

# HCC, Westfield State Announce Nursing Degree Partnership

**HOLYOKE** — Officials from Holyoke Community College (HCC) and Westfield State University signed a dual admission agreement this week that streamlines the process for students who want to continue their nursing educations at Westfield State after earning an associate degree in nursing at HCC.

The RN-to-BSN completion program partnership was announced during a ceremony at HCC's Center for Health Education on Jarvis Avenue in Holyoke, home to the college's RN (registered nurse) and LPN (licensed practical nursing) programs and medical simulation center.

"We're delighted to be here today and excited about this new venture to expand our existing collaboration with HCC to offer a streamlined, efficient pathway to a bachelor of science in nursing degree for HCC students," said Westfield State University President Ramon Torrecilha. "This is important because it underscores the values of both institutions — our commitment to accessibility and our commitment to affordability."

By granting automatic admission, the new agreement simplifies the application process for HCC nursing students who want to earn a BSN at Westfield State — and can also significantly reduce the cost for that degree.

"We already have a really strong partnership with Westfield State, and this is an opportunity to enhance that partnership," said HCC President Christina Royal. "It's all for the sake of our students who need and want easier options as they move from their two-year studies to their four-year studies. Many of our students prefer Westfield State, so we want to make that transfer process as seamless as possible."



From left, Diane Prusank, WSU's provost and vice president of Academic Affairs; WSU President Ramon Torrecilha; HCC President Christina Royal; and Monica Perez, HCC's vice president of Academic Affairs.

Officials said the new program will consist mostly of online coursework with limited on-campus requirements. Applications are now being accepted for fall 2019 enrollment.

According to the agreement, graduates of HCC's associate degree program can transfer up to 90 course credits into the BSN degree program at Westfield State. HCC students need 72 credits to complete the requirements for their associate degree in nursing.

"The total cost of the 30 nursing-degree credits for the completion program is \$10,800, making the program one of the most cost-

effective of its kind in the area," said Shelley Tinkham, dean of the College of Graduate and Continuing Education at Westfield State.

Full-time students can complete the program as quickly as one year; students can also opt to complete the program on a part-time basis in 24 months.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor, employment of registered nurses is projected to grow 15% by 2026, significantly faster than the average for all occupations. Torrecilha said nursing professionals with BSN degrees will remain in high demand for the foreseeable future.

"This latest collaboration empha-

sizes both institutions' commitment to growing this high-demand segment of the workforce, underscoring our mutual concern and interest in preparing future generations of nursing professionals," he said.

Royal cited a recent report, the "Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint," that identified health sciences as a priority sector for Western Mass.

"It's one of the economic engines that drive our region," she said, "so for us to stay focused on providing opportunities like these that are going to lead to vibrant jobs in this community is just going to bolster that sector of the economy."