

**NURSING SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2012 AWARDS**

Submitted for: Action.

Summary: This item presents a recommendation for five institutions to receive grant awards under the Nursing School Grant Program administered by the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The goal of this program is to increase the number of nurses graduating from Illinois institutions of higher learning who are prepared for careers as registered nurses.

This grant program is tied to Goal 3 of the *Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success*, increase the number of high-quality postsecondary credentials to meet the demands of the economy. Nursing continues to be a high-demand field where the annual supply of newly licensed registered nurses continues to be lower than the demand. This grant program provides institutions with financial assistance directed to expand their capacity or improve student performance to help meet the statewide demand for registered nurses.

Action Requested: That the Illinois Board of Higher Education approves the Fiscal Year 2012 awards totaling \$880,000 for two Expansion Grant Renewals and three Improvement Grants under the Nursing School Grant Program.

STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**NURSING SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2012 AWARDS**

The 2012 awards will mark the sixth year of the Illinois Nursing School Grant Program. During the past five years the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) has awarded approximately \$5.3 million of nursing school grants to 21 nursing programs in Illinois. These programs were located at two public universities, seven community colleges, and 12 private not-for-profit institutions.

Eligible Institutions

Participation in this program is open to Illinois institutions of higher learning offering associate- and baccalaureate-level registered nursing degree programs. All institutions that participate in this grant program must meet specific eligibility requirements based on the type of degree program offered:

- Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) must be approved by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR); be accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC); and have an articulation agreement in place with at least one institution of higher learning that offers a baccalaureate degree in nursing.
- Baccalaureate (BSN) programs must be approved by IDFPR and be accredited by either the NLNAC or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).
- Baccalaureate completion (RN-BSN) programs must be accredited by the NLNAC or the CCNE.

Two Types of Grants

This program provides for two types of competitive grants - Expansion Grants and Improvement Grants.

Expansion Grants are designed for high-performing nursing schools who agree to expand student capacity to increase the number of students preparing for careers as registered nurses. Expansion grants are renewable for up to three years based on sustained program progress and evaluation results. The grant also requires that an external evaluator - who is jointly agreed to by the institution and the Board staff - review the activities and report on the progress made.

- FY2012 Applications: Applications for renewal of Expansion Grants were sent to the three grantee institutions that received an Expansion Grant in FY2010, Benedictine University, Lisle; St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing, Peoria; and Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing, Quincy.
- Eligibility for Renewal: Prior recipients must maintain their high performance standards to be eligible for the renewal grant, i.e., licensure pass rates for first-time test-takers that are equal to or greater than 90 percent and program attrition rates that are equal to or less than 15 percent. In September 2011, the St. Francis Medical

Center College of Nursing contacted the Board regarding the drop in their licensure pass rate to below 90 percent. After reviewing the recent data it was agreed by the Board staff and the grantee that St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing did not meet the eligibility standards for a renewal in FY2012 and was therefore ineligible to participate in the Expansion Grant program this year.

- Uses: 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 requisite program audits and evaluations.
- Evaluation Criteria: Applications for renewal are evaluated based upon the interim evaluation report provided by an external evaluator; the proposed budget; the proposed activities; and the institution's performance measures, i.e., program attrition rate, first-year retention rates, job placement rates, and number of degrees conferred.

Improvement Grants are designed to support lower-performing nursing schools by providing financial assistance to make improvements aimed at increasing student retention and improving licensure examination pass rates. Grants are awarded on an annual basis. An in-house program evaluation focused on measuring progress in meeting objectives and outcomes is required at the end of the grant period.

- FY2012 Applications: Improvement Grant Applications were posted on the Board web site on September 15, 2011. The Illinois Center for Nursing assisted the Board staff with distributing announcements to nursing schools in Illinois.
- Eligibility: The ADN and BSN programs must have licensure 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.
- Uses: 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 requisite program audit.
- Evaluation Criteria: Applications are evaluated based upon the proposed strategies to improve the quality of instruction, increase student retention and increase licensure examination pass rates; proposed budget; proposed evaluation; evidence of institutional support and sustainability; and performance measures, i.e., retention rates, job placement rates, and number of degrees conferred.

Recommended Awards

In the fall of 2012 the Board received seven applications for the FY2012 Nursing School Grant Program, two Expansion Grant Renewals and five Improvement Grants. An out-of-state nursing grant evaluator was selected to independently examine each application and make recommendations to assist Board staff in developing award recommendations.

The staff recommendation is to award two Expansion Grant Renewals and three Improvement Grant projects from the \$880,000 appropriation for the Nursing School Grant Program. Shown below are the institutions recommended for funding, the amounts of recommended funding (plus any prior year funding), and a brief description of the proposal.

Expansion Grant Renewals

Benedictine University (Benedictine), Chicago and Springfield (\$239,817 in FY2010; \$362,175 in FY2011; and \$450,405 in FY2012). Benedictine's RN to BSN completion program adopted an accelerated off-site cohort delivery model. Current cohort sites are offered through partnerships with community colleges (College of DuPage and Triton College) and Memorial Medical Center in Springfield through Benedictine at Springfield. With funding through this grant program, the number and frequency of the cohorts were expanded (Triton, 25-30 students per cohort, 2x/year; DuPage, 25-30 students per cohort, 2x/year; and Springfield, 17-22 students per cohort, 3x/year).

