LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Arm greetings, dear friends of Augustana!

We are embracing the beginning of the Fall semester and enthusiastically watching our dreams of the Froiland Science Center become a reality. This past year, the nursing department has been like a kaleidoscope – constantly changing and creating new landscapes of new opportunities, joys and excitement.

Augustana College is now Augustana University. We are very excited about the change, which acknowledges our strong undergraduate programs and developing graduate programming.

Interest in both our traditional and newly established Accelerated Nursing Program continues to increase. We have had visits with prospective students and their families, proudly telling them about our excellent offerings and the “Augie Advantage!” Last fall, our first cohort of five non-traditional students entered the 16 month Accelerated nursing program and will graduate in December 2015. We are thrilled to have 16 Accelerated nursing students start with us in Fall 2015. The traditional and international nursing programs and our collaboration with our clinical academic partners remain very strong.

We are eagerly looking forward to new learning opportunities for our students with the development of an undergraduate Genetics Certificate and the Graduate Genetic Counseling Programs under the direction of Genetic Counselor Quinn Stein. Our graduates continue to be highly recruited and maintain one of the highest national licensing (NCLEX) pass rates within the state, consistently ranging from 97.5-100% in the past five years.

In late May our faculty and staff offices relocated to our temporary spaces in the Sioux Falls Seminary where we have been warmly welcomed. Nursing classrooms, skills’ and simulation labs were created in the Humanities Building, Madsen Center, and Our Savior’s Lutheran Church. Truly one of the more interesting experiences was transporting our hospital beds and various manikins along the campus sidewalks enroute to the Humanities Building in late May.

As a Department of Nursing, we cherish and celebrate our rich blessings, moments, memories, and accomplishments of the academic year: our outstanding traditional, accelerated, and international students; academic colleagues, staff, and YOU, our remarkable alumni. Many individuals have touched our lives very deeply this year. We are reminded that wherever we go, a piece of Augustana goes with us so that we continue to be connected.

We look forward to hearing from you and having you visit us in the new Froiland Science Center in January 2016. Blessings always, take care, and please keep in touch!

As ever,
Pamela A. Schroeder, EdD, RN
Chair, Department of Nursing
Associate Professor

Faculty (L to R): Patricia Waltman, Pam Schroeder, Jean Herrmann, Karla Abbott, Michelle Gierach, Mary Nelson, Connie Evenson. (Not pictured: Lynn White and Beth Karel)
Karen Younger, Professor Emeritus of Nursing, announced her retirement from Augustana following the 2014-2015 school year. Karen is looking forward to traveling with her husband and enjoying a break before whatever comes next takes hold of her. Younger joined the Augustana faculty in 1993 and has been with Augustana since, even during some simultaneous military service. Karen is a retired colonel in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, where she served nearly 30 years on active and reserve assignments.

“I don’t feel like I’m exiting and leaving this academic home,” Younger says. “This will always be my academic home.” She notes that she was honored when her colleagues made her an emeriti faculty member, giving her a permanent place at Augustana.

In addition to excellent work as an educator in both the classroom and clinical settings, Younger served Augustana as a leader in many other realms of academia, including Chair of the Department of Nursing, Chair of the Curriculum Council and Chair of the Institutional Review Board. She also spent three years as Director of Assessment and Institutional Research, during which time she enjoyed the cross-divisional engagement.

“Each of my roles allowed me to get to know a different group of people on campus and I was able to work very closely with them in academic affairs,” she says.

She notes that each chance to work intensely with a new group of people has enriched her, from her military service to collaboration with the nursing faculty and academic affairs, and especially with her last and largest cooperative project: the Dr. Sven G. Froiland Science Complex. In her last five years at Augustana, Younger has served as Natural Science Division Chair, leading the sciences in planning the Froiland Science Complex additions and renovations.

“Working so closely with the faculty on this project while working as the Division Chair was a wonderful capstone to my career,” she says. “We studied together as a faculty on what we felt were important learning experiences for the students to have access to.”

