resource materials. Components of this project are based on learning theory relevant to retaining students.

University of St. Francis, Joliet, \$34,010. The University of St. Francis (USF) proposes to increase retention and the first-time pass rate on the NCLEX for BSN graduates by expanding academic support services. An internal analysis of institutional student data identified mathematics, reading comprehension, critical thinking, and study/test taking skills as essential to success. To help address these needs, the College of Nursing and Allied Health piloted an academic enhancement program of interactive sessions with senior students to review curricular content and increase critical thinking skills. Preliminary data show an increase in first time pass rates for NCLEX takers. In addition to expanding the academic enhancement sessions, the college proposes adding a summer nursing boot camp and adding support in the pre-clinical and first clinical courses.

Grant funds will be used to hire a part-time academic learning specialist to (1) provide academic support to nursing students, (2) develop and offer learning strategies and review sessions, and (3) facilitate a five-day boot camp for undergraduate nursing students. These strategies are supported by evidence-based best practices.

Recommendation

The staff recommends the adoption of the following resolution:

The Illinois Board of Higher Education hereby approves the allocation of \$1.0 million for Fiscal Year 2009 Nursing School Grants as detailed in this item and shown in Table 1.

Table 1

ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Nursing School Grant Program
 FY2009 Recommended Allocation

Nursing School Grant Program	FY2009 Recommended Amount
<i>Expansion Grants</i>	
CCC - Harry S. Truman College	\$ 300,000
Loyola University of Chicago	300,000
Northern Illinois University	300,000
<i>(90% of \$1.0 Million or \$900,000)</i>	\$ 900,000
<i>Improvement Grants</i>	
Lewis University (\$33,235 request plus prorated share of remaining allocation)	\$ 35,240
Triton College (community college) (\$29,000 request plus prorated share of remaining allocation)	30,750
University of St. Francis (\$32,075 request plus prorated share of remaining allocation)	34,010
<i>(Maximum is 10% of \$1.0 Million or \$100,000)</i>	\$ 100,000
Total	\$1,000,000