

**APPROVED**  
**February 4, 2014**

Item #IV-14  
February 4, 2014

**NURSING SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM  
FISCAL YEAR 2014 AWARDS**

**Submitted for:** Action.

**Summary:** This item presents a recommendation for four institutions to receive grant awards under the Nursing School Grant Program administered by the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The goal of this program is to increase the number of nurses graduating from Illinois institutions of higher learning who are prepared for careers as registered nurses.

This grant program is tied to Goal 3 of the *Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success*, increase the number of high-quality postsecondary credentials to meet the demands of the economy. Nursing continues to be a high-demand field where the annual supply of newly licensed registered nurses continues to be lower than the demand. This grant program provides institutions with financial assistance directed to expand their capacity or improve student performance to help meet the statewide demand for registered nurses.

**Action Requested:** That the Illinois Board of Higher Education approves the Fiscal Year 2014 awards totaling \$375,848 for one Expansion Grants and three Improvement Grants under the Nursing School Grant Program.



STATE OF ILLINOIS  
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**NURSING SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM  
FISCAL YEAR 2014 AWARDS**

The 2014 awards will mark the eighth year of the Illinois Nursing School Grant Program. During the past seven years the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) has awarded approximately \$6.5 million in nursing school grants to 24 nursing programs in Illinois. These programs were located at three public universities, ten community colleges, and 11 private not-for-profit institutions.

**Eligible Institutions**

Participation in this program is open to Illinois institutions of higher learning offering associate and baccalaureate level registered nursing degree programs. All institutions that participate in this grant program must meet specific eligibility requirements based on the type of degree program offered:

- Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) must be approved by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR); be accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) formerly known as the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission; and have an articulation agreement in place with at least one institution of higher learning that offers a baccalaureate degree in nursing.
- Baccalaureate (BSN) programs must be approved by IDFPR and be accredited by either the ACEN or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).
- Baccalaureate completion (RN-BSN) programs must be accredited by the ACEN or the CCNE.

**Two Types of Grants**

This program provides for two types of competitive grants - Expansion Grants and Improvement Grants.

Expansion Grants are designed for high-performing nursing schools who agree to expand their capacity to increase the number of students preparing for careers as registered nurses. Expansion grants are renewable for up to three years based on sustained program progress and evaluation results. The grant also requires the retention of an external evaluator, one who is jointly agreed to by the institution and the Board staff, to review the activities and report on the grantee's progress.

- Fiscal Year 2014 Applications: The Expansion Grant Application was posted on the Board web site on September 10, 2013. The Illinois Center for Nursing assisted the Board staff with notifying the nursing schools about the grant program and application.
- Fiscal Year 2014 Eligibility: The ADN and BSN programs must have licensure pass rates for first-time test-takers that is equal to or greater than 90 percent and a program

attrition rate that is equal to or less than 15 percent. The RN-BSN completion programs must have a program attrition rate that is equal to or less than 15 percent.

- Uses: Expansion grant funds may be used to hire additional nursing faculty; develop or expand instructional programs; develop or expand academic support services; increase classroom space and clinical space; improve existing classroom space; purchase equipment and instructional materials; and conduct requisite program audits and evaluations.
- Evaluation Criteria: Applications are evaluated based on the proposed strategies to increase the number of nurses while maintaining the quality of instruction, student retention, and licensure examination pass rates; proposed budget; proposed evaluation by external evaluator; evidence of institutional support and sustainability; and performance measures, i.e., retention rates, job placement rates, and number of degrees conferred.

Improvement Grants are designed to support lower-performing nursing schools by providing financial assistance to make improvements aimed at increasing student retention and improving licensure examination pass rates. Grants are awarded on an annual basis. An in-house program evaluation focused on measuring progress in meeting objectives and outcomes is required at the end of the grant period.

