

A History of the Department of Nursing

During the Jim Crow Era, the nation functioned on the law of separate but equal. This law was challenged with the 1938 Gaines Decision in which the Supreme Court ruled that a state must provide the same education to blacks and whites within the state or integrate. In response to requests for Public Health training by black citizens in North Carolina, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Public Health program and the North Carolina College for Negroes (now North Carolina Central University, NCCU) decided to duplicate at NCC the program in health education offered at UNC.

In the fall of 1943, NCC announced the Department of Hygiene and Public Health with Dr. Leroy R. Swift as director. Also, the field of Public Health Nursing was identified as a future offering. It was determined that the new public health nursing program would be the same as that for white students at UNC, including the admission requirements, the faculty, and the curriculum. The program was to be headed by the faculty from UNC with the understanding that the responsibility would be taken over by NCC within two years. All public health students took the same core courses, and nursing students were required to take four additional courses. Two faculty members from UNC were assigned to teach the four courses in public health nursing.

In the summer of 1945, Dr. James E. Shepard appointed Ms. Mary Mills as the director of the newly created Department of Public Health Nursing. Ms. Mills resigned in February of 1946 to go to Liberia under the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Although she served in the capacity of director for only six months, Ms. Mills helped with the early planning of the department. In 1948, the Department of Public Health Nursing officially opened with Ms. Esther Henry as the director. The new department, offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in public health nursing, was housed on the third floor of the Health Building located on the north side of the campus near Lawson Street. The first degrees (Bachelor of Science in Public Health Nursing, BSPHN) were conferred in June 1950.



In 1961, the curriculum was expanded to include the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) for the generalist nurse. The new BSN program was designed to provide opportunities for registered nurses (RN) that were graduates of diploma and associate degree programs. NCCU had one of the first RN-BSN programs in the country. The BSPHN degree was phased out; the last degree conferred was in 1964. The BSN program designed specifically for registered nurses was discontinued in 1969. In the 1970-71 academic year all students, traditional and RNs, were admitted under the new generic nursing program. The new curriculum was planned so that students would

complete the program in four academic years and one nine-week summer session, totaling 142 semester hours. RNs admitted into the program were given twenty-five (25) hours of credit for nursing courses after completing a written examination and demonstrating clinical competence. All students that were interested in nursing had to make application to the upper division in the spring of the sophomore year. The new BSN program was housed in the Robinson Science Building. The class of 1974 was the first to graduate under the new program.

In 1969, the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) began investigating the desegregation of ten states, including North Carolina, that had historically segregated systems of public higher education. In 1970, the University of North Carolina System received its notice of non-compliance with Title IV from the HEW Office of Civil Rights. The UNC System was found to be maintaining a racially separate public higher education system. The duplication of programs was a matter of contention with HEW; their belief was that the programs were duplicated because of segregation and that non-duplication of programs would expedite desegregation. HEW threatened to withhold \$89 million in federal funding if the UNC System did not desegregate.

During this same time the three black campuses (North Carolina A & T State University, NCCU, and Winston-Salem State University) that had nursing programs were struggling with low board scores. NCCU was the lowest of the three. Passage rates were as low as 18% in 1977. This was a turbulent time in the history of the department. While the NCCU administration and nursing faculty worked to bring up board scores, the UNC Board of Governors (UNCBOG) were meeting on the fate of the three black schools of nursing. On May 12, 1977, the UNCBOG Committee on Educational Planning, Policies and Programs, issued a resolution regarding the black nursing programs. The resolution first called upon the chancellors of the three schools to develop plans for the revision of admission requirements and to strengthen the baccalaureate programs in nursing. Secondly, reports of the activities were to be submitted to the president of the UNC system, and he in turn was to make recommendations to the UNCBOG. Lastly, the campuses were given deadlines and passage rates to meet. The minimum requirements were that by 1981 two-thirds of those taking the nursing licensure exam

must pass on the first writing, and three-fourths of those taking the exam must pass by 1983. If the requirements were not met and maintained, the UNCBOG would terminate the programs.

The NCCU Department of Nursing (NCCU DON) failed to meet the requirements set forth by the UNCBOG. At the same time, negotiations with the UNCBOG and HEW were stalled, and one negotiating point was to improve upon the black nursing programs and facilities. Following rallies to keep the NCCU nursing program open, all three black programs were given extensions to improve upon their performance.

In the academic year 1982-83, the DON moved to the second floor of the new Health Sciences Building (now Miller-Morgan Building). This gave the program new classrooms and a skills lab for practice. Unfortunately, the new building was just part of the problem; board scores were up but still far from the level needed to save the program.

In 1987, with board scores at 42%, the UNC BOG made the decision to close NCCU's nursing program. Again, supporters of the program, including NCCU Chancellor LeRoy T. Walker, nursing alumni, university alumni, community organizations, and friends, rallied to keep the program open. NCCU restructured the department and replaced the leadership. The board scores for 1988 doubled to 88% and continued to climb until the department was no longer under threat of closure by the UNCBOG.

In 1990, UNC President CD Spangler recommended closing the NCCU DON and opening a joint program with Pembroke State University (now UNC Pembroke) and Fayetteville State University. Again, community leaders, alumni, and friends came together and successfully fought to save the nursing program once more. Board Scores remained steady for a number of years until 2003.

