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MAY 13, 2024 | VOL. 25 ISSUE 20



Student Overcomes Obstacles to Achieve Dreams

Read Amaka's story on page 2

EDUCATION SHOWCASE

RN 2 BSN

PROGRAM OVERVIEW
Starts in January & August



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Amaka Okwudigbo, Student at OCU

Came to the U.S. on a student visa 8 years ago at the age of 18. She was homeless and without food.

story by Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

Amaka Okwudigbo endured quite a journey moving to the United States from Nigeria in pursuit of a career in the healthcare field.

She has overcome homelessness, food insecurity, and financial issues to fight for her career dreams.

She is currently a student with Oklahoma City University's 12-month accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program.

"I've had a lot of challenges since I've been in the United States," said Okwudigbo, who came to the United States eight years ago at age 18. "I've been homeless, and had no food, and no accommodations, but I was lucky enough to find help here at OCU. They have a food pantry and they have been really helpful with

food to me. I have a place to stay. God really, really blessed me."

Okwudigbo came to the U.S. on a student visa.

"I just needed to change my environment, and someone mentioned that I should apply for a visa to see if I can further my education here in the United States and I took the risk," she said. "I first landed in Houston, Texas, and I graduated with an Associates of Science in Health, and then I moved to Oklahoma to further my education. I went to Rose State College, and I had two Associate's degrees from there, one respiratory therapy and the other one programming"

Okwudigbo credits Candace Jones, her former boss (Academic Advisor) at Rose State College, for helping her secure housing.

"She's been amazing, she gave me a roof under her house," Okwudigbo said.

After graduating from Rose State, Okwudigbo looked to expand her educational horizons.

"When I graduated with my programming degree last December, I was looking to expand my knowledge to see other options, so I started looking for schools that could give me a Bachelor's degree, which I could get very fast," she said. "I looked online and I found OCU, and when I spoke to the recruiters, the advisors at the nursing program, they were really fast with responding to me and I was like, 'I think this is the school that I am going to.'"

OCU's accelerated BSN program is the state of Oklahoma's first and only 12-month accelerated BSN. The program provides an opportunity for individuals with a non-nursing associate or bachelor's degree to earn a BSN degree in less time than a traditional baccalaureate program. This is an in-person program that consists of 56 credit hours spread over three full-time semesters during the 12-month program.

Some key features of Oklahoma City University's 12-month accelerated BSN are:

- o Program consists of 56 credit

hours over 12 months

- o Direct transfer of previous associate or baccalaureate degree credits

- o Clinical experiences at major hospital and community sites in the Oklahoma City metro area

The program will prepare you to sit for the National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX-RN), which all prospective nurses must pass in order to be licensed in their state.

Okwudigbo worked her way through her previous schools, but was able to secure a scholarship to attend OCU. She hopes to find on-campus work to help with the rest of her school costs.

"It's been a huge challenge, because without a job I wouldn't be able to pay for this, but I was lucky enough to get a scholarship this first semester," she said. "Even though the cost was a bit challenging for me, I was like, 'I will fight for it and I will do it,' and I am here. I am extremely proud."

Okwudigbo credits her parents for instilling her with determination and a strong work ethic.

"I grew up in an environment where we are satisfied with the

See AMAKA Page 3

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Amaka Okwudigbo is currently a student with Oklahoma City University's 12-month accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program.

AMAKA

Continued from Page 2

little that we have, and I'm a first generation that was going to school," she said. "My parents are my backbone. I'm glad that they raised me the way they did."

Okwudigbo also thanked Gina Crawford, DNP, APRN-CNP, FNP, CNE, and Dean and Associate Professor, and Dr. Janice Carr, DNP, RN, CNE, Associate Professor, for their help at OCU's Kramer School of Nursing.

"I want to say thank you

to Dean Gina Crawford and Dr. Janice Carr for their enormous support," she said.

Okwudigbo's goal is to join the military and work in healthcare.