- Fiscal Year 2014 Applications: Improvement Grant Applications were posted on the Board web site on September 10, 2013. The Illinois Center for Nursing assisted the Board staff with notifying the nursing schools about the grant program and application.
- Fiscal Year 2014 Eligibility: The ADN and BSN programs must have licensure pass rates for first-time test-takers that are less than 90 percent or program attrition rates that are greater than 15 percent. The RN-BSN completion programs must have a program attrition rate that is greater than 15 percent.
- Uses: Grant funds may be used to develop or expand instructional programs; develop or expand academic support services; improve existing classroom space; purchase equipment and instructional materials; and conduct requisite program audit.
- Evaluation Criteria: Applications are evaluated based upon the proposed strategies to improve the quality of instruction, increase student retention and increase licensure examination pass rates; proposed budget; proposed evaluation; evidence of institutional support and sustainability; and performance measures, i.e., retention rates, job placement rates, and number of degrees conferred.

### **Recommended Awards**

In the fall of 2014 the Board received 12 applications for the Fiscal Year 2014 Nursing School Grant Program, six Expansion Grants and six Improvement Grants. An out-of-state nursing grant evaluator was selected to independently examine each application and make recommendations to assist Board staff in developing award recommendations.

The staff recommendation is to award one Expansion Grant and three Improvement Grant projects from the \$425,000 appropriation for the Nursing School Grant Program. Shown below are the institutions recommended for funding, the amounts of recommended funding, and a brief description of the proposal.

## **Expansion Grants**

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (\$255,848). The public university will use the grant funds to offer an online accelerated RN-BS program starting the spring 2015 term. This program addresses the needs of the student, employer, and the nursing profession. Student concerns include assuming debt or loss of income in order to attend school, lack of employer support related to tuition assistance and flexible work hours, required physical presence in classes, length of programs, limited available programs, and personal life demands. The number of nurses seeking admission into RN-BSN programs is expected to continue to increase as more hospitals are seeking Magnet Recognition which requires an increase in the number of baccalaureate prepared nurses. In addition, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences recommends that the proportion of nurses with a baccalaureate degree should increase from 50 to 80 percent by 2020 to offset the shortage of nurses and to fill the more advanced and expanded roles of nursing. Evidence suggests that nurses who are baccalaureate-prepared possess a wider range of competencies that prepares them to handle the complexities of healthcare and healthcare systems.

SIUE's *One CLICK Accelerated RN/BS Program* was designed to facilitate student success by addressing the common barriers to online program completion. All students will be given an orientation program and on-going support services to navigate the procedures, policies, and educational systems necessary for successful completion regardless of their prior online learning experience. Varied learning styles are incorporated into the system to address student needs. A social presence is supported through discussion forums at the beginning of the course to facilitate introductions and off-subject discussion, instructor-facilitated discussion of course content, and acknowledgement of the student's posted points of view. Additional services including student advising, academic support and library support services, interaction and feedback from instructors, and technology support. The features of the program are consistent with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's pleas for a seamless transition in RN-BSN completion programs and are designed to eliminate the many barriers often cited by returning RN students.

The grant will fund the hiring of a program coordinator, three faculty instructors, two information technology support specialists, and an outside evaluator. The grant activities will start with the instructors completing training on online teaching and the coordinator developing enrollment projections for at least two cohorts with a data collection plan and reporting mechanism. The coordinator will also recruit participants through corporate partnerships with employers and articulation plans with community colleges. SIUE has a Memorandum of Understanding with a 17-hospital, multi-state healthcare system and is preparing similar agreements with several additional healthcare systems in southern Illinois. The outside evaluator will oversee all aspects of program evaluation.

## **Improvement Grants**

Illinois Central College, Peoria (\$40,000). The community college proposes to lower attrition rates and increase student retention in their two-year ADN program. Grant funds will be used for pre-entry interventions including a student questionnaire on learning preferences and attitudes toward learning; a faculty assessment of students based on identifying vulnerabilities; student participation in an online nurse boot camp; and utilization of a retention specialist. The interventions will begin March 2014 for students enrolling in the fall 2014 term.

