

## Online nursing program earns high marks from national reviewers

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/22917/online-nursing-program-earns-high-marks-from-national-reviewers/>

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh College of Nursing (CON) educational leaders who first envisioned it admit they weren't exactly sure what would come of "ACCEL" when it launched.

The innovative, hybrid College of Nursing Accelerated Online Bachelor to BSN option allowed individuals with bachelor's degrees -- meeting meticulous admissions criteria -- to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 12 months.

Sounded appealing, leaders thought. However, like any novel program, this one broke new ground, integrating online teaching technology, cutting-edge course scheduling and on-campus and remote site classrooms and clinical education experiences. There were natural questions: Would students embrace it? College of Nursing Dean Rosemary Smith said prior CON administrators thought it might "have a short life."

They are glad to admit they're concerns were unfounded.

A meticulous, three-year review of ACCEL funded with a nearly \$300,000 "Evaluating Innovations in Nursing Education (EIN)" grant by the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, found the option compares well with traditional programs, is more than financially self-sustaining and yields graduates with high degrees of skill and satisfaction.

"This is not only a strong endorsement of our program, it's also an affirmation that we're doing our part to develop high-impact, high-quality online programs at UW Oshkosh that propel students' professional nursing careers while answering the demands of the health care industry," Smith said.

Almost 700 students from nursing programs around the United States were involved in the review project, including May and October 2006, 2009 and 2011 graduates of ACCEL. UW Oshkosh's CON leaders gathered on Oct. 19 to learn the results of the EIN review.

ACCEL is comprised of online theory courses and clinical rotations that take place in the students' home communities and are supervised by specially trained "preceptors" in provider settings, such as hospitals. The option incorporates an innovative mix of technologies, including "Second Life," a virtual environment in which students interact with professors, their fellow students and patient avatars.

The grant was approved in 2010. UW Oshkosh program administrators wanted to gauge the effectiveness of the ACCEL option. The EIN initiative supported evaluations of programs around the nation that are expanding teaching capacity and/or promoting faculty recruitment and retention in schools of nursing. In 2010, UW Oshkosh was one of four recent EIN grant recipients.

The EIN review found:

- Both classmates and professors were easily accessible – almost around the clock -- via the 12-month option’s online technology.
- Students lauded the convenience of having a diverse number of “preceptors,” or practical learning experience collaborators and sites, such as clinics and hospitals in the New North region.
- “The ACCEL and traditional students who stayed in their programs all graduated.” There was “no significant difference in the students’ overall scores on the ATI RN Comprehensive Predictor exam...” “Both programs scored the same on the RWJ Student Assessment of Nursing Education” and “ACCEL students did better on NCLEX (the National Council Licensure Examination) on 1st attempt.”

“Many (students) said, ‘If I could not have been able to participate from my home community, I would not have done this,’” said Dr. Terry Gibson, a member of the EIN grant review team that deeply examined ACCEL and other programs. “They said, ‘You could be working at 2 a.m. in the morning and you could look down at Skype and see who was there.’”

“They said they could just not believe that this was the only experience they had where the faculty were so responsive,” Gibson said.

Dr. Chere Gibson, who also helped conduct the EIN review, said students in ACCEL also came away from the program with “higher levels of self-confidence in working with physicians and with patient families” than students in some of the more conventional programs examined.

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- [UW Oshkosh College of Nursing ACCEL program](#)