

**NURSING SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2010 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 student retention and improving institutional pass rates on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX).

At its August 2009 meeting, the Illinois Board of Higher Education allocated a fiscal year 2010 lump sum appropriation of \$6.8 million to a number of grant programs previously funded by line item appropriations. The Board allocated \$880,000 to the Nursing School Grant Program. After a comprehensive review using two external grant evaluators, staff recommends the approval of \$843,984 in support of three Expansion Grants and two Improvement Grants to five eligible entities under the Fiscal Year 2010 Nursing School Grant Program.

Action Requested: That the Illinois Board of Higher Education approve Fiscal Year 2010 awards totaling \$843,984 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 2010 AWARD ALLOCATION**

The purpose of the Nursing School Grant Program is to increase the number of nursing students graduating from Illinois institutions of higher learning prepared for careers as registered nurses. In Fiscal Year 2010, the \$880,000 allocation for the program will support grant projects aimed at expanding and improving nursing programs at five institutions.

Application/Eligibility Process

On September 15, 2009, the Board released the competitive application materials for the Fiscal Year 2010 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.

Expansion Grants

In order to participate under the Expansion Grant category, ADN and BSN programs must have NCLEX-RN pass rates for first-time test-takers that are equal to or greater than 90 percent. In addition, these programs must have 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.

Grants recommended under the Expansion Grant category will support high-performing nursing schools by expanding nursing program capacity and increasing the number of students preparing for careers as registered nurses. Each Expansion project approved under this program

will be required to have an external evaluator who is jointly agreed to by the institution and the Board staff. Grant awards made under the Expansion category are renewable for up to three years based on sustained program progress and evaluation results. Expansion grant funds may be used to:

- Hire additional nursing faculty;
- Develop or expand instructional programs;
- Develop or expand academic support services;
- Increase classroom space and clinical space;
- Improve existing classroom space;
- Purchase equipment and instructional materials; and
- Conduct program audits and evaluations.

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. The RN-BSN completion programs must have a program attrition rate that exceeds 15 percent.

Improvement Grants will support lower-performing nursing schools by providing financial assistance to make improvements aimed at increasing student retention and improving licensure examination (NCLEX) pass rates. Grant 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 a program audit.

Review Process

Four Expansion Grant proposals and 11 Improvement Grant proposals were received for the Fiscal Year 2010 program. Two out-of-state nursing grant evaluators were selected to independently examine each application and make recommendations to assist Board staff in developing award recommendations.

The four Expansion Grant proposals submitted by Illinois institutions were evaluated using the following review criteria:

- **Budget Requirements:** How well does the budget clearly describe the proposed use of funds for the Expansion Grant Program as allowable and cost-effective?
- **Comprehensive Program Description:** How well does the proposal provide a clear description of strategies to increase the number of ADN or BSN prepared registered nurses in Illinois while maintaining the quality of instruction, student retention, and licensure examination (NCLEX-RN) pass rates?

- **External Evaluation Plan:** How well does the proposed evaluation process describe the use of an external evaluator to assess the program effectiveness of the activities in relation to 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:** How does this institution fare regarding specific performance measures (retention rates, job placement rates, and number of degrees conferred)?

The 11 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 2010, the recommendation is to award three Expansion Grants and two Improvement Grant projects from the \$880,000 allocation 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 category and up to 10 percent will be available to support Improvement Grant projects. The project amounts shown below reflect the institutional funding requests.

Expansion Grant Projects

Benedictine University, Lisle, \$239,817. The goal is to increase the RN to BSN completion graduates from 44 to 75 per year by adding three cohorts (one in Lisle and two in Springfield). Strategic partnerships are in place in both regions to make the most of increased capacity for a diverse population of graduates. This proposal is part of the Benedictine commitment to expand their RN-BSN completion program on a statewide basis. Grant funds will be used to hire additional full-time and part-time faculty, purchase health assessment lab kits, and obtain evaluation materials and services.

