

Approve NSU's doctor of nursing degree

This week, Northwestern State University will submit an application to the University of Louisiana Board of Supervisors requesting approval for a new degree program in nursing: the doctor of nursing practice. We at the Shreveport-Bossier Business Alliance for Higher Education stand united in support of this application because we believe Northwestern is the university in our area best-suited to fill a clear and present need we see both as employers and community leaders. Northwestern not only has the largest nursing program in the state, but it also has the largest number of students, currently 180, in its nurse practitio-

ner program. Northwestern's graduate nursing program is also the only graduate nursing program in



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Louisiana to be ranked among the top 100 programs in the nation last year by U.S. News and World Report. Nurse practitioners are filling a critical void throughout our nation, state and region as we suffer a continued shortage in the number of primary care physicians, especially those willing and able to serve in our small communities and ru-

ral parishes. The Association of American Medical Colleges said in 2010 that the U.S. had approximately 353,000 primary care doctors, but we would need 450,000 more by 2020. When it comes to the state, Louisiana is faring especially poorly.

According to the 2012 Kaiser Family State Health Facts, Louisiana has 124 primary care physicians per 100,000 citizens compared to the national average of 271 per 100,000. Today, 21 percent of Louisiana residents have limited or no access to primary care, and it's only getting worse.

Fortunately, nurse practitioners are increasing in number, and those who

have mastered the 36 additional hours required for the doctor of nursing practice degree, are even better prepared to work in our underserved communities where there is no physician. Nurse practitioners, especially DNPs, are able to provide a wide range of care formerly restricted to primary care physicians, particularly in the areas of women's health, pediatrics, and family care, and thankfully, 93 percent of nurse practitioner degree graduates from Northwestern stay right in Louisiana.

There are several reasons often cited for denying new degrees in higher education: regional duplication, little student interest, insufficient employ-

ment demand, no real community need, and inadequate financial resources to fund a new program. In this case, not one of these impediments holds up.

There is no doctor of nursing practice offered in north Louisiana although there are five such programs in south Louisiana. Duplication does not exist north of Interstate 10. Yet, there is strong demand in the area.

According to a Louisiana State Board of Nursing report, there are more than 200 nurse practitioners pursuing their DNP out of state, and most are from north Louisiana.

Finally, with the strongest nursing program in the state, it is clear North-

western has the infrastructure needed to offer a quality program and produce the much-needed graduates ready to work in primary care. We hope others in Shreveport-Bossier City will join us in encouraging both the University of Louisiana Board of Supervisors and the Louisiana Board of Regents to quickly approve this new program at Northwestern so we can better educate our local, and largely place-bound health care providers as they seek to learn more and provide better services to our region.

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