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Recession Proof: The Need for Nurses Continues to Rise at Record Rate

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With announcements of rising unemployment and an ongoing economic recession, Georgia Southern University Nursing graduates are finding that they are not only in high demand, but those employers are fiercely competing for their services upon graduation. Among the highest ranked Nursing program in the state of Georgia, Georgia Southern University is seeing not only increased interest in its graduates, but also a rise in applicants to its highly competitive program.

‘It is really amazing to see the interest from not only employers, but also the increase in the number of applicants to our program,’ said Jean Bartels, Ph.D., professor and chair of the School of Nursing at Georgia Southern University. ‘Employers continue to aggressively recruit our students, considered to be the best in the state, both at the undergraduate and graduate level.’

Some students within the School of Nursing at Georgia Southern are not only receiving one or two job offers, but receiving them before they even graduate. In fact, more than two thirds of the December 2008 graduating class received two to three job offers from health care agencies both in and out of state. For area health care agencies, Georgia Southern graduates were the most heavily recruited Nursing graduates of any regional University. In fact, one large metropolitan hospital hired only Georgia Southern graduates this December. A recent news story by the Associated Press noted that some employers are becoming very creative going as far as offering red carpet treatment and gas cards just to entice job seekers to attend job fair. ‘Nearly every recruiter that comes to Georgia Southern’s campus is trying to find a way to stand out versus the competition. In such a competitive market, recruiters are definitely searching for unique ways to attract graduates.’

Demand on the Rise

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 233,000 additional new jobs will open for registered nurses each year through 2016. That is on top of about 2.5 million current positions. When you take into consideration that only about 200,000 candidates passed the required RN licensing exam in 2008, the need for new nurses becomes even more alarming.

According to Bartels, Georgia ranks 42 nationally in the supply of RNs creating an RN vacancy rate of as high as 15 percent, well above the national average. By 2012, Georgia alone will have an estimated shortfall of more than 20,000 nurses. ‘Even with a best-case scenario, assuming all nursing graduates pass the licensure exam, remain in Georgia, and work full time, it is estimated

that with current capacity and practices, the state will only be able to produce a maximum of 12,000 of the needed 20,000 RNs by 2012.”

‘The need for well-educated nurses is not only tied to the increased demand for healthcare, but can also be attributed to increasing numbers of retiring nurses,” said Bartels. Nurses are retiring at a faster rate than Universities can train and supply new nurses not to mention addressing additional need on top of that.”

Becoming More Competitive

Bartels is also seeing another trend the desire of current nurses to earn additional higher degrees in their field Georgia Southern University offers several programs that have grown rapidly in the past year. These include the RN-BSN program where a currently registered nurse may earn a bachelor’s degree through a completely online program. In addition, the University also offers a Master of Science and Nursing and this past year introduced a Doctor of Nursing Program (DNP). The RN-BSN and DNP are offered completely online while the Master of Science in Nursing is taught through a combination of online and classroom instruction.

All three programs have been designed for nurses working long hours or varying shifts. There is an obvious interest in achieving additional nursing education and we designed the programs so that nurses could not only pursue their degree, but do so while they continued to work,” said Bartels.

One need that Bartels continues to reinforce is the need for additional nursing faculty. ‘I am trying to search for a faculty member right now to fill a position and there are just not enough faculty members to go around.” To counter this trend, programs like Georgia Southern have launched doctorate level programs designed to prepare nurses not only for advanced nursing practice, but also to return to the classroom to teach what they have learned.” Georgia Southern’s Doctor of Nursing Practice program is one of only two of its kind in the state and now students have access to one of the nation’s top nursing programs at any location with an Internet connection.”

With current economic conditions, demand for new nurses, the challenge to provide additional training for current nurses and the need for new faculty, Bartels says creativity is the key. ‘You’ve got to be creative, persistent and willing to step outside the box,” she says. ‘At Georgia Southern we are continually looking for new ways to not only address the existing shortage, but prepare for expected future demand.”

Prospective students may find out more about Georgia Southern’s nursing programs at: www.georgiasouthern.edu. The application deadline for the Doctor of Nursing Practice program is March 1, 2009. The RN-BSN program and the Master of Science in Nursing program accept applications throughout the year.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University, offers more than 110 degree programs serving nearly 18,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. The University, one of Georgia’s largest, is a top choice of Georgia’s HOPE scholars and is recognized for its student-centered approach to education. Visit: www.georgiasouthern.edu.