Benedictine proposes using alternative outcome measures since the NCLEX pass rate is not applicable for RN to BSN completion students. The external evaluator will be working with the University on coordinating the three proposed systems including; (1) a Program Assessment Matrix (PAM) which details the evaluation of achievement of university and program outcomes; (2) an Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA) course evaluation system; and (3) the Live Text electronic student portfolio system.

Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing, Quincy, \$263,060. The goal is to expand the Nursing Skills Laboratory and provide more students with a safe and technology-sound learning environment to practice nursing skills and clinical reasoning. Blessing-Rieman is positioned in a rural area of Illinois with a limited pediatric, obstetric, and high-acuity population. Alternative experiences such as simulation of these types of patients will enhance skill and confidence before moving students to patient care.

Blessing-Rieman is preparing to expand their nursing student population. A new larger nursing education facility will open in 2011. In preparation, the institution is growing their own faculty with students who are currently completing the master's program (MSN). Grant funds will be used to expand the current Nursing Skills Laboratory into a high-fidelity clinical laboratory. The grant budget includes purchasing high-fidelity simulation equipment, hiring an additional faculty member for the lab, and training for faculty on using the new equipment.

St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing, Peoria, \$257,327. The goal is to develop coordinated academic services, increase the number of simulated learning laboratories, and pilot the use of simulated learning as a potential solution for the shortage of clinical sites. Grant funds will be used to furnish an Academic Development Center, purchase services from an ESL (English as a second language) consultant, purchase simulation equipment for two additional labs, and hire one faculty member.

The College of Nursing experienced an increase in the number of students who are at risk for academic failure when the institution recently expanded student capacity. St. Francis defines a student at risk for failure academically as a student who earns at least one course grade of "C" during the nursing program. After conducting an in-house study of recent students, the College found that a nursing student with at least one "C" was less likely to graduate; less likely to complete the nursing program in two years; and less likely to pass the NCLEX-RN in the first attempt. In the search for proactive solutions, the College benchmarked with nine colleges on how they handle students at risk academically. Seven of the nine schools have a specific person or center dedicated to helping students at risk. After further research, the College decided to establish an Academic Development Center to strengthen academic resources, including ESL services.

Improvement Grant Projects

Lake Land College, Mattoon, \$39,780. The primary goal is to address the high program attrition rate by incorporating interactive technology-based instruction through the purchase of a human patient simulator and an audience response system. Nursing students will benefit from the immediate assessment provided by this technology. The assessment will result in as-needed remedial instruction and academic support to improve student success and confidence. Grant funds will be used to purchase a simulator and five sets of audience response remotes and receivers. Nursing faculty members have received training in using simulation.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Urbana/Champaign site, \$44,000. The College of Nursing is in need of additional nursing skills laboratory capacity after recently increasing their enrollment by 34 percent at the Urbana/Champaign site. Classroom space for the increased number of students in didactic experiences has not been problematic since classes are held in various existing buildings on campus. The additional lab will be a patient room with simulation equipment to provide nursing and other healthcare students with a protected environment to develop competencies. Grant funds will be used for a simulated electronic medical record system, hospital room furnishings, supplies for simulations, and simulation scenario packages.

Recommendation

The staff recommends the adoption of the following resolution:

The Illinois Board of Higher Education hereby approves Fiscal Year 2010 awards totaling \$843,984 for Expansion and Improvement Grant projects under the Nursing School Grants as detailed in this item and shown in Table 1.

Table 1

ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Nursing School Grant Program
FY2010 Recommended Allocation

Nursing School Grant Program	FY2010 Recommended Amount
<i>Expansion Grants</i>	
Benedictine University, Lisle	\$ 239,817
St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing, Peoria	257,327
Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing, Quincy	263,060
<i>(90% of \$880,000 or \$792,000)</i>	<hr/> \$760,204
<i>Improvement Grants</i>	
Lake Land College, Mattoon (an Illinois Community College)	\$ 39,780
University of Illinois at Chicago, Urbana-Champaign site	44,000
<i>(Maximum is 10% of \$880,000 or \$88,000)</i>	<hr/> \$ 83,780
Total	\$843,984