Tradition: The History of the School

The origins of the OHSU School of Nursing can be traced to the summer of 1919 when the University of Oregon introduced the state's first professional courses in nursing. The courses were offered in Portland in cooperation with the Northwest Division of the American Red Cross Home Service Department, the Portland Visiting Nurse Association, the Welfare Bureau, and the Oregon Tuberculosis Association. In 1920, the Portland School of Social Work offered a standard course of study in public health nursing.

In 1926, the University of Oregon, recognizing the need for baccalaureate prepared nurses, introduced a five-year curriculum culminating in the Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Nursing. Additionally, between 1928 and 1939, a certificate program was offered for qualified students in accredited hospital schools permitting them to receive university offerings facilitating their career mobility.

In 1932 the Portland School of Social Work curricula was integrated into the University of Oregon's nursing degree program and transferred to the University of Oregon Medical School, Department of Nursing Education in Portland, Oregon. This consolidation allowed the Department of Nursing Education to offer courses using its own facilities and clinical resources at accredited community hospitals and agencies. Additionally, a 2-year pre-nursing curriculum was established at University of Oregon and Oregon State University.

During World War II, the baccalaureate degree program was accelerated into a 4-year program, and public health nursing was incorporated into the program in 1956 under the guidance of Elnora Thomson, a leader in the field. In 1947, a $60,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation made possible a teaching and supervision program for baccalaureate prepared registered nurses which in 1955 became the Master of Science degree in nursing education.

The Oregon State Board of Higher Education, in 1960, recognized the changing nature of nursing and expanded the Department of Nursing Education to be the University of Oregon School of Nursing. During the 1960s the school further developed its undergraduate and graduate program offerings. In 1961, funds from the U.S. Public Health Service supported a comprehensive study of mental health concepts in the
baccalaureate program. The Nurse Training Act made possible additional areas of graduate study and increased undergraduate enrollment of registered nurses. The baccalaureate degree was further strengthened in 1972 by funding that developed a learning resources center. Other study and development grants assisted growth in various school programs, especially continuing education. The school began offering a Master of Nursing degree in 1971.

In November 1974, the University of Oregon School of Nursing, Dental School and Medical School united as a single institution, the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center. While the independence from the University of Oregon was granted at that time, the name failed to reflect its independence. The Center becomes Oregon’s only academic health center and one of 125 in the nation. It was not until 1981 that the state Legislature changed the name to the Oregon Health Sciences University. Another name change occurred in 2001 when Oregon Health Sciences University merged with the Oregon Graduate Institute School of Science and Engineering and officially became Oregon Health & Science University.

In 1979 the undergraduate degree programs were expanded to La Grande, Oregon, in order to provide the Eastern region of the state with baccalaureate prepared nurses. Eastern Oregon University continues to be one of the regional campuses for OHSU School of Nursing.

The OHSU School of Nursing continued to evolve in the 1980s as the school reorganized its programs to reflect nursing’s focus on health and interaction with specific populations. The departments included Adult Health and Illness, Community Health Care Systems, Family Nursing, and Mental Health Nursing. In June 1983, the school gained approval from the Oregon State Board of Higher Education to begin a new graduate curriculum. This new program was designed so that the master’s curriculum was the first component of a curriculum leading to the doctor of philosophy degree in nursing. Admissions to the PhD program began in fall 1985.

The 1990s offered many opportunities for innovation and change. To assist with the education of independent practitioners in several specialties including mental health, community health, adult care, pediatrics, gerontological nursing, women’s health care, nurse-midwifery and family nursing, postmaster’s certificate options were developed which allow students with a master’s degree in nursing to gain theory, knowledge and clinical experience necessary to apply for nurse practitioner licensure.

