Termination of the 2+2 Pre-Nursing Program
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April, 8, 2013

The School of Science proposes that the 2+2 Nursing Program be terminated. This proposal has been discussed with faculty responsible for courses that support the program, with the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academics, and with the Provost. This proposal is not easily requested. The College has a long history with the nursing profession, beginning in 1973. The School of Science will investigate new programs that will keep us connected to the nursing profession.

This proposal is separated into three principal sections: the history of nursing at Saint Mary’s, including recent activity in the 2+2 program; the present environment, which we conclude leads us to propose the termination of the program, and future directions to keep Saint Mary’s involved in the nursing profession. We begin with the history of nursing programs at the College, including a discussion of difficulties encountered with the 2+2 program. We clarify the reasons that we recommend a termination of our 2+2 program, and conclude with our suggestions for investigating future directions.

History

In 1973, Samuel Merritt College (now Samuel Merritt University (SMU) and Saint Mary's College (SMC) joined in a partnership to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. This intercollegiate program offered students a four-year curriculum in which they completed pre-requisite courses in sciences and liberal arts in the first two years before beginning their clinical nursing courses during their junior year, while continuing to take courses at Saint Mary’s. Samuel Merritt admitted students to the program and Samuel Merritt coordinated all financial aid and tuition payment. Samuel Merritt Nursing faculty and the curriculum committee of Saint Mary's College guided by the requirements of WASC, the California Board of Registered Nursing, and the Nursing Accreditation organizations developed the curriculum for the four-year intercollegiate program. The BSN curriculum was a rich balance of liberal arts, science and nursing theory and clinical experience.

In 2003, the Presidents of each institution agreed that the differing expectations regarding enrollment goals, and the difficulty of coordinating the infrastructure of the two institutions presented serious obstacles to the administration of the program. As a result, the Presidents in conjunction with other administrators on both campuses and the SMC Academic Senate, decided to discontinue the intercollegiate program and develop what is now known as the 2+2 Nursing program. In a 2+2 arrangement, students are admitted as Saint Mary's students for the first two years and then matriculate to Samuel Merritt during their last two years. This made the managing of admissions, tuition payment, and the coordination of course offerings easier to orchestrate for the students as well as the two
institutions. Samuel Merritt/Saint Mary’s Intercollegiate Program graduated its last class in 2004. Saint Mary's admitted its first 2+2 Pre-Nursing students in the fall of 2005.

The two year Saint Mary’s curriculum was designed by a group of administrators from both institutions. This group decided that completion of the two-year pre-Nursing curriculum would culminate in an Associate’s degree and if students completed the two-year curriculum with a 3.0 cumulative GPA and passed an entrance exam (then the NET exam, now the TEAS exam), students would be guaranteed admission to Samuel Merritt. It was agreed that Saint Mary’s could send 20 students each semester to Samuel Merritt. In the summer of 2011, the decision was made to eliminate the AS degree. This decision was made for 3 reasons:

- WASC did not approve the awarding of the AS degree when initially developed.
- Students exiting the Nursing program can easily transition to another major at SMC.
- None of the other schools that send students to SMU awarded degrees, but do offer certificates of completion of the pre-requisite courses.

Since the 2+2 Program’s initiation Saint Mary's has sent 180 students to Samuel Merritt. During the first 3 years, Saint Mary’s admitted transfer students into the 2 year pre-Nursing program, but in 2007 the decision was made to stop admitting transfer students because freshmen applications rose drastically and the transfer option most often resulted in transfer students completing a bare minimum of 5 courses at Saint Mary’s.

Samuel Merritt University’s Board of Directors has mandated that the pass rate for first time NCLEX takers be at 93%. At an October 11, 2011 meeting with Samuel Merritt, the partnership Schools (Mills and Holy Names) were given the NCLEX pass rates of students from our individual schools. Samuel Merritt has the same relationship with these schools as with us. However these two schools do take transfer students into their first 2 years. We only accept freshmen. The partnership schools transfers are not even close to that target. The transfer students Samuel Merritt gets from the Community colleges though, are at or closer to that target.

Our discussion focused on the many variables that affect this outcome:

- Community college students may be older and have more experience with study skills and test taking as well as life experience.
- Samuel Merritt only takes the very top students from the community colleges to fill spots that are not filled by the partnership schools. However that number has been around 45% from Community colleges in recent years.
- At the same time Samuel Merritt is committed to diversifying the Nursing Profession. Their statistics do not indicate significant correlations with race or gender and NCLEX pass rates in their students. However, Christa Kell notes that she
finds many of our students of color that enter Saint Mary's as freshmen are first generation students who may have special needs as they transition to college.

As a result of this feedback we began discussions with Samuel Merritt University and considered the following interventions in the areas of our academic preparation and admission standards:

**Academic Preparation**

A meeting was held with all but one St. Mary's faculty and two faculty members from Samuel Merritt to discuss our science curriculum. The conclusion of that meeting was that our science courses are outstanding and definitely prepare students for the Samuel Merritt Curriculum. It was suggested that Chemistry professors meet with Samuel Merritt faculty to discuss the Chemistry curriculum to address the needs of future Nurses. Five requests for such a meeting from Saint Mary's has not led to such a meeting with the Nursing administration at Samuel Merritt.

Some science faculty have reviewed NCLX test books to better prepare students for critical thinking exam questions.

A full day retreat was held for all new freshmen to address issues of study habits and time management as well as study approaches to core sciences.

Science Tutoring services were expanded and better utilized.

**Admission Criteria**

Admission criteria were raised when the 2+2 was initiated. These criteria have now been raised even higher for 2013 entering freshmen: 3.8 high school GPA, B’s or higher in all core high school courses and 500 or above SATS.

**Outcomes**

In spite of these reported efforts, Samuel Merritt announced in October, 2012 that it would cut the allocated number that each partnership school can send in half, if a 93% first time pass rate on the NCLEX is not achieved by Spring 2015. SMC student scores have averaged between 80% and 87%. As a result we were forced to decrease our entering class of fall 2013 to 20 students. This was done because there is uncertainty about the numbers and a guarantee can only be made to 10 students each semester.

**The Present**

After much thought and discussion Christa Kell has recommended that the partnership with Samuel Merritt be terminated after the spring of 2016. Thus, we will admit our last class of
20 this coming Fall 2013, with 10 students transferring in the Fall 2015 and 10 in the Spring 2016.

This decision has been agreed on by the Dean, the Vice Provost and the Provost for the following reasons:

- A decrease in the collaborative relationship with Samuel Merritt resulting in addendums to the original contract that do not align themselves with the mission of Saint Mary’s College to recruit and support a diverse student population.
- The message sent to Saint Mary’s about the performance of our students on the NCLEX in spite of a positive recognition of the preparatory curriculum at Saint Mary’s. Little evidence of Samuel Merritt’s commitment and plans for working with students to increase NCLEX pass rates.
- The negative financial impact of lowering the enrollment to 20 students each year would result in a deficit. This impact is due to the number of resources, classes, support services, and administration of this program. The infrastructure required is clearly not warranted for such a small program that does not result in a degree from Saint Mary’s.

The Future

During the 2013-14 academic year various options will be explored to determine the future of nursing education at Saint Mary’s College. These may include but are not limited to:

- A health science curriculum that would lead to a post baccalaureate ABSN or MSN program
- An RN-BSN PROGRAM
- Saint Mary’s own BSN program
- Continuing education for RN’s re: social justice and cultural competency