



RISING OUTCOMES

Together we will inspire students and transform communities. **FALL 2023**

NURSING FACULTY IGNITED PASSION IN GAJESKI

Sylvia “Mimi” Kubsch, Lorraine Noll and Harriet Wichowski were mentors to many nursing students, including an ambitious Sharon Gajeski, who came to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay in the 1980s for its newly launched BSN Completion Program.

Kubsch, Noll and Wichowski were trail blazers and the passionate faculty who created the Completion Program when there was no other like it in the state.

Gajeski would eventually become colleagues with her mentors, and now, is preparing to retire from UW-Green Bay as a member of the nursing faculty who launched the newest nursing degree program, a prelicensure four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN).

“It’s just exciting, thinking back to 2018 when we started planning those first classes, and then in 2021, teaching during the (Covid-19) pandemic, and to see the first class graduate,” says Gajeski, RN, MSN and assistant teaching professor.

“I’m grateful I was here during this time and had the opportunity to be part of something so successful for the University, and for the area to have another nursing program.”

Kubsch, Noll and Wichowski’s energy and commitment to teaching lit a fire in Gajeski, who soon set herself on a path to becoming an educator, too.

“I always, always had a love for learning and education,” she says. “I enjoy seeing that light bulb moment in students — seeing their growth in a clinical setting from that very first time when they’re nervous and are asking me to come into (the pa-



UW-Green Bay nursing students Ashlyn Gerber (left) and Emily Bushnell stand with Sharon Gajeski (far right), RN, MSN, assistant teaching professor, in the Aurora BayCare Nursing Skills Center. Gajeski is a UW-Green Bay alumna of the BSN Completion Program, and will retire in May 2024 after 16 years with UW-Green Bay’s Nursing and Health Studies department.

tient’s) room with them, and being able to guide them through that. I love sharing that experience. We’ve all been there.”



Pearson

Nursing advisor Ruth Pearson describes Gajeski as passionate and dedicated to students. “Sharon has impacted each nursing program offered at

UW-Green Bay — most noteworthy is her involvement with BSN, both in development and teaching. She truly embraces our mission — together we inspire students and transform communities.”

A Green Bay native, Gajeski enrolled at Bellin College in 1980. She completed her general education classes at UW-Green Bay to complete an associate degree in nursing (ADN) and nursing courses at Bellin. As she began her first nursing job in orthopedics and neurology for Bellin Hospital, she also started classes in the BSN Completion Program at UW-Green Bay.

Like many young nurses, even today, Gajeski worked at the hospital nights and weekends and took classes part-time. “The great thing about that program is that (the faculty) helped us apply the learning right while we were working. Tying

Continued inside



BUILDING FOR TOMORROW

College of Health, Education and Social Welfare



Dear friends and alumni,

"A strong healthcare system is the foundation of our communities' well-being and it's also

the foundation of a healthy economy." — Secretary Amy Pechacek, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

I agree with Secretary Pechacek! It's for these reasons that we built the prelicensure nursing program at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and are working to grow nursing and health studies offerings and enrollment.

Our first cohort of prelicensure nursing students graduated in May 2023 and were quickly hired to fill open nursing positions. Most were hired by our local healthcare organizations. These new nurses were vitally needed in our nursing workforce. In fact, healthcare systems are asking us if we can prepare even more nurses.

I am pleased to share that UW-Green Bay recently received a \$150,000 grant from the David L. and Rita E. Nelson Family Fund within the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. This matching gift will help to expand the number of students admitted to the prelicensure program. We are

appreciative of this generous gift and are up to the challenge of raising the remaining \$150,000 match.

This is important help and recognition on the heels of receiving a Wisconsin Workforce Innovation Grant to build teaching capacity and the final year of the prelicensure nursing. Launched in 2022, the pilot project has been effective in engaging our healthcare partners in a new way. We have had outstanding feedback from our partners, including Aurora BayCare Medical Center, HSHS St. Vincent Hospital and Bellin Health.

Jenna Liphart-Rhoads, RN, PhD, assistant professor, has prepared 10 nurses employed at our partner organizations to serve as co-clinical instructors to teach clinical groups of nursing students.

We continue to think big and address community needs with innovative solutions. Thank you for your support of UW-Green Bay nursing.

Sincerely,

Dean Susan Gallagher-Lepak, RN, PhD
College of Health, Education and Social Welfare

Contact: 920-465-2034; gallaghs@uwgb.edu

Make a difference. Help with one of these needs:

- Sponsorship of a nursing skills lab simulation station, \$10,000 (6 stations)
- Sponsorship of nursing health assessment stations, \$20,000 (8 stations)

Gifts can be recognized with a wall-mounted plaque, or be made anonymously. Use the enclosed envelope or go to www.uwgb.edu/foundation. Thank you!

GAJESKI | From Front Page

that all together made it so real — they helped us realize the difference it could make in our careers and our practice," says Gajeski.

While working as a staff nurse at Bellin, Gajeski became a clinical educator and precepted student nurses. That's when she fell in love with teaching. Gajeski completed a Master of Science degree in Nursing, education emphasis, at UW-Oshkosh. This led to a teach-

ing position at Bellin College — her first experience working as a colleague alongside faculty who had been her teachers.

