

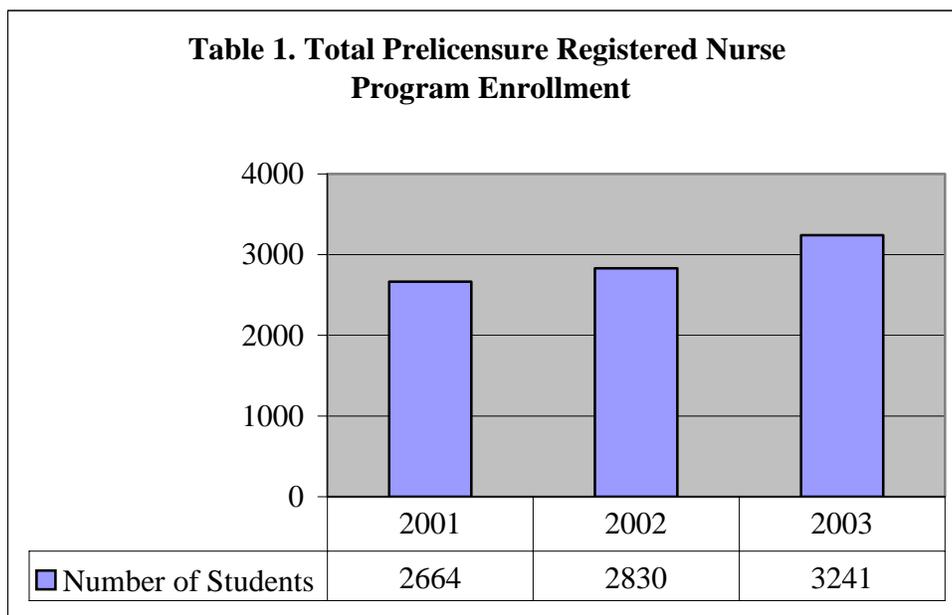
# White Paper: Community Colleges Awarding Baccalaureate Degrees in Nursing

## Introduction

The community's response to the proposal for a six-year pilot program allowing community colleges in Arizona to offer nursing baccalaureate degrees was discussed at a Day of Dialogue sponsored by the Arizona Nurses Association (AzNA) and the Arizona State Board of Nursing (AzSBN). Representative Russell Pearce introduced an amendment for this six-year pilot program twice in the 2003-2004 legislative session. The Day of Dialogue was funded by a grant from the Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association's Campaign for Caring. More than 75 nurse leaders and other Arizona stakeholders attended (Appendix A).

## Nursing Education in Arizona

Although Arizona has increased registered nursing student enrollment by 22% between 2001 and 2003 as displayed in Table 1, Arizona continues to experience a nursing shortage. The state's ability to respond to the demand for more nurses is dependent upon the capacity to educate more nurses as well as to create attractive nursing work environments.



Nurses in Arizona have two educational tracks for entry into the profession: associate degrees from a community college and baccalaureate degrees from a university. Three public universities and one private university awarding baccalaureate degrees, and 16 community colleges along with one private career college awarding associate degrees provide prelicensure entry level nursing education within the state. In the 2002 legislative session, Senate Bill 1260 entitled "An Act Providing for the Development of the Caregiver and Resource Expansion Program within the Arizona Board of Regents and Community College Districts" called for the

development of a plan for doubling nursing educational capacity by 2007 without specifying the type of degree earned by those graduates.

In addition to these traditional prelicensure programs, two public universities (University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University) and one private university (Grand Canyon University) have created a second degree program where students who already have a baccalaureate degree in another field can earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing (BSN). In addition to these prelicensure programs, four universities (Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, Grand Canyon University, and University of Phoenix) have established programs for registered nurses to pursue advancing their education in what have become to be known as RN to BSN programs. Courses completed in the community college nursing program transfer into the university and are applied toward completion of the BSN degree.

The AzSBN also reports that a number of new nursing programs are in development within the state. The AzSBN has been contacted for information on initiating twelve new programs (11 associate degree and one diploma).

### **Capacity Issue in Nursing Education in Arizona**

Nursing education programs within the state are over capacity and are currently denying admission to otherwise qualified candidates. The AzSBN reports that there were 756 students who were qualified but could not be admitted to registered nurse programs. This number may be slightly overstated because some students, particularly in the metropolitan areas of the state, apply to multiple programs. Even excluding the “double applicants”, the number of students who were qualified but could not be admitted is sizeable.

There are several factors that contribute to this limited capacity for educating nurses within the state:

- The plan developed in response to SB 1260 estimates the cost of doubling Arizona’s nursing educational capacity to be \$126 million.
- There is a significant need for educational infrastructure, educational facilities, and clinical learning placements to support program expansion.
- There is an acute shortage of nursing education program faculty. Approximately 5% of current faculty positions are unfilled. The average age of nursing faculty in Arizona is 53 years (SLHI, 2002). In other words, half of the nursing faculty in Arizona will be reaching retirement age within the next 12 years.

### **Educational Preparation of Nurses**

As the state responds to the nursing shortage and challenge of educating more nurses, ensuring that enough nurses are available is significant, but guaranteeing that nurses are prepared with the education necessary to meet the needs of the community is paramount.