Student retention/attrition research indicates that contributing issues may be academic related and/or involve personal reasons (such as illness, financial hardship, parenting leave, relative's care). In 2012, the college implemented an entrance exam (Health and Environmental Sciences Institute or HESI 2A) to assess student aptitude in math, reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary. Students who do not score above 80 percent are referred for development college courses in their area of weakness and are not admitted to the nursing program until this course work is complete. This grant will be used to augment the recently implemented HESI 2A assessment with a student self-directed assessment to identify the personal and behavioral issues which contribute to attrition. In addition, faculty will use the customized screening tool to identify nursing students with a high risk of attrition. Grant funds will be used to enroll the at-risk students in the online nurse boot camp. Students will participate in the course modules free of charge and will commit to three hours of learning every week during the month prior to the start of the ADN program and will complete the modules prior to the first day of class. The boot camp includes modules on academic, social skills, and nursing education.

Illinois Central College will use the grant to fund a retention specialist who will oversee the pre-entry interventions and ongoing student surveillance for consistent recognition and remediation of at-risk students. This person will be a current full-time faculty who will commit to 16 hours per week and will work with the program director and nursing faculty to implement the activities of the proposal.

Methodist College, Peoria (\$40,000). The private, not-for-profit college will use the grant funds to improve the pass rates of first time RN licensure test-takers by improving the undergraduate biology curriculum. The college will use an integrative approach utilizing technology and investigative laboratory pedagogy to support student learning of biological concepts using hand-on laboratory projects to help students improve their level of understanding in physiology, chemistry, microbiology, genetics, and biochemistry. Funds will be used to create a hybrid learning environment combining innovative technology with the more traditional wet-lab experience by providing the necessary lab equipment and tools. The lab, with the development of a solid anatomy and physiology background, will create opportunities for student to begin, early in their academic careers, to actively practice observation, data collection, and assessment on team based projects.

Methodist College continues to modify the early baccalaureate curriculum to provide opportunities for students to gain, expand, and create new skills. The College believes this approach incorporates the results and information regarding predictors and indicators of success into a proactive approach that transfer this knowledge into a first or second year academic experience. This design allows students the opportunity to gain these skills which ultimately provide the foundation for future successful nursing education.

Prairie State College, Chicago Heights (\$40,000). The community college proposes to lower attrition rates in the first year of the nursing curriculum in their two-year ADN program. Grant funds will be used for a part-time project leader and part-time supplemental instruction leaders for three semesters starting in the spring of 2014. The project leader will supervise the supplemental instruction process, train supplemental instruction leaders in supplemental instruction teaching/learning techniques, and ensure all reports are finalized and transmitted. The supplemental instruction leaders will support two basic nursing courses in the first year of the nursing curriculum, Nursing 101 and Nursing 102.

The attrition rate in the first year of the Prairie State College nursing program has been a major concern for many years. Students typically have difficulty passing their multiple choice

exams which require them to think critically at a higher level. The majority of unsuccessful students will either withdraw during the semester or stay in the class but earn an “F” which prevents them from continuing their program of study. Many students will return to the nursing program after sitting out for a year. However, two course failures mandate that the student not return to the nursing program for five years.

Prairie State College believes the key to improved retention and success is student and institutional proactive measures. Supplemental instruction is a student-centered, collaborative learning approach which will empower students to be proactive learners. Since supplemental instruction targets high-risk material, not high-risk students, the supplemental instruction will be offered to all entering first year nursing students.

### **Recommendation**

The staff recommends the adoption of the following resolution:

*The Illinois Board of Higher Education hereby approves the Fiscal Year 2014 awards totaling \$375,848 for Expansion and Improvement Grant projects under the Nursing School Grants as detailed in this item and shown in Table 1. The Board also authorizes the Executive Director to make pro rata adjustments to the grant awards in the event that appropriated funds are reduced or unavailable.*

Table 1

ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Nursing School Grant Program  
 FY2014 Staff Recommendation

| <b>Nursing School Grant Program</b>                             | <b>FY2014<br/>Recommended<br/>Amount</b> |
|---|--|
| <i>Expansion Grant</i>  |  |
| Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville (public university) | \$ 255,848                               |
|   | <hr/> \$ 255,848                         |
| <i>Improvement Grants</i>                                       |  |
| Illinois Central College, Peoria (community college)            | \$ 40,000                                |
| Methodist College, Peoria (private, not-for-profit)             | 40,000                                   |
| Prairie State College, Chicago Heights (community college)      | 40,000                                   |
|   | <hr/> \$ 120,000                         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$ 375,848</b>                        |