In the 1990s, the NCCU DON began implementing innovative programs, including the Shiloh People's Clinic: An Alternate Clinical Training Site. The Shiloh People's Clinic, a nurse-managed health promotion and screening clinic, was designed to address the lack of health care providers to rural African Americans. The DON partnered with a community service agency, the North Carolina Student Rural Health Coalition to address the problems facing the Shiloh community. The project was fully implemented in spring 1993 with students from three university departments having the opportunity to develop skills in community assessment, community health delivery, leadership, planning, client assessment and teaching, and client and community advocacy.

The second innovative program established at NCCU was the RN-BSN Mini-Semester Program. The mini-semester concept was designed for accelerated completion of a BSN. The upper level was divided into three mini-semesters, and ran August to April each year. The RNs were given credit for their junior year after successfully completing the bridge course and GEC requirements. Classes were held one day per week, and clinical were included in the second and third semesters. This was a very popular program for RNs. In the late 1980s and 1990s, NCCU was the only baccalaureate program in Durham. Being the only BSN program in the city proved to be advantageous to NCCU's nursing program. The DON saw an increase of approximately fifty registered nurses in the RN-BSN program each year in the 1990s.

The NCCU DON again saw a decline in board scores in the new millennium. In 2004 and 2005 board scores dropped to 65% for both years, and the NCCU DON was put on probationary status by the North Carolina Board of Nursing and UNC General Administration. The NCCU administration again looked for new leadership for the department of nursing.

In the summer of 2005, a new director and new faculty were hired. The department was again restructured, and new office of student services was created to facilitate student needs. The RN-BSN program was revitalized to encourage associate degree nurses to become bachelor's prepared nurses. Simulated experiences using Human Patient Simulators (HPS) became a part of the student's clinical experience. Board passage rates for 2006 were 82%, for 2007 91%, and for 2008 90%. With the increase in board scores the department was given permission to begin planning the transition from a department to a school by the NCCU Board of Trustees.

The department continues to grow and has recently added an Accelerated BSN program (ABSN). The first ABSN class was admitted in January 2009. Nursing is in the process of planning the new school of nursing building that is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2011. The NCCU DON has taken flight and is continuing to soar.

The Department of Nursing has been fully accredited since its inception in 1948.

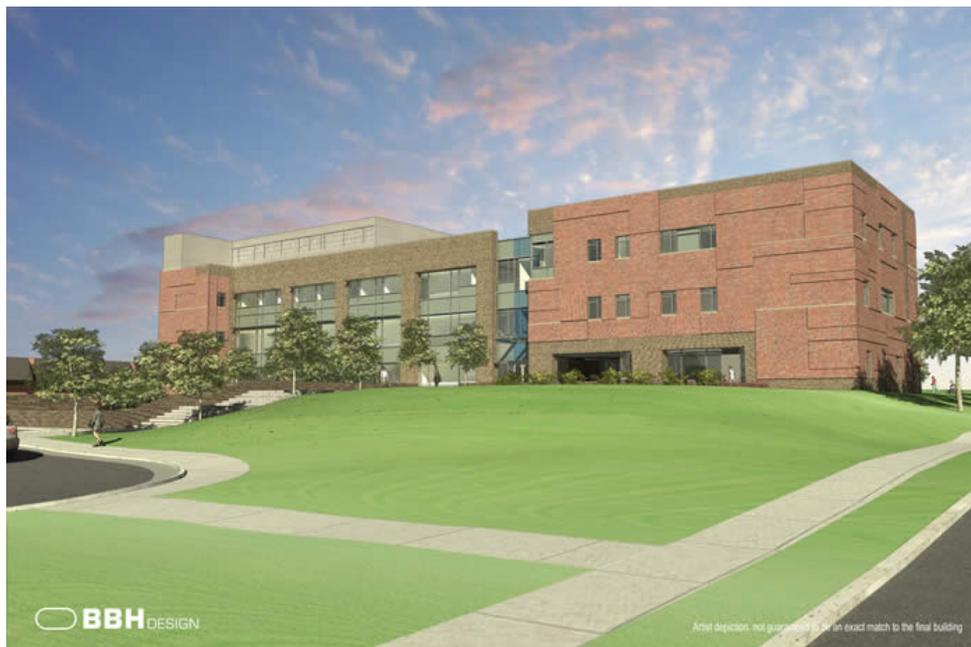
Department Chairs and Directors

Ms. Mary Mills, Director, Public Health Nursing Program, 1945-1946

Ms. Esther Henry, Chair, Department of Public Health Nursing, 1948 - 1951

Ms. Ruth Hay, Chair, Department of Public Health Nursing, 1951 – 1952
Ms. Jeanette Jackson, Chair, Department of Public Health Nursing, 1952 – 1954
Ms. Lattis Melba Campbell, Chair, Department of Public Health Nursing, 1954 – 1955
Ms. Ruth Hay, Chair, Department of Public Health Nursing, 1955 – 1957
Ms. Helen Sullivan Miller, Chair, Department of Public Health Nursing, Department of Nursing, 1956 – 1978
Dr. Johnea Kelley, Chair, Department of Nursing, 1978 – 1988.
Dr. Marion Gooding, Chair, Department of Nursing, 1989 - 1991
Dr. Ernestine Small, Chair, Department of Nursing, 1991 – 1994
Dr. Kaye McDonald, Chair, Department of Nursing, 1994 – 1998
Dr. Betty Dennis, Chair, Department of Nursing, 1998 – 2003
Dr. Fannie July, Interim Chair, Department of Nursing, 2004 – 2005
Dr. Lorna H. Harris, Chair, Department of Nursing, 2005 – Present

Prepared by Ms. Tracey Burns Vann
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The School of Nursing Building scheduled for completion in Fall 2011