"I am so eager to join either the Air Force or the Army," she said. "This has been my goal since I was a baby, and I would love to, actually when I graduate, if by the grace of God, practice in the military."

For more information about OCU's Kramer School of Nursing visit <https://www.okcu.edu/nursing>.



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OMRF Nurses Deliver Patient Care - And Much More



Nurses fill a variety of roles at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. From left are nurses Annie Swinea, Kelly Gentry, Janice Gales, Donna Prickett, Judy Harris, Carmen Childs and Julie Traylor.

At the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, nurses take care of thousands of patients living with autoimmune diseases. But they also do much, much more.

In OMRF's Multiple Sclerosis Center of Excellence, nurses are involved in nearly every aspect of the patient experience. Carmen Childs and Donna Prickett provide direct patient care, Julie Traylor - the clinic's manager - keeps all parts of the center running smoothly, and Annie Swinea helps patients connect with service and resources in her role as case manager.

"MS is a complicated and challenging disease," Swinea said. "We work together to help patients navigate their journey with this condition."

Guiding patients to understanding also motivates Judy Harris, who serves as a lead clinical research nurse for a clinic that works with patients with a rare condition called sarcoidosis. "We listen, we encourage, and we help them advocate for themselves," said Harris, who became a nurse after a 30-year teaching career.

Kelly Gentry uses her experience as a nurse to serve as program coordinator for the Oklahoma Center for Adult Stem Cell Research, a program of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust housed at OMRF. She manages the center's grant applications, communications and administration.

"Being a nurse requires skills that go way beyond taking care of patients," said Gentry, who's held a variety of roles since her career

began as a floor nurse at Children's Hospital. "I never thought I'd have a desk job, but the skills I learned at Children's, like talking to doctors and managing charts, helped prepare me for the administrative career I've had since then."

Janice Gales serves as the foundation's clinical research nurse coordinator for studies of Sjögren's disease, an autoimmune illness in which the body attacks its own moisture-producing glands. After screening and enrolling participants, Gales walks them through the necessary forms, tests and lip biopsy.

"I'm not afraid to jump in to help with a blood draw if we're falling behind," she said. Thanks to her training as a nurse, "It's something I can do that not everyone in my position does."

Gales also coordinates OMRF's institutional review board, which ensures that every research project involving human participants is conducted ethically, safely and legally. As someone who got her start in acute care, Gales says she can "look at a protocol and understand how a participant will be treated." And by overseeing research studies involving hundreds of subjects, she now cares for more people than ever.

"Our nurses are indispensable, not only to our clinics, but to the entire foundation," said OMRF Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer Judith James, M.D., Ph.D. "Our patients often tell us they look forward to their next clinic or research appointment, and we know that's largely due to the connection and well-earned trust they develop with our nurses."

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NURSE TALK



Which of the seven dwarfs best describe you early in the morning?

"I would be HAPPY because I wake up cheerful and full of"



Kimberly Tate, NRCMA

"I would be SLEEPY because I am not a morning person!"




Stephanie Morin, MA

"I would definitely be SNEEZY because my allergies are horrible in Oklahoma!"



Haven Jackson, MA

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Tulsa Community College and Oklahoma City University Sign Articulation Agreement to Address Nursing Shortage



Left to Right: Paula Marshall, Dr. Angela Sivadon, Dr. Leigh Goodson, Dr. Kenneth Evans, Dr. Michelle Kiec.

On Monday, Tulsa Community College and Oklahoma City University inked an articulation agreement aimed at bolstering the nursing workforce and facilitating seamless academic transfers for students.

A signing ceremony held at TCC's Metro Campus celebrated the initial agreement that prioritizes the nursing field and highlights a strategic collaboration between TCC and OCU. By clarifying transfer policies that assure consistency between academic programs, both institutions seek to create a smooth transfer experience from an associate degree to a bachelor's degree program.

"Tulsa Community College is proud to partner with Oklahoma City University to tackle the pressing shortage of qualified nurses in the state," said TCC CEO and President Leigh Goodson, Ph.D. "Together we are creating clear transfer pathways to guarantee opportunities for continued education to our students who will soon play critical roles in the healthcare industry."

