

# The *Heart* of Nursing

With an updated academic blueprint, a tech-savvy training center and strong roots in the local health care community, the Nursing program enters a new era

— by Mark Russell Johnson —



**S**tanding in a control room the size of an ample walk-in closet, Tony Russell looks out through the expanse of a broad two-way mirror—à la *Law & Order* interrogation scenes—into a lab room next door where a bedridden mannequin lies open-mouthed, staring at the ceiling. This room is where the “brains” of the high-tech simulation dummy come to life, where the voice, the moans and vomiting sound effects are piped-in through a microphone, where breathing sounds and coughs are created, where the pulse finds its beat. It makes for a very realistic lesson as nursing students set up IVs or insert catheters into an otherwise rubbery, indifferent patient.

Their training, Russell explains, gains further realism from COCC staffers who volunteer to play the part of concerned family members. “Sometimes the family members are compliant, sometimes they’re just well-meaning and get in the way, sometimes they’re ridiculous,” he says. He himself has played many such roles, including the guy who’s accidentally hampering things and the guy who’s skeptical of younger nurses’ abilities.

Nursing faculty fill in as no-nonsense physicians. Occasionally, there’s a solemn chaplain. It’s immersive, stressful stuff—and vital to getting students prepped for their careers ahead.

Russell, the outgoing Nursing department chair, was brought in two years

ago to take a successful but strained program and guide it forward. With a buttoned-down business background and a genial manner that suggests he could be, say, a literature professor (which he actually is), he’s proud of what the department has created together. He points to the caliber of students’ national exam scores as a much-prized metric.

“The rate at which they pass their NCLEXs is extremely high,” he says. “We’re consistently 10 points above the national average.” Scores and SIM (simulation) mannequins aside, there’s a lot in motion with the current nursing education at COCC, an updated structure that’s built on the sturdy foundation of a long-running, experienced program.

### DEEP ROOTS & FRESH GROWTH

The College was still in its infancy and piggybacking on Bend High’s downtown campus when it first introduced the Nursing program in 1954. Sixteen students, all women, comprised that original cohort. At the time, it wasn’t clear if a flood of new nurses would oversaturate the region.

But that original teaching partnership formed with area hospitals, including St. Charles—then a stout brick structure rising above the basalt outcropping of “Hospital Hill”—evolved from a training conduit into a reliable, steady pipeline for a growing region. Today, students still perform all clinical rotations with

St. Charles Health System (SCHS), putting them on the frontlines while they work toward their degree.

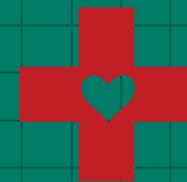
The Nursing program picked up speed in 2012. That year, the College finished construction of the Health Careers Center, a glassy, modern facility built with a voter-approved bond that nearly doubled the learning space. “We built this place to get bigger,” says Russell.

clinical just weeks into our first term of first year.” Right out of the gate, students are learning up-close fundamentals and making assessments. COCC professors follow along to monitor and assist.

By the end of the first year, students are qualified as certified nursing assistants (CNAs). It’s a new design that allows them to accrue credentials while conducting their studies. They can work

part-time as CNAs or licensed practical nurses, typically on weekends, if they so choose.

Year two ratchets up the clinicals, culminating with a capstone experience: four weeks of working hip-to-hip with a nurse. And, at the end, students are not only holding an associate degree, they’re confident, capable and have seen plenty. Most of them, says Jane Morrow, Nursing



## DONATIONS IN ACTION

Thanks to COCC Foundation donor support, 11 designated Nursing scholarships will be awarded for the 2018-19 academic year, totaling some \$50,000.

“And we got as big as we could get very quickly.”

Each year, 96 students—48 in their first year and 48 second-years—don lab coats and stethoscopes and dive into their intensive studies. Labs and lectures, led by seven faculty members, take place on the building’s third floor, where carbon-copy SCHS hospital rooms (right down to the make and model of the beds) set the stage for realistic lessons.

Clinical rotations begin almost immediately. “I love how immersive our program has become,” says Kelly Soto, a 2018 graduate and Foundation scholarship recipient. “We’re put into



Christian Columbres

Timothy Park



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professor and incoming department chair, will go on to earn a bachelor's degree in nursing, a BSN, considered the gold-seal standard these days. "Because of our partnerships with Linfield and OHSU and some other colleges, the ability to go on and get a bachelor's is fairly seamless," she says. "They can get that degree primarily online." Thanks to a clinical-heavy program, students find the BSN more attainable; most do it in two years. OSU-Cascades recently announced that it will begin offering an online BSN program starting with the 2019-20 school year.

On the other side of the building from Morrow's office, there's a storage room that would bring a grin to a U.S. Army quartermaster. Shelves of labeled supplies, tidy and neat, await their next lab session. Crates of syringes and surgical gloves. Bins of interchangeable SIM limbs and genitalia. Vials of medication, demo-dosed for practice, that look just like the real deal. The lab coordinator,

Amy Wheary, keeps it all humming. This is a new position, created to manage inventory and orchestrate the constant flow of nearly 100 students—integral to an expanded footprint and enrollment.

