Union University will begin a certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) program next year, one of the few programs in the United States designed in cooperation with rural hospital systems. Union’s faculty gave the CRNA curriculum a nod Oct. 4 when the program came up for final approval.

The new graduate track—one of three available in Union’s master of science degree program—will help meet increasing needs for nurse anesthetists and is a result of requests from area hospitals. Scheduled to begin in January 2006, it is designed for those who already hold a four-year nursing degree and will include a 30-month curriculum. West Tennessee Healthcare recently committed a $2.5 million gift to support the program, once it completed the approval process. Other hospitals systems are working out details for cooperative agreements as well.

Certified registered nurse anesthetists are anesthesia professionals who administer approximately 65 percent of all anesthetics given to patients each year in the United States, according to the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA). As advanced practice nurses, they work in every setting in which anesthesia is delivered: traditional hospital operating rooms and delivery rooms; outpatient surgical centers; critical access hospitals; and more.
CRNA program adds one more track to Union master’s degree in nursing

The new certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) program adds one more track in Union University’s master of science degree in nursing. In addition to CRNA, the graduate program offers tracks in nursing education and nursing administration.

Interim Dean Tharon Kirk says that the advanced degree program is one way Union is meeting shortages in the field.

“The master’s program at Union seeks to meet the need for nurses with advanced levels of knowledge and skills who can help address some of the shortage issues related to nursing,” she said. “Both the nursing education track and the CRNA track are designed to produce nurses who can help meet critical shortage areas. Despite the growing interest in nursing as a profession, most schools have difficulty finding qualified faculty to teach. Without teachers, enrollments cannot increase. The nurse educator track is designed to help address this problem.”

Kirk said the nursing administration track prepares nurses for leadership roles in “advanced professional nursing practice with specific functional and clinical abilities.” All three graduate tracks in the program are designed on the cohort model, in which class members take all the core courses together as a group. The education, administration and CRNA tracks are set up so that students take classes with their respective track groups.

Both nursing education and nursing administration tracks include 38 class hours and are offered on both Germantown and Jackson campuses, while the CRNA track includes 74 hours and will be available only in Jackson.

Union names Smith new dean for nursing school

Dr. Timothy L. Smith has been named dean of Union University’s school of nursing, effective January 1, 2005. Smith currently serves as associate professor and coordinator of the nurse anesthesia program at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

He will replace Tharon Kirk, interim dean during the search process.

Smith earned a bachelor of science in nursing degree from the University of Memphis, as well as master’s and doctoral degrees with nursing anesthesia concentrations from the same institution. He holds certifications as a registered nurse, a nurse anesthetist, basic and advanced life support.

In addition to his current position, Smith has also been employed by the University of Tennessee at Memphis and has practiced with CRNA Associates and Anesthesia Consultants Exchange in Chattanooga, as well as the Medical Anesthesia Group, the Cardiovascular Center, Methodist Hospitals Central and Baptist Memorial Hospital Central, all in Memphis.

He was voted faculty member of the year in UTC’s school of nursing in 2003 and received the excellence in teaching award from graduate students at UT-Memphis in 1999. Smith is a member of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists and the Tennessee Association of Nurse Anesthetists.

According to Dr. Carla Sanderson, Union University’s provost, “Dr. Tim Smith brings to Union’s school of nursing two key qualities: a heart for introducing young minds to the career of nursing and its endless opportunities for Christian service and valuable leadership experience in advanced practice nursing.

As the profession of nursing continues to grow and develop in even more advanced roles, Dr. Smith will lead us to take advantage of new opportunities for service.

“Academic deans at Union University hold the key leadership positions for ensuring the right programs for the future,” she said. “Union has tremendous beginning to be a leader in recent years with outstanding dean leadership. With the addition of Dr. Tim Smith, the dean leadership at Union is truly a remarkable one.”