In an interim report, the external evaluator reported that Benedictine has successfully implemented the expansion grant objectives and is to be commended for proceeding with the implementation even before receiving grant award funds [due to the State's restricted cash flow]. Their commitment to achieving the goals of the project is evident. Given the accomplishments thus far and the effective management of the programs, further expansion to other areas with limited resources is recommended. (Susan Poslusny, PhD, RN, May 20, 2011)

Grant funds will be used on four initiatives: (1) continue to offer expanded cohorts in Chicago and in Springfield; (2) work with Morton College to help increase the number of BSN prepared Hispanic nurses; (3) develop a nursing assessment/simulation lab and instructional resources in Springfield and enhance the Lisle laboratory to integrate simulation into the program; and (4) develop online courses as an option for future programs.

Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing (BRCN), Quincy (\$263,000 in FY2010; \$393,829 in FY2011; and \$331,671 in FY2012). BRCN is expanding the student enrollment in their pre-licensure BSN program which is located in a rural, west central part of Illinois. The college continues to exceed their goals for enrollment growth and provides second year courses and clinical for nursing students at John Wood Community College. The escalating growth is impressive but also has created new challenges in managing resources.

In the interim report, the external evaluator reported that all outcomes significantly exceed the outcome projections, demonstrating the ability of BRCN not only to recruit and retain students but to successfully expand the base of baccalaureate prepared nurses through successful NCLEX-RN performance. The 23.6 percent enrollment increase exceeds the two year goal of 6 percent is impressive and would not be sustainable without the nursing expansion grant with simulation lab expansion, faculty development, and additional personnel. (Donna L. Hartweg, PhD, RN, October 28, 2011)

This year's grant will build on the first two grants by successfully using simulation with the expanded student population and to familiarize, train, and encourage best practices in simulation by their faculty.

Improvement Grants

CCC – Richard J. Daley, Chicago (\$40,000). This ADN nursing school program has undergone tremendous change since fall 2010 when the program absorbed 72 additional students who had been enrolled at Olive-Harvey College. This increased the program enrollment by 67 percent. The college had expected to graduate more than one hundred nurses annually beginning in May 2012, but met this goal one year earlier than expected. While the college has successfully increased the number of graduates each year, student performance continues to be a major

concern. The pass rate on the licensure examination (NCLEX) has decreased from 100 percent in 2009-10 to 73 percent in the 2010-11 academic year.

Grant funds will be used to train faculty to implement active learning techniques and to improve the audio-visual tutorial lab.

Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights (BSN, \$40,000). For the past five years, the performance of graduates on the licensure examination (NCLEX-RN) has been consistent at the 80-86 percent success rate. This rate is far below the faculty benchmark of 92 percent. Faculty has implemented several measures without any noted improvement. This year, the results appear to be heading below the 75 percent benchmark set by the state of Illinois. Research suggests that coordinated, complex simulation activities and opportunities are lacking and need to be implemented to support the NCLEX success rate of the graduates.

The grant funds will be used to help provide equipment and materials for a new simulation lab. In addition, funds will be used to educate the faculty on best simulation practices.

St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing, Peoria (BSN, \$17,924). The purpose of the grant is to focus on students at risk of failing the licensure exam (NCLEX-RN). The goal is to increase and sustain a pass rate of 92 percent for graduates taking the test for the first time. The 2010 pass rate was 86 percent. Research indicates that the lack of comfort with technology is a barrier to success on the NCLEX-RN. Practicing computer-based testing decreased anxiety and students report feeling more prepared for the licensure exam, particularly for students with English as a second language.

Grant funds will be used to purchase computers to provide computerized remediation support and practice time for students who are at risk of failure.

Recommendation

The staff recommends the adoption of the following resolution:

The Illinois Board of Higher Education hereby approves the Fiscal Year 2012 awards totaling \$880,000 for Expansion and Improvement Grant projects under the Nursing School Grants as detailed in this item and shown in Table 1. The Board also authorizes the Executive Director to make pro rata adjustments to the grant awards in the event that appropriated funds are reduced or unavailable.

Table 1

ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Nursing School Grant Program
 FY2012 Recommended Allocation

| Nursing School Grant Program | FY2012 Recommended Amount |
|---|--|
| <i>Expansion Grant Renewals</i> | |
| Benedictine University, Lisle | \$ 450,405 |
| Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing, Quincy | 331,671 |
| | <hr/> \$ 782,076 |
| <i>Improvement Grants</i> | |
| CCC – Richard J. Daley College, Chicago | \$ 40,000 |
| Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights | 40,000 |
| St. Francis Medical Center College of Nursing, Peoria | 17,924 |
| | <hr/> \$ 77,924 |
| Total | \$ 880,000 |