Under the agreement, TCC students graduating with an Associate of Science in Pre-Nursing will have the opportunity to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Nursing at OCU. Clear and structured transfer pathways have been established for students to transition from TCC to OCU. Courses completed as part of the Associate of Science degree at TCC that do not fulfill general education requirements at both institutions will transfer to OCU as electives, allowing students to maximize their credits.

"We are proud of the impact our nursing graduates have had within the state and national health care landscapes," OCU President Kenneth Evans, Ph.D., said. "Our priority is to continue preparing future health care leaders to address the nursing shortage, while providing key scholarships to make quality nursing degrees more accessible for students in Tulsa and around the state."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average annual salary for a registered nurse in Oklahoma is \$82,110. While pursuing a bachelor's degree at OCU, students can expect to gain a competitive edge in the job market, with opportunities for career advancement and higher earning potential.

In Spring 2023, TCC saw nearly 400 students enrolled in the College's

Associate of Applied Science Nursing degree program and more than 1,200 in the Associate of Science Pre-Nursing degree program.

"Increasing access to an exceptional nursing education is critical to meeting the healthcare needs of our communities," said TCC Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer Angela Sivadon, Ph.D. "With this agreement, our graduates can continue their academics at Oklahoma City University where they will develop additional nursing qualifications."

On top of in-person courses for students to learn baccalaureate-level nursing skills, OCU's online RN to BSN program provides flexibility and accessibility for working professionals or students with other commitments. Furthermore, OCU offers transfer scholarships to eligible TCC students, easing the financial burden of pursuing higher education.

"We strive to meet our students where they are through our core principles of caring, kindness and respect," said Gina Crawford, Dean of the Kramer School of Nursing. "Whether you're just starting out on your nursing journey or are transferring to OCU from a school like Tulsa Community College, we are here to guide and support you along the way."

Two additional transfer maps with Oklahoma City University have recently been established:

1. Associate of Arts in Communication Arts & Technologies at TCC to Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication: Strategic Communications at Oklahoma City University
2. Associate of Arts in Communication Arts & Technologies at TCC to Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication: Multimedia Journalism & Broadcast Production at Oklahoma City University

These agreements represent a major achievement in advancing educational opportunities and addressing workforce needs. TCC and OCU are proud to join forces in shaping the future of Oklahoma through excellence in education and collaboration.

For media inquiries or further information, please contact Kelsey Kane from TCC at 918-210-0996 or Rod Jones from OCU at 405-301-7085.

RSU Building Legacy of Compassionate Nurses

The Rogers State University School of Nursing and Health Professions offers programs in nursing and pre-allied health fields. Nursing programs include the RN2BSN online program which allows registered nurses with an associate degree to complete a bachelor's degree; the traditional BSN in nursing, leading to RN licensure; and the bridge to traditional BSN entry for LPNs or paramedics to earn their bachelor's degree. Allied health sciences options include pre-athletic training, pre-physical therapy and pre-occupational therapy. The Master of Business Administration (MBA) program at RSU now offers a concentration in Healthcare Management.

With a history of over 40 years of academic excellence, RSU's nursing program provides academic rigor and a reputation that gives RSU graduates an edge in the competitive job market. Upon graduation, RSU nursing graduate NCLEX pass rates exceed the state and national average. Approximately 95% of students report having obtained an RN position before graduation. These outcomes are credited to a quality curriculum, outstanding students, and a caring and dedicated faculty. RSU's nursing faculty have more than 130 years of experience in both academic teaching and practical experience. Several low and high-fidelity laboratories are utilized to provide hands-on learning so that students are well prepared to deliver safe, high-quality nursing care in a variety of settings.

For those interested in furthering their education and increasing their employment viability in the nursing field, the RN2BSN online nursing program offers them the chance to earn their BSN in a fully online format. Registered nurses who currently have an associate degree in nursing can complete their BSN in as few as three semesters. The program has start dates in both January and August.

