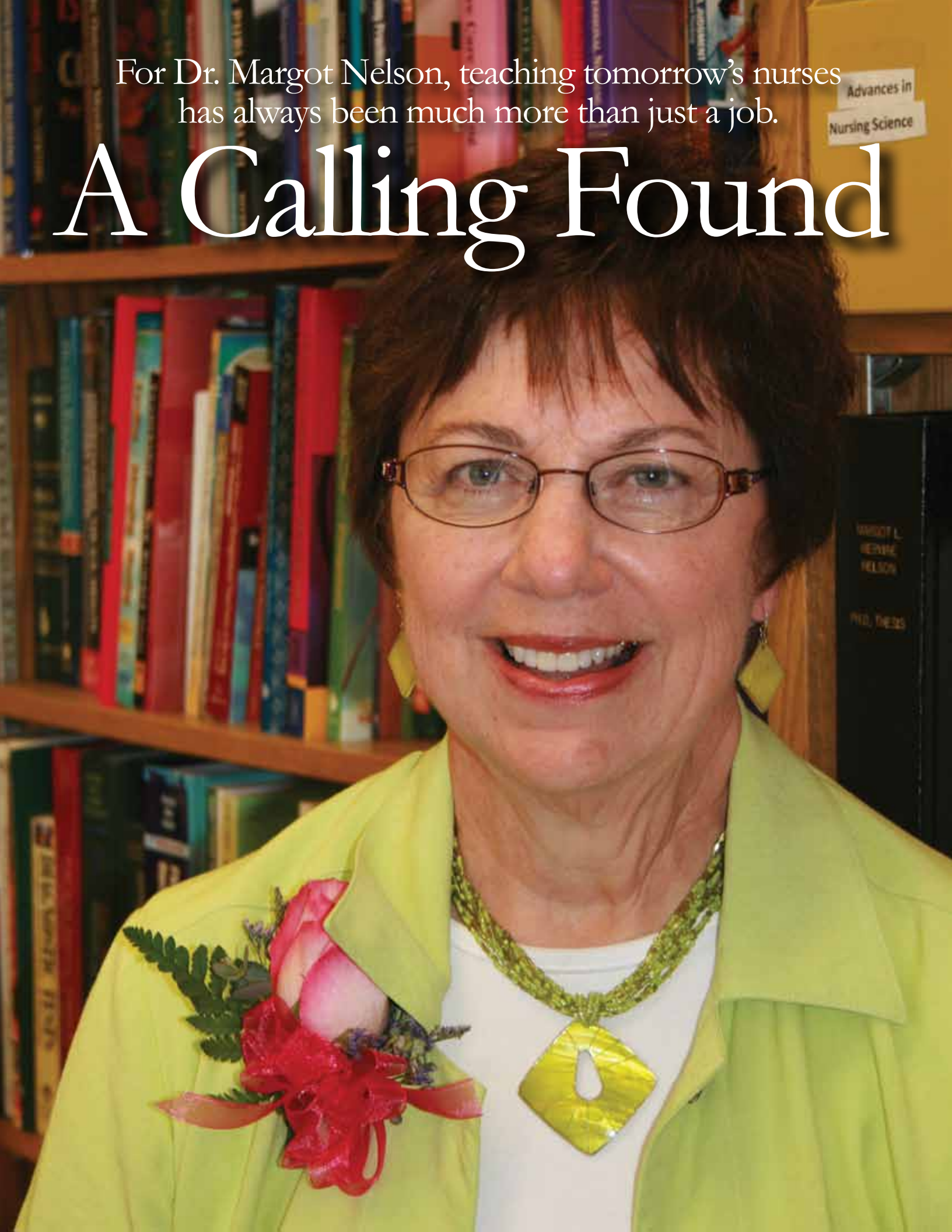


For Dr. Margot Nelson, teaching tomorrow's nurses
has always been much more than just a job.

A Calling Found



Leaning back in her chair, in an office wallpapered by books and papers, Dr. Margot Nelson, class of 1967, says it like it is.

And it's delightful to hear.

"It's about *vocatio*," she says with a smile, emphasizing the "ca" and waiving her hand up toward Heaven.

"Life really is about your calling – your vocation. It's not about money or fame or big houses. It's about providing healing and comfort to people who are suffering. And, teaching students how to provide that care."

After spending 40 years teaching Augustana nursing students what she calls "the art and science of caring in the human health experience," Nelson is retiring as professor and chair of the Nursing Department.

