

TO: Montana Board of Regents

FROM: Roger Barber  
Deputy Commissioner for Academic & Student Affairs

RE: An Update on the Model Nursing Curriculum

DATE: March 5, 2008

The model nursing curriculum, developed in response to the Legislative performance audit on transfer practices in the Montana University System, has been a topic of continuing discussion with the Board of Regents for several years. That model was initially approved by the Board in May 2005, modified in May 2006, and “tweaked” one more time in May 2007. Although this report probably could have been delayed until May 2008, the information is important enough that the Board should know about it as soon as possible.

Important background information on the model nursing curriculum can be found at the following website:

<http://mus.edu/che/arsa/Nursing/>

Members of the Board of Regents, and colleagues in the Montana University System, may want to read that material first, before continuing with this memorandum.

Nursing programs in the Montana University System are required to report to two regulatory boards: the Montana Board of Regents and the Montana State Board of Nursing. Representatives from the State Board of Nursing participated in every discussion concerning the model nursing curriculum, but based on their interpretation of that Board’s regulatory authority, they were reluctant to give an early opinion on the model until it was brought to them by an actual nursing program.

That has happened. The State Board of Nursing has approved the model nursing curriculum for Practical Nursing programs at MSU-Great Falls College of Technology and Flathead Valley Community College, and Practical Nursing/Registered Nursing programs at Montana Tech of The University of Montana and MSU-Billings College of Technology. The latter programs, with both PN and RN nursing preparation, were difficult for the State Board of Nursing, however, and some of its unease and uncertainty were also reflected in recent reviews of PN/RN programs at the UM-Helena College of Technology and the UM-Missoula College of Technology.

In an effort to clear the air, the State Board of Nursing hosted a meeting in early January 2008, and invited all of the nursing directors from throughout the State to discuss the model nursing curriculum. At that meeting, representatives of the Board and the executive director of the Board, Barb Swehla, explained that one State Board rule, in particular, causes some concern. That rule requires practical nursing students to be trained, all through their nursing coursework, in the scope and practice of practical nurses. When it looks at the model nursing curriculum, with its integrated, 2 + 1 curriculum for PN and RN nurses, the State Board of Nursing is not certain that the nursing coursework, in the third and fourth semesters, satisfies that requirement. If that curriculum is taught at the RN level, and students who choose to step out of the program to take the PN licensure exam are only required to take a “scope of practice” course to prepare for licensure, then the model curriculum does not satisfy the nursing board’s expectations.

After extensive discussions, the nursing directors and the State Board of Nursing representatives agreed that there are two solutions to the problem, and those solutions are common enough throughout the United States that they even have a name:

- 1) the model nursing curriculum could be offered as part of a ***Bi-Level Nursing program***. Under that model,
  - the program would have one application process, for admission to the nursing curriculum in semester 3;
  - the nursing coursework in semesters 3 and 4 would be taught at both the PN and RN “scope of practice” level;
  - the nursing coursework in semesters 5 and 6 would be taught at the RN “scope of practice” level only;
  - students would have the right to “opt out” of the program at the end of semester 4 and sit for licensure as a PN nurse, or they could simply continue on for another year and sit for licensure as an RN nurse.
  
- 2) the model nursing curriculum could be offered as part of a ***2 + 1 Nursing program***. Under that model,
  - the program would have two application processes; the first one would occur at the beginning of semester 3;
  - the nursing coursework in semesters 3 and 4 would be taught at the PN “scope of practice” level only;
  - students would be required to sit for licensure for the PN nursing;
  - the second application process would occur at the beginning of semester 5, and only licensed PN nurses would be eligible to apply;
  - the nursing coursework in semesters 5 and 6 would be taught at the RN “scope of practice” level.

The 2 + 1 Nursing program is particularly attractive for some of the nursing programs throughout the State, primarily because they would like to provide PN nurses for their service area. In fact, they have promised their healthcare providers that that is one of the

goals of the nursing program. Because it has two application periods and two applicant pools, the 2 + 1 model also opens the RN portion of the program up to licensed practical nurses who are already working, but who would like to upgrade their training and become registered nurses. The Bi-Level nursing program does not provide that window of entry to PN nurses, since all of the students in the nursing cohort have the right to stay in the program and complete the last two semesters of RN coursework.

Because of the January discussion, the nursing programs throughout the Montana University System now have some direction from the State Board of Nursing concerning the model nursing curriculum. That “interpretation” will have to be endorsed by the entire State Board of Nursing, and that hasn’t happened yet. But once it does, MUS nursing programs will have to decide how they want to offer the curriculum to satisfy both 1) the expectations of transferability held by the Board of Regents; and 2) the expectations of appropriate “scope of practice” preparation held by the State Board of Nursing.

At this writing,

- the nursing program at Montana Tech of The University of Montana intends to eliminate its practical nursing program and focus on registered nursing, using the model curriculum.
- the nursing program at Montana State University-Northern has decided to adopt the model nursing curriculum for its registered nursing program, and that decision is before the Board of Regents at this meeting, as part of the Level I memorandum.
- the nursing program at Montana State University-Billings College of Technology is leaning toward a 2 + 1 nursing model. That program is already using the model nursing curriculum.
- the nursing program at The University of Montana-Helena College of Technology is leaning toward a 2 + 1 nursing model. It will almost certainly make the conversion in January 2009.
- the nursing program at The University of Montana-Missoula College of Technology is undecided, although its initial plans were based on a 2 + 1 model since it had promised Missoula healthcare providers that it would continue to train PN nurses and provide career advancement for licenses PN nurses.
- the nursing program at Miles Community College has no immediate plans to adopt the model nursing curriculum until it has more evidence, in the form of licensure pass rates, to evaluate its effectiveness.

Everyone at the January 2008 discussion agreed that assessment of the model nursing curriculum was essential. The model is so new, and its implementation is so recent, that assessment data is sketchy at this point. Only one program, Flathead Valley Community College, has generated a cohort of students from the model who have sat for PN licensure. The pass rate was 100 percent.