The program provides nursing students with the means to earn their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), while the online format gives students the flexibility to accommodate their busy schedules. RSU's nationally recognized and fully accredited RN2BSN online program offers real-world practical experience, affordability and flexible coursework that builds upon a student's experience as an RN, preparing to advance them at their workplace, through a graduate program or even to help them find a new position.

In April 2023, Saint Francis Health System and Rogers State University announced a partnership to educate students in the nursing program at Saint Francis Hospital in Tulsa, with Saint Francis serving as an extended campus of the university where students can spend their final three semesters at Saint Francis in Tulsa as they earn their BSN from RSU. This partnership allows RSU to increase its capacity to educate nurses, with the first cohort beginning their time on campus at Saint Francis Hospital in January 2024. The opening of the extended campus at Saint Francis, as well as the recent addition of a spring cohort on RSU's main campus in Claremore, has significantly increased the capacity to graduate outstanding nurses from the RSU School of Nursing and Health Professions.

RSU consistently earns national recognition for affordability, both for



traditional classes and its online programs. The university is routinely recognized for having one of the region's lowest student debt loads with nearly half of its graduates earning a degree without any student loan assistance.

The traditional BSN and RN2BSN nursing programs are fully accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN). Being the only public residential university in the metropolitan Tulsa area, RSU gives students a traditional college experience. With the university's proximity to Tulsa, RSU is strategically positioned geographically, fiscally and reputationally to be Oklahoma's first choice in BSN education.

RSU is committed to building a legacy of compassionate and virtuous nurses who advocate for their patients and serve the community for years to come. For more information about RSU's nursing programs or to schedule a campus tour, visit <https://www.rsu.edu/nursing> or call 918-343-7631.



RN BSN



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Starts in January & August

- ✓ Nursing program courses completed in 2-3 semesters*
- ✓ Each nursing course 5 weeks, one at a time
- ✓ Fully online
- ✓ Corequisite courses may be taken before, during or after nursing program courses
- ✓ No written exams
- ✓ Must have valid RN license
- ✓ Pay-as-you-go option available

*Length of time required to complete degree will vary depending upon student's transfer credits.

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Dr. Marla Smith | marlasmith@rsu.edu | 918-343-6887



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Machine Learning for Maternal Health: OU Engineer Receives NSF CAREER Award for Preeclampsia Study

Talayah Razzaghi, an assistant professor of industrial and systems engineering at the University of Oklahoma, has been awarded a Faculty Early Career Development Program award from the National Science Foundation for her work titled "Personalized Maternal Care Decision Support System for Underserved Populations."

Known as a CAREER award, Razzaghi was awarded \$496,732 to research machine learning-based clinical decision support tools for early preeclampsia detection in maternal healthcare research.

Preeclampsia, a pregnancy complication characterized by high blood pressure, affects 8-10% of pregnancies in the United States annually and poses significant risks to maternal and neonatal health if left untreated. Despite its prevalence, identifying women at higher risk of developing preeclampsia remains challenging

due to various contributing factors, including age, race and pre-pregnancy health conditions.

"Our research will address these challenges head-on by using cutting-edge machine learning algorithms to analyze diverse datasets and predict the likelihood of preeclampsia during pregnancy, particularly among underserved minority populations," Razzaghi said. "The research will focus on mitigating biases inherent in existing predictive models, which often overlook the unique healthcare needs of communities of color."

Razzaghi adds that the staggering rise in maternal mortality rates in the U.S. over the past two decades demands action. "Through our research, we aim to harness the power of machine learning to provide personalized, equitable maternal care and reduce disparities in maternal health outcomes."

The approach includes the development of machine learning-based predictive models that are scalable for learning from large-scale healthcare data and yield fair classifiers that balance accuracy and fairness across racial subpopulations. By tackling these technical challenges, Razzaghi hopes to enhance the identification of pregnant women at high risk of preeclampsia while promoting fairness in maternal health management systems.

