

School of Nursing EXPANDS

New CRNA program will partner with rural hospital systems

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 hospital 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;

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the offices of dentists, podiatrists, ophthalmologists, plastic surgeons and pain management specialists, as well as in military and state healthcare facilities.

The AANA cites a decline in the number of positions available for anesthesiology residents and an increase in outpatient surgeries and surgical procedures done in places other than hospitals as driving the increased need for CRNAs. Also, insurance plans are recognizing CRNAs for providing high-quality anesthesia care at reduced costs. That cost-efficiency of CRNAs helps keep escalating medical costs down, the AANA says.

Recent statistics indicate a projected national shortfall of 7,000 CRNAs by 2005, according to Union University Provost Carla Sanderson.

"It is quite satisfying for Union University to be able to respond to a national workforce demand," said Sanderson. "It's even more satisfying that we are joining with West Tennessee Health Care and others in meeting a need that will directly impact so many around us."

Because of decreased enrollments in nursing programs in general during the 1990s and the subsequent decrease in the pool of nurses

eligible for CRNA certification, the workforce shortfall is expected to rise until at least the year 2020.

In the southeastern United States, CRNA education programs tend to be located in large metropolitan areas. The nearby state of Mississippi has no CRNA program within its borders. Nonetheless, CRNA practitioners are the sole administrators of anesthesia in about two-thirds of the nation's rural hospitals.

"You don't see a lot of schools working to build a network of rural hospitals for a program like this," said Dr. Tim Smith, Union's new School of Nursing dean. "It's the beginning of a new era in Christian education."

"I'm excited about seeing Union helping to fill this need," said Lisa Rogers, a Jackson OB/GYN and Union trustee who helped study the feasibility of a CRNA program.

CRNA graduates typically find an extremely receptive job market. Starting annual salaries average \$118,000, according to Allied Consulting, a Dallas-based health care staffing firm.


Those who enroll in the program can expect to complete 74 hours of intense, full-time study built on a cohort model, which

includes a clinical residency and a thesis or scholarly project. Approximately 15-20 students will be admitted to each class, with student selection made in collaboration with program partners. Admission requirements include:

- eligibility for registered nurse licensure in the state of Tennessee
- completion of a bachelor of science in nursing degree with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher
- one year of critical care experience
- official Graduate Record Exam test scores
- evidence of writing skills, an interview and references.

Now that the program has received final approval, the university will begin a national search for CRNA faculty, according to Sanderson.

The entire nursing program will be housed, along with the departments of chemistry and biology, in Union's new science building when it is completed. Construction will begin in the spring.

For more information about the CRNA program, contact Tharon Kirk, interim dean, at (731) 661-5331. 



"I have worked on the feasibility committee. I have enjoyed working on that committee and will enjoy working in that program to educate Union students. The Jackson community has a need for the program and I am excited about Union's effort to provide an anesthetic program."

Melissa LeFave '98

Jackson-Madison County General Hospital- anesthesia

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 group.

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. 



Nursing major Steven Wilson holds a newborn during clinicals.

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 been blessed beyond measure in recent years with outstanding dean leadership. With the addition of Dr. Tim Smith, the dean leadership team at Union is truly a remarkable one." 