Over the last four decades, she has worked

Texas Woman's University in Dallas, Texas, and one from the University of South Dakota Medical School. She earned her doctorate in nursing from the University of Minnesota.

Looking back, Nelson marvels at how technology has changed the field of nursing and nurse education.

"Obviously, our equipment is newer now, and more sophisticated. The high-fidelity mannequins are a great example – these machines can talk to students, exhibit heart and lung sounds and deliver babies. We can even create wounds on their bodies that our students can treat."

"What we teach has also changed because the role of nursing has changed over time. Long ago, paper charts were the custom and we taught students the appropriate way to document their interactions with patients. Today, most facilities use electronic health record systems and, each system is specific to the institution. We've had to teach students

years, but the student interest has definitely been there."

Nelson says because Sioux Falls has become a thriving healthcare center, Augustana nursing students have opportunities to conduct their clinical rotations within the city through partnerships with institutions such as Sanford Health, Avera McKennan, the Veteran's Administration, the Avera Heart Hospital and others.

A leadership and clinical practicum course is also offered as a part of the nursing major; during that course students work with nurse preceptors at healthcare facilities locally and nationally. The College also offers a leadership and clinical practicum course during which students spend time working with preceptors at healthcare facilities in Norway.

Students also have opportunities to study nursing abroad in locations such as Ecuador, Norway, Namibia, the Dominican Republic and Germany.

"The most important thing nurses bring to the practice of nursing is themselves – their compassion, their ethics and their values."

– Dr. Margot Nelson

to help develop and carry out the department's mission: "To prepare students to apply knowledge and Christian values in the understanding and fostering of health, wholeness and human potential in a changing world."

And, she's also worked to foster in students genuine caring and concern for others

"It's about genuine caring – caring enough to engage ourselves – caring enough to go to bat for someone. The most important thing nurses bring to the practice of nursing is themselves – their compassion, their ethics and their values. Nursing is learning how to *be*. Someone can be a brilliant practitioner but, if they can't empathize or communicate ... if they can't talk to a patient who is dying then, their mere skills are useless."

Remembering

A native of Rapid City, Nelson worked at McKennan Hospital in the medical/surgical area before joining Augustana in 1971.

"Dr. Joyce Nelson, professor emerita of Nursing, found me in the unit. She thought I was a good practitioner and she urged me to teach. I kept my foot in both worlds for a long time. For awhile, I was mostly a nurse and doing some teaching on the side. Then, I was more of a teacher and nursing on the side."

She holds two master's degrees, one from

how to navigate the documentation system."

Dr. Mike Wanous, associate academic dean, said Nelson has been a significant figure in Augustana's history.

"Margot has been a wonderful colleague to work with. She is someone who really cares about students and faculty peers as people," he said. "When I think of Margot, I think of someone who is encouraging, and who gets the big picture of the greater good for Augustana."

Addressing the Shortage

In 2010, the Institute of Medicine released a report on "The Future of Nursing" to address the growing shortage of U.S. nurses. The report called for increasing the number of baccalaureate-prepared nurses in the workforce to 80 percent and doubling the population of nurses with doctoral degrees.

"As the population ages, the need for nurses continues to increase. However, the supply – even though more and more students choose to pursue careers in nursing – continues to stay flat. The supply can't meet the demand," Nelson said.

Augustana, Nelson said, has worked hard to help alleviate the shortage, even increasing its cap for a nursing class from 40 to 64 students.

"It was a gradual increase over a period of

At the same time, each fall nursing students from Norway spend a semester on Augustana's campus. They're taught a course in U.S. healthcare where they learn about the U.S. healthcare system, health issues and in-depth health assessment. From there, they take courses from Augustana faculty and have internships with practicing nurses in Sioux Falls.

What's Next?

"It feels like I just got here," Nelson says, laughing. "When I started at Augustana, I was 26 years old – one of the youngest faculty members here. Time flies!"

She's not sure yet what her plans are for retirement.

"I'm trying to be patient and let life unfold," she said, explaining that she's considering a number of options, including volunteering to help people who are in hospice care.

"People with a shorter life trajectory demand the best of who we are. And, hope – the hope we all have deep down inside – changes in the face of death. Suddenly, the little things matter more – things like attending a wedding or, going home one more time. As nurses, we have the opportunity to help people die well."

"Again, it's about *vocatio* – vocation," she says. "Life is about your calling."