"This research has far-reaching implications beyond preeclampsia detection," Razzaghi said. "By understanding and addressing the complex interplay of social determinants



Talayah Razzaghi, an assistant professor in the Gallogly College of Engineering at the University of Oklahoma, was awarded a CAREER award from the National Science Foundation to study the identification of pregnant women at high risk of preeclampsia.

of health, we can apply these insights to other pregnancy-related diseases and even non-clinical factors such as socioeconomic status." She adds that her CAREER award also will focus on a recruitment and research internship program that involves the inclusion of underrepresented students in STEM fields.

Collaborating with clinical partners at the OU Health Sciences Center, Texas Tech Health Sciences Center and the University of Pittsburgh, Razzaghi has access to diverse datasets crucial for training and validating the machine learning models. However, she acknowledges the challenges of accessing sensitive healthcare data and emphasizes the importance of responsible data usage and privacy protection.

"We are committed to upholding the highest standards of data ethics and privacy throughout this research," Razzaghi said. "Our goal is to advance scientific knowledge and improve healthcare outcomes while respecting the privacy and confidentiality of patient information."

Learn more about [Razzaghi's research](#)

The project, titled "Personalized Maternal Care Decision Support System for Underserved Populations," begins Aug. 1, 2024, with funding expected through July 31, 2029. The project is funded by the Info Integration and Informatics Program in the National Science Foundation as part of [award #2339992](#).

Founded in 1890, the University of Oklahoma is a public research university in Norman, Oklahoma. As the state's flagship university, OU serves the educational, cultural, economic and health care needs of the state, region and nation. OU was named the state's highest-ranking university in U.S. News & World Report's most recent Best Colleges list. For more information, visit <https://www.ou.edu/>.

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Chaplains Deploy to Sulphur Following Deadly Tornadoes



BILLY GRAHAM

Crisis-trained chaplains with the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team (BG-RRT) are deploying to Sulphur, Oklahoma, after a massive tornado devastated the community of 5,000 on Sunday. According to news reports, more than 20 tornadoes impacted Oklahoma, resulting in approximately 100 reported injuries, four deaths, and untold property damage.

"The swath of devastation that has ripped through Oklahoma is stunning and heartbreaking," said Josh Holland, international director of the BG-RRT. "The overwhelming sense of loss - for those who lost their homes, and especially for those who lost loved ones - will be nearly unbearable. We want the people of Sulphur and the surrounding region to know that Jesus loves them, that we are praying for them, and we will be standing beside them."

BG-RRT chaplains arrived April 30th and began ministry to the community May 1st.

The deployment to Oklahoma comes one day after the organization announced deployments in Iowa and Nebraska following tornadoes that devastated the Omaha region on Friday.

In addition to these recent deployments, BG-RRT chaplains continue to minister in Slidell, Louisiana, and Rock Hill, South Carolina, after storms impacted both of those communities earlier this month. Chaplains are also offering hope and providing emotional comfort and spiritual care to families who have been forced to flee their homes in war-torn Ukraine.

The Billy Graham Rapid Response Team was developed by Franklin Graham and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association following the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. It has since grown into an international network of chaplains in the U.S., U.K., Canada and Australia who are specifically trained to deal with crisis situations. They have deployed to more than 800 disaster sites across the globe, including shootings, floods, hurricanes, wildfires and tornadoes.

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A Shared Experience Between a Mother and a Daughter

The bond between a mother and daughter is undeniable and unwavering. Just ask Denee Hacker and her mother, Pat Mays. The two women, while 30 years apart, battled breast cancer together.

The Daughter

Denee was showering when she felt a small lump near her armpit. She had a normal mammogram just two months prior but called her doctor anyway. She was sent for another mammogram, an ultrasound and eventually a biopsy. Then, on March 22, 2022, she was officially diagnosed with cancer.

"When I had the biopsy, I joked with the radiologist saying my birthday is tomorrow so unless you've got good news - don't call me," Denee remembers. "He called me on my 41st birthday to tell me I had invasive ductile carcinoma." That's when the shock set in. Denee was young, she had two daughters and a husband to live for. She didn't have breast cancer in her family. How could this be happening?