In 2007, she returned — again — to UW-Green Bay, this time as a nursing advisor before shifting to her current role as assistant teaching professor.

"It has been a highlight of my career to a part of the (BSN) cur-

riculum design and new program launch. This was from the ground up," she says. "We're watching as the first class takes their licensing tests and we get as excited as they do when they share the news that they passed."

"I feel blessed that I have had the opportunity to cross paths with so many students and nurses over the years."

DREAMS GROW FROM UGANDA TO UWGB

From more than 7,700 miles away, Esther Nalukwago envisioned her future as a Phoenix. It was a bold move that no one in her family had ever done before. She was going to college. She had done well in school, and she was ready.

She left her home in Uganda in 2018 and arrived at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay dressed for summer in wintry December. The change in weather was startling. But it was minor compared to the changes that Nalukwago would experience over the next four years.

On May 13, 2023, she became a member of the first graduating class of UW-Green Bay's traditional, four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program. She works as a registered nurse in the surgical unit at HSHS St. Vincent Hospital in Green Bay, and now envisions a new future: operating a health clinic utilizing American medical practices back home in Uganda.

"My ultimate hope is to open my own clinic and have it set up like American style and practices," she says. "Basically, how (Americans) treat patients, they prioritize the patients, whereas back home, it's not the case."

When Nalukwago was very young, her father passed away. A family from Green Bay chose to support her and her brother and made it possible for the siblings to remain with their mother in Uganda. When offered the opportunity to attend college and live with her host family in Green Bay, she took the leap with the intent to return home after graduation.

She enrolled and earned a seat in the BSN program. "Halfway through, I kind of started to question if I was supposed to be in the program. Things got harder as we advanced," she says.

It's not uncommon, says Sharon Gajeski, RN, MSN, assistant teaching professor, for nursing students to



Esther Nalukwago, RN, stands in front of the statue of St. Anthony of Padua on the eighth floor of HSHS St. Vincent Hospital in Green Bay.

struggle with the demands of course work and clinical rotations during their junior and senior years.

"I'm so impressed especially with students who speak English as their second language and come from different cultures. I'm amazed, especially by Esther. I loved seeing the growth over the course of the program."

Nalukwago says nursing faculty like Gajeski, helped motivate her. "I thought about my country and how badly we need health care workers. I knew at some point, I'm going to have to move back and I want to set myself up for job security."

Nalukwago passed the state licensure exam in late July. She had already started her fulltime job at St. Vincent's Hospital. It's a job she enjoys and intends to stay for a few more years before returning home.



CHAIR'S REPORT

We are excited to share the successes of the first class of prelicensure Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) graduates, who participated in the University's first pinning ceremony and graduation in May.

Many employers have a strong preference for nurses to be BSN prepared. The prelicensure program helps ensure a well-prepared nursing workforce.

2023 traditional BSN graduate data

93%

NCLEX-RN pass rate

77%

Employed in health care in Green Bay

88%

Employed in health care in Wisconsin

Sampling of post-graduation roles: medical/surgical, intensive care, emergency department, behavioral health

We also saw a large number of BSN Completion Program graduates graduate in May. Like many alumni before them, completing the BSN Completion Program provides greater opportunities for career and educational mobility.

Many health fields continue to grow — our programs include Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Health Information Management and Technology Program (BS HIMT), Health and Wellness Management (MS HWM), and the newest program, Community Health Education (BS CHE).

We couldn't be more proud of all of our graduates who are contributing to positive health outcomes.

Christine Vandenhouten

Director of Nursing Programs and Chair of Nursing and Health Studies Department





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Nursing Department at 920-465-2826 or nursing@uwgb.edu



HEALTH INFORMATION LEARNING OPTIONS ON THE RISE

Positions in healthcare outside of patient care roles are in high demand, and to help meet our community's need, UW-Green Bay offers a bachelor's degree in Health Information Management & Technology (HIMT). It is a fully online program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM).

The program is led by experienced faculty from across the UW System. Heidi Neverman, MSN, assistant teaching professor at UW-Green Bay, recently passed the Certified Health Data Analyst exam from the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA). This credential affirms her expertise in health data management and analysis.



Neverman

HIMT Degree: The HIMT program focuses on developing graduates' skills to navigate and adapt to changing regulations, technologies and governance surrounding patient information. This expertise is essential in maintaining the quality of health care by ensuring that patient information is accurate, accessible and secure.

Certificate Option: UW-Green Bay also offers an online Health Information Management (HIM) certificate for students with a prior bachelor's degree. This is a 24-credit fully online asynchronous curriculum comprised of existing HIMT courses.

Mentor program: HIMT graduates or

professionals working in the HIMT field are needed for a new mentoring project at UW-Green Bay.



Neal

Misty Neal, MBA, RHIA, HIMT Program Director and HIMT faculty member, is leading the project and is looking to pair HIMT students with mentors to meet virtually (or in-person if in the same city). The mentor program is aimed at first generation students and half of the HIMT students are in this demographic.

The Mentoring Project was started 2021-22 with business students and later added education, human biology and public and environmental affairs majors. The focus is to connect students with mentors in their discipline in meaningful ways. Contact: Misty Neal, nealm@uwgb.edu.