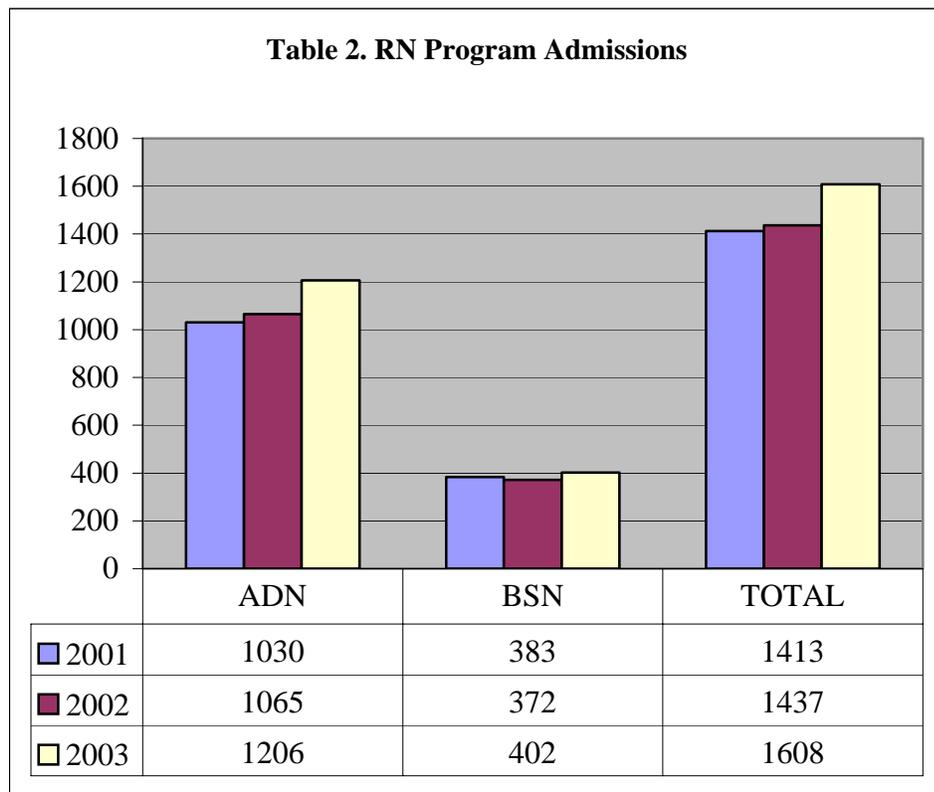
There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating a relationship between a high percentage of RNs with a baccalaureate degree and improved patient outcomes and nurse retention. The 2003 Aiken study concluded that a 10 percent increase in nurses with a BSN decreased the risk of

patient death and complications by 5 percent. Supporting this conclusion is the 2001 Fagin study, which showed that nurses prepared at the associate degree or diploma level commit significantly higher levels of medication errors and procedural violations. Further, BSN-prepared RNs have higher levels of job satisfaction, which is a key to nurse retention as demonstrated by Rambur et al., 2003. RNs prepared at the associate and diploma levels and complete an RN to BSN program demonstrated higher competency in nursing practice, communication and leadership according to Phillips et al., 2002.

In the United States, approximately 19% of the RN population have completed additional academic nursing or nursing related preparation after they graduated from basic nursing education (Spratley et al., 2002). The percentage in Arizona is unavailable. However, 317 nurses graduated from RN to BSN programs in 2003 (AzSBN, 2004).

**Educational Capacity**

Table 2 displays the change in prelicensure RN program admissions over the past three years. Both ADN and BSN programs in the state have increased enrollment. The educational capacity in associate degree programs has expanded more than the educational capacity in the university setting. Associated degree nursing program enrollments increased by 17% as compared to a 5% increase in baccalaureate degree programs (AzSBN, 2004).



When compared to recent graduates in the United States, Arizona is graduating a smaller percentage of nurses with BSNs as their entry-level education as described in Table 3.

	Arizona	United States
Diploma	0%	6%
Associate Degree	72%	55%
Baccalaureate Degree	28%	38%

All states offer prelicensure ADN and BSN programs. In addition, RN to BSN programs are quite common. In the past five years, numerous states have begun to offer second-degree BSN programs. Four states (Florida, Idaho, Nevada and Utah) permit community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees. In these cases, a four-year BSN degree can be earned at a community college in addition to at a university. New York State is proposing a statutory/regulatory change requiring future nursing students who graduate with an associate degree or diploma in nursing to obtain a baccalaureate degree in nursing within ten years of initial licensure.

### **Day of Dialogue Conclusions**

The consensus from the Day of Dialogue is that Arizona needs to increase both the number of RNs and BSNs:

- The need for more nurses remains and Arizona needs a higher percentage of BSNs than now exists.
- There is some evidence demonstrating a relationship between a high percentage of RNs with a baccalaureate degree and lower patient mortality and complications.
- BSNs are better prepared 1) to work autonomously, a skill especially valuable in underserved populations; 2) to navigate the system; 3) to improve interdisciplinary coordination; and, 4) to increase the faculty pool.

The primary concerns with increasing the number of BSNs are the cost of education and the lack of differentiated roles in practice.

Attendees acknowledged that there might be better methods/models to approach nursing education than those already in place. As new methods and models are developed, the participants agreed that the following essential elements must be incorporated:

- Remain student-centered
- Decisions should be based on existing data and new data sources should be developed for missing data
- Partnerships must be created with educational institutions, healthcare delivery systems, legislators, and other key stakeholders to achieve mutually agreed upon goals
- Appropriate indicators/benchmarks must be created as markers of success
- Time is of the essence for our actions

The group indicated that strategies should involve multiple approaches including:

- Activities that would strengthen educational advancement from associate to baccalaureate degree programs
- Exploration of solutions which are being applied successfully in other professional programs
- Development and pilot testing of new models as demonstration projects

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