

HOLYOKE

HCC adds nursing program with Westfield State

Dual-degree nursing agreement is the first of its kind in the state

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There will be more slots available for students pursuing bachelor's in nursing degrees under a concurrent enrollment agreement signed yesterday by Holyoke Community College and Westfield State University.

Students enrolling at Holyoke Community College for nursing will now be able to check a box on their application to indicate they are interested in the concurrent program with Westfield State, said Sharale W. Mathis, HCC vice president of Academic and Student Affairs.

"At that point, they're in," Mathis said in a news release. "No additional application is needed for Westfield State."

The dual-degree nursing agreement that is the first of its kind in Massachusetts.

Holyoke Community College can accept up to 60 students total in its prelicensure nursing programs.

During their first year at Holyoke Community College, students will complete their general education courses and prerequisite health science classes. During their second and third years, they will take classes both at HCC and Westfield State to complete their associate's degree in nursing. Then, as registered nurses, they will complete their fourth year at Westfield, according to a news release.



LINDA THOMPSON

"This pathway makes it a lot more seamless for the student," said Jessica Holden, executive director of nursing and an associate

professor at Westfield State, in phone interview. "They only apply once,"

Students save money taking courses at Holyoke Community College versus Westfield State and can also take advantage of HCC's programs for those learning English

"The great thing is it gives access to both schools' resources," she said.

The program begins in 2024 because the group of nursing students who start in fall 2023 are already accepted.

"I think this is the way of the future," said Westfield State University President Linda Thompson. "We really have to look at ways that we educate young people without causing them to feel like they have a burden when they graduate."

According to a Massachusetts Health Policy Commission report that came out in March, vacancy rates of registered nurse positions in acute care hospitals doubled from 6.4% in 2019 to 13.6% in 2022, and employment in nursing and residential care facilities remains below where the numbers were in 2018.

The report said shortages hurt patient care. For exam-

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ple, by making it slower to discharge patients.

In September 2022, there were at least 200 patients in Massachusetts hospitals who had been waiting over a month for discharge to a skilled nursing facility.

“We are not just desperate for nurses,” Thompson said. “We’re desperate for every type of profession to work in the health care sector, so I do hope this is the first of many

opportunities for us.”

Holden said it’s important to students move toward a bachelor’s degree even if they are registered nurses with an associate degree

“The bachelor’s degree allows more flexibility for nurses who may want to take on managerial or leadership roles,” she said. “Some organizations require a bachelor’s degree for hire.”

And there is evidence that nurses with bachelor’s degrees makes it safer for the patient with fewer negative outcomes in those settings.