Another program update will impact the admissions process. Beginning in fall 2019, a critical-thinking test replaces the personal essay section. This is an extra measure of raising the program's bar while helping students grasp a fundamental nursing truth: book smarts matter, but thinking on one's feet, being adaptable, is paramount.

### CONNECTIONS IN CARE

Annamarie Norman was tending to a patient during clinicals, standing at his bedside, when she made her first big pivot from budding student to take-charge caregiver. "When he sat up on the edge of his bed," the former student recalls, "I recognized that he wasn't well and knew he was about to pass out. I immediately got in front of this man three times my size and got a good stance. He passed out and I caught him...I definitely felt more like a nurse at that point."

For this 2018 grad and COCC Foundation scholarship recipient, and every other nursing student in the program, gaining hands-on experience is indispensable. The learning-working connections with health care partners are, of course, required for earning their degree. But they also serve to open doors.

Routinely, an external advisory board of health care leaders apprises the College of employment needs. "Bend Surgery Center tells us, flat out, how many they're looking to hire," says Russell. "Partners In Care has a lot of our graduates." Over the past several years, he says, 100 percent of COCC graduates have landed a job.

About a quarter of the students find positions at SCHS, according to Morrow. St. Charles Health System also donates funds directly to the program to support expenditures, such as replacing SIM mannequins.

Summit Medical Group Oregon - BMC provides both a place to learn and launch a career. "We have students who go there for observational experiences in their urgent care area," says Morrow, adding that a few spend their capstone there. A fair number, she says, are hired on. The

clinic also provides several program scholarships through donations to the COCC Foundation.

And at Redmond's Ridgeview High School, a CNA training model that began last year, with oversight by COCC, is offering an opportunity for students to get a great start in the profession. Students interested in health care careers receive school credit while achieving their CNA; they complete clinicals through Regency Pacific Management in both

Redmond and Prineville. This joint educational effort opened up a new channel to apply for federal Perkins Funds, dollars that have since benefitted both institutions with the purchase of a portable bladder scanner, shared between COCC and Ridgeview classes.

### TEACHING TALENT

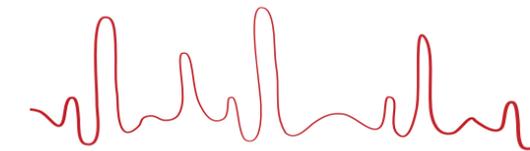
The steady, resolute heartbeat of the Nursing program is its faculty. "Without a doubt, they're some of the hardest-working faculty," says Russell. "They're always on their 'A' game. It's always real—the consequences are always high."

With decades of collective experience as nurses and nurse practitioners, their backgrounds include specialties in surgery, oncology, intensive care and home care, among others. A big piece of what they bring to the program, beyond tried-and-true knowledge, is perhaps harder to quantify but equally indelible: encouragement and a sense of all-for-one.

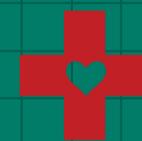
"The support from each and every student and faculty member left me dumbfounded," shares Liam Bennett, a 2018 graduate who received a Foundation scholarship. For Bennett and his classmates, this strong learning environment will prep them well for the road ahead.

And these RNs, it should be noted, are coming online at a crucial time. An already decades-deep nursing shortage in the U.S. will shift into overdrive as more and more baby boomers hit retirement, putting added stress on the health care system. Every single day, according to the Pew Research Center, 10,000 men and women are reaching retirement in America. "The shortage is really going to pick up in about five years," says Morrow. It makes the value of these nurses extra salient.

Kelly Soto is excited to start her first nursing job, a position with the neurosciences department at a Boise hospital. And after all the training, the mock exercises and labs, the clinicals and exams, she's very aware of having gained more than just a skill set at COCC. "Professor (Michele) Decker was 100 percent right when she warned us during summer orientation that 'this program will fundamentally change you,'" says Soto. "It has, and I couldn't be more thankful."



Mark Russell Johnson is the staff writer in COCC's College Relations department.



## BEDSIDE DRAMA

"Family member" volunteers bring added realism to SIM training

Carolyn May is in constant need of medical care. The 39-year-old patient, facing a five-year history of Crohn's Disease, suffers from frequent nausea, weakness and abdominal cramps, and never seems to find relief. But, then again, there's only so much that can be done for her: she's made of rubber.

The character is one of several reoccurring storylines that the Nursing program utilizes in its SIM training. Students interact with her via a concealed microphone to determine her underlying health issues. "There's a

huge communication piece that we can assess to see how the students are doing," says Nursing professor Jane Morrow of the lifelike lessons.

And each year, volunteers play the parts of husband, brother, sister and friend to Carolyn for these simulation labs, bringing an extra layer of authenticity. If you'd like to participate, please contact Amy Wheary, 541.383.7587, for dates and times. Emmy nominations not required.