She was referred to Brian Geister, M.D., at the INTEGRIS Health Cancer Institute in Oklahoma

City. "When I met Denee she was understandably anxious. She had just heard the words no one ever wants to hear. We talked a lot about her options and her faith," says Geister. "I could tell she was a fighter so we opted for an aggressive treatment plan."

Denee underwent six rounds of chemotherapy, 17 Herceptin and Projeta doses, a double mastectomy, 28 rounds of radiation and a full hysterectomy. Denee admits it was overwhelming at times but says she tried to stay positive. "Anytime I caught myself being negative, I would reframe my thoughts." She explains, "For example, if I found myself thinking 'I feel like I got hit by a truck today', I would adjust that thought to something like 'I can really feel the chemo working today'. It was a trick Dr. Geister taught me that truly helped me survive."

The Mother

As fate would have it in the summer of 2022, as Denee was finishing her last chemotherapy treatment, Pat was about to embark on a battle of her own. "I was



Denee Hacker underwent six rounds of chemotherapy, 17 Herceptin and Projeta doses, a double mastectomy, 28 rounds of radiation and a full hysterectomy.

diagnosed with breast cancer not even six months after my daughter's diagnosis," Pat exclaims. Her cancer was found during a routine mammogram and was slightly different from her daughter's disease,

but still she couldn't help but think, "What are the odds that we would both be fighting breast cancer at almost the exact same time?"

Continued on next page



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SCAN ME

SHARED EXPERIENCE

Continued from Page 12

Pat also saw Dr. Geister at the INTEGRIS Health Cancer Institute. On occasion, the two women would share a treatment room and sit side by side while receiving their medication. Both, trying to be strong for the other. "I wanted to show my daughter that I would be ok no matter the outcome because God was with me," declares Pat. Denee wanted to be a positive inspiration to her mother. "I wanted to prove to her that she too could fight this and win - just like I was."

In all, Pat received 12 chemotherapy rounds, a series of shots, nine infusions and a double mastectomy.

The Gift

Both women are now cancer-free and say their shared experience makes Mother's Day that much more special. "Cancer will show you what really matters in life," proclaims Denee. "It has a way of bringing families even closer together." Pat is just thankful to get to spend another Mother's Day with her three



Denee Hacker battled breast cancer together.

daughters and six granddaughters, all of whom will get routinely evaluated for breast cancer for the rest of their lives.

The mother/daughter duo wants to encourage others to conduct self-breast exams and receive regular mammograms. They say to do it for yourself, and for those you love and hold dear. Click here to schedule your mammogram today.

TCC to Honor Second Largest Class of Nursing Graduates in Pinning Ceremony

Tulsa Community College will celebrate the achievements of its most recent Nursing graduates with a pinning ceremony next week. On Tuesday, 102 individuals will be honored for completing TCC's Associate Degree Nursing Program. This is the second largest graduating class of nurses, one year after TCC saw its largest class of 103 graduates on Tuesday, May 14, 2024 between 7-8 p.m.



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The ceremony will be at the TCC Southeast Campus Van Trease Performing Arts Center for Education, 10300 E 81st St, Tulsa, OK 74133.

The College's Nursing program continues to add capacity each semester through Fall 2027 in an ongoing effort to strengthen the area nursing workforce. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of RNs is projected to grow 6 percent from 2022 to 2032, faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for healthcare services is expected to increase due to an aging population that has more complex medical needs.

TCC offers two distinct nursing tracks—the Career Mobility (LPN/Paramedic to RN) Track and the Traditional (RN) Track. The Career Mobility Track, spanning three semesters, provides an accelerated pathway for LPN/Paramedics to transition into registered nurses. The Traditional Track, completed over four semesters, serves as a comprehensive route for aspiring RNs. Graduates of the program earn an Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree and are eligible to take the NCLEX-RN exam.

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