By studying how to optimize the learning process for all the men and women who will study in the Froiland Science Complex, Younger’s connection to the other departments became stronger than in her previous years on campus.

“You’re sweating blood, tears, excitement, and energy with other people. It’s really bonding,” Karen says.

Hearing about the capabilities of the new space, it’s easy to see the collaborative work among educators was a sizable undertaking. Younger takes the time to point out just a few of the features nursing students can be excited about.

Larger simulation labs, a full-flex classroom, and an active collaborative learning lab will offer a new concept-based approach and a stronger dose of learning.

“The Froiland Science Complex will be equipped with a high fidelity simulation center,” she says. “The rich learning experience will be fostered by 8 bays designed to match realistic equipment and scenarios. A software system is being installed that will allow students to record their simulations and closely study their personal performance in each lab. We are moving towards competency-based testing with hyper realistic mannequins featuring various simulations of bodily functions.”

With all these plans in place, Younger is excited to see the new direction for Augustana University. “The nursing department is in great hands under the leadership of Dr. Schroeder,” Younger says. “We are very proud of our program, our students, faculty and staff.”

Thank you, Dr. Younger, for sharing your hard work and vast talents with Augustana nursing.
Matt Mahal is a 2008 Augustana alumnus working with the Sanford Air Med team. He flies in the Sanford helicopter or plane to airlift patients from one location to another. As an advanced flight nurse, he is solely responsible to provide and direct the highest level of care as these patients are transferred from one destination to the other.

“It’s just me and a paramedic up there, and then if we need to, we can call a physician on the ground. But we’re the ones who have to make it happen.” Matt explained.

As a flight nurse, Mahal says he and his colleagues are held to a higher level of accountability. “You have to be extremely competent,” he says.

Since joining the team on June 1 of 2013, Mahal has flown on 268 flights.

The Augustana Choir attracted Matt to the Augustana campus. He spent three years singing with The Augustana Choir, including a trip to Africa. While he says a student could receive a nursing education from any number of places, he sees the value of the Augustana education in those experiences he could not have had anywhere else, like his study abroad in Norway during his Senior year in the nursing program.

Mahal also praises Augustana for giving him the critical thinking skills he needed to manage the fast-paced situations of the flight team. He says the University features strong professors who “challenged and aided the progression from learning the nursing skill to applying it in the clinical setting.”

While completing his senior nursing preceptorship, Matt had the opportunity to work very closely with the Air Medical Team. It was at that time he knew that he wanted to pursue Emergency flight nursing.

Thanks to the critical skills he developed in the Augustana Nursing Program, Mahal is fulfilling that dream.

Nick Ehrhardt received this year’s Bryan Prairie Award, given annually to a nursing graduate exemplifying the caring spirit of Bryan Prairie (’09), who worked for a cleaning company while searching for an RN position and lost his life saving his co-worker when the scaffolding they were on broke. Bryan’s family established this gift in his memory.
Connie Evenson, one of the two new assistant professors, isn’t a stranger to campus. After graduating from Augustana in 1979, Evenson worked at a Kansas City hospital in critical care and pediatrics when an opportunity arose to teach. She returned to Augustana Nursing in the 1990s before accepting a position with USD at the Sioux Falls campus.

“I enjoy being a nurse; I enjoy working with patients, but when I started to teach and work with students, I just knew that was my place,” Evenson said.

Evenson is teaching Health Assessment to the Junior Traditional, Accelerated and International nursing students. This course prepares students to listen to patient cues to complete a holistic assessment.

“I think that is where the art of nursing is,” she says. “Learning how to listen to the patient. Not just verbally, but what do you smell? How do you hear their body, or what noises do they make? I think it’s important to get students to learn mindfulness and being present with the patient in the moment.”

After teaching 20 years with USD, Evenson is excited to come home to Augustana.