In 1992 the Oregon State System of Higher Education Chancellor mandated a consolidation of state supported nursing education programs. This consolidation led to the addition of nursing programs from Oregon Institute of Technology and Southern Oregon University to the Eastern Oregon University and OHSU-Portland programs. That same year, the School of Nursing on the Portland campus proudly took up residence in a new building, which is a center for teaching, learning, research, and conferences. The school’s statewide outreach, community service, partnership, and excellence are coordinated from this environment. At present the OHSU School of
Nursing has programs located at a virtual campus and five campuses across the state—Ashland, Klamath Falls, La Grande, Monmouth and Portland.

During this same time, a unique collaborative statewide degree was being developed. The Oregon Master of Public Health Program was developed and offered through Oregon Health and Science University, Oregon State University, and Portland State University. This unique program allows students to interact with nationally and internationally recognized faculty from three dynamic universities and combines broad training in public health with specific training in one of the specialty tracks offered at the participating universities. The OHSU School of Nursing began offering the online Primary Health Care & Health Disparities track of the OMPH in fall 2005.

In 1999 nursing leaders in Oregon began to see evidence of a growing shortage of professional nurses and the Oregon Nursing Leadership Council began a strategic plan to address this major workforce issue. The strategic plan had two goals specifically related to nursing education: to double enrollment in Oregon nursing programs and redesign nursing education to meet the emerging health care needs of Oregonians more directly. The ONLC agreed the best way to meet these two goals was through the development of a competency-based nursing education system; hence, the Oregon Consortium for Nursing Education was established as a partnership among community colleges and public and private university schools of nursing, including OHSU. The key features of OCNE include a shared, competency-based integrated curriculum culminating in a bachelor’s degree; improved access to bachelor’s degree education; redesigned clinical experiences and inter-institutional collaboration; shared faculty expertise across OCNE campuses; and development and use of state-of-the-art clinical simulation to augment on-site clinical training, making use of shared instructional materials. OCNE admitted its first cohort of students in fall 2006.

In 2003 high-fidelity simulation was incorporated into the nursing curriculum with the opening of the OHSU Simulation and Clinical Learning Center on the Portland campus. The Ashland and Klamath Falls campuses opened simulation facilities in 2005 and the La Grande campus in 2006.

Nursing students on all of the OHSU campuses participate in clinical learning activities in numerous areas such as hospitals, clinics, and community settings. In addition to these traditional sites, students are able to participate in simulation, a learning activity which is incorporated into many nursing courses. In simulation, students participate in patient care utilizing a manikin called a human patient simulator. The simulator mimics a human patient in many ways, and allows the students an opportunity to practice in a safe environment. The development of teamwork, clinical judgment skills, and communication are some of the focus areas addressed in simulation.

In 2006 the school began offering Oregon’s only master’s degree program in nurse anesthesia. The first cohort to graduate in December 2008 all passed their certification exams on the first attempt.
In 2007 the OHSU School of Nursing Portland campus opened March Wellness at OHSU’s Center for Health & Healing at the bottom of Portland’s Tram, part of Portland’s new South Waterfront development. March Wellness is a medical wellness center that was conceived by health care researchers and practitioners in the OHSU School of Nursing who understand and value the development of health management programs. March Wellness offers a state-of-the-art wellness environment and an integrative approach to health and fitness. March Wellness is currently managed by the OHSU Provost’s office.

The school began offering a Doctor of Nursing Practice program with a postmaster’s option in 2007 and a postbaccalaureate option in 2009. The DNP prepares clinical nurses for advanced practice and provides students with the opportunity to gain doctoral level education while maintaining a practice focus.

In 2008 the school opened its fifth campus in Monmouth at Western Oregon University and admitted 27 students to its first undergraduate class.

The 2009 edition of the *US News & World Reports* ranking of *America’s Best Graduate Schools* ranked OHSU School of Nursing seventh in the country. Several of our specialty areas were also ranked with Nurse-Midwifery being ranked first in the nation. Additionally, our gerontology related programs were ranked 5th and our Family Nurse Practitioner program ranked 11th in the country.