“Augustana’s nursing department has always been a symbol of excellence in nursing,” she says. “Now, returning to the campus long-term, Evenson is ready to add to and expand upon the inspiring attitude of her fellow faculty.

For Michelle Gierach, the next career step had to be somewhere with a strong tradition of overlapping disciplines.

“My dissertation background,” Gierach says, “is in inter-professional education: bringing lots of different professions together and educating them on how to function better as a team in the workforce setting.”

So after 12 years at USD’s Sioux Falls campus, she is eager to become immersed in the liberal arts atmosphere of Augustana University.

“The Augie nursing program is very highly respected both for their NCLEX pass rate and for the diversity of the education that their students receive,” Gierach says.

Gierach did her undergraduate work at Bethel University, obtained her master’s degree at the University of Phoenix and earned her doctorate at USD. She also spent five and a half years as a military nurse, serving as an Air Force Captain.

Starting as an assistant professor, she hopes to bring the value for inter-professional education to her students in addition to a sense of service.

“Service learning is a passion of mine, and nursing really follows along with that because of all the clinical experiences our students have,” says Gierach. For the past 10 years, she has managed a weekly free clinical at the Union Gospel Mission, a downtown homeless center.

She’s excited about engaging students in this unique learning experience to serve and expand nursing practice with literacy programs and religious engagement. “When I treat a patient, I think of you as a whole person,” she says.

Jennie Holland began working as the Health Sciences Program Manager with the genetic counseling and nursing programs in August 2014.

As the first to hold this new position, Jennie has had to pave her own way, determining how the job works. This was a challenge she welcomed, and one made easier by the supportive atmosphere she found at Augustana University.

“I have been so impressed with the campus. All of the faculty, staff, and students have been so supportive, warm, and inviting,” she says.

Before coming to Augustana, Jennie spent the past 10 years working with the USD Nursing program as a Student Services Coordinator and Advisor. She also has extensive experience in working with health care professionals and agencies, which has helped her adapt to her new role.

Jennie continues to build on her goal to help students. “I love helping students,” she says. “I want them to feel that connection that when they come to our office they know we’re going to help before they walk out the door.”

Fall 2015 International Students from Norway.

Nursing students enjoying their immersion in Norway.

Nursing students in Ecuador.
The new accelerated nursing program allows students who have already completed an undergraduate degree and the necessary prerequisites to complete the Augustana nursing experience in just 16 months.

The program offers flexibility for students to be working or raising families while quickly priming themselves for employment in one of the fastest growing fields in the country.

The first set of accelerated nursing students will graduate from Augustana University in December 2015. The Accelerated Program has been a wonderful experience for this class.

Thomas Davies graduated Augustana as a biology major in 2009. He was already looking for an accelerated program in nursing when his alma mater announced their own.

“I knew of Augustana nursing’s reputation as being a top tier program in the region,” he said, “so it was an obvious choice.”

Caitlin Hagen graduated from Iowa State University and worked a few years before deciding to pursue nursing. When she began looking for programs, Augustana topped her list because of its reputation and location close to her family.

“We have a really good advantage in Sioux Falls that we have great clinical sites right here,” Hagen said.

The curriculum consists of two fall semesters, one J-term, a spring semester and a summer session. The schedule allowed Davies to maintain his position as wrestling coach at his old high school by leaving nights and weekends free. He’s also been able to make frequent visits to his wife in Fargo.

“At times it has been challenging,” he said. “But this is another step in the direction of my future, so I am finding my way, and with the help of the Augustana nursing faculty and staff, I know I will get there.”

Davies praised the program for ensuring the students don’t miss out on any learning from the traditional model.

“They know how much success the traditional undergrad program has, so they do not and would not take those learning opportunities from us,” he said.

Hagen also notes that the department has been excellent at asking for feedback to improve the program for future accelerated students.

“All of the staff have been excellent,” she said. “They’re on top of things. They want you to succeed.”

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