



UPDATE

SUNY Upstate Records Greatest Enrollment Increase in more than a Decade

Peter Beatty, PhD, Central Region Office Director

The New York State Area Health Education Center (AHEC) System's nearly 10 years of work to generate interest in health careers appears to be bearing fruit at SUNY Upstate Medical University, which has recorded its largest enrollment increase in more than a decade. For the 2008 academic year, 1,377 students are enrolled, up nearly 10% from 2007.

"We need to be part of the solution to the nationwide shortage of health care professionals, and increasing our enrollment

is one of the ways we can make good on our promise and embrace our mission of helping to meet the area's health care needs," said David R. Smith, M.D., President of SUNY Upstate Medical University.

The incoming class in Fall 2008 was 26% larger than in 2007. Much of that growth came in the College of Nursing, which this year accepted 152 students into its bachelor's, master's and certificate degree programs (76% more than 2007).

"We have accepted the challenge to double our efforts in strengthening and increasing the ranks of nursing," said Elvira Szigeti, R.N., Ph.D., Dean of the College of Nursing. Dr. Szigeti is a member of the Board of Directors of the Central NY AHEC and the NYS AHEC System Advisory Board.

Szigeti said the increase is due in part to the faltering economy. "Nursing has always been

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WNY R-AHEC Connects with MAPS Students at SUNY Geneseo

Sally Wing, Western New York Rural AHEC Special Projects Consultant



Some SUNY Geneseo MAPS students participate in recent Health Care Career Expo.

November marked a very exciting point in the Western New York Rural Area Health Education Center's (R-AHEC) outreach efforts to offer programs to undergraduate pre-health students.

R-AHEC attended the Geneseo Chapter of the Minority Association of Pre-Health Students (MAPS) Careers in Health Care EXPO at SUNY Geneseo. The 50-plus MAPS students, who were in

their first year of organizing on the campus, showed great enthusiasm and determination in their eagerness for information about AHEC and health professions.

The mission of the MAPS organizations across colleges and universities is to "provide under-represented pre-health students with knowledge, skills

and experience that are both pre-requisite to and affiliated with becoming a professional in health care fields." This mission is a natural fit with R-AHEC's mission to "improve health and health care through education."

Following the MAPS event, R-AHEC

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Survey Shows Pipeline Achievements

In late 2007 the NYS AHEC System conducted a statewide evaluation to measure the impact of its programs targeting students in grades K-12. As part of this, a survey was developed to track former AHEC pipeline/enrichment program participants. Some 74.1% of respondents plan to pursue a health care career. Most students (86%) who plan to or are pursuing a health care career responded that participation in an AHEC program influenced that decision.

The results of this survey indicate the NYS AHEC System is accomplishing the goal of connecting students to health care careers. To view the complete report, go to: www.ahec.buffalo.edu

Enrollment

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a career that has been immune to economic cycles — nurses are needed 24 hours a day in every corner of the state,” she said.

Another reason for the class size increase is the growing necessity of having advanced education in nursing, Szigeti noted. “Advanced degrees in nursing are becoming more important as nurses take on more responsibilities at the bedside, in research laboratories and in hospital leadership,” she said.

While the College of Medicine incoming class remains the same as Fall 2007 (160 students), it has a decidedly Empire State feel to it this year, thanks to changes in admissions policies long advocated by the AHEC Central Region Office. Eighty-one percent (130 students) of the incoming class is from New York, up from 49% a year ago. This year marks the largest number of

New York state residents in the incoming College of Medicine class since 2003. The percentage of the class from rural counties in the state also jumped dramatically, from 11% in 2007 to 26% in 2008.

“Our enrollment increase, especially among state residents, exemplifies the College of Medicine’s commitment to educate and train a strong cadre of medical professionals who have roots in New York and may seek opportunities to care for patients here,” said Steven J. Scheinman, M.D., SUNY Upstate Senior Vice President and Dean of the College of Medicine. “I believe that our admissions process has struck a good balance between accepting the best students regardless of state of origin and our obligation to the people of New York to educate physicians who are more likely to remain in the state.”

Also enjoying an enrollment surge is the College of Health Professions, which enrolled its largest class in the last five years.

The number of students in the 2008 class is 146, up from 131 students last year and 119 in 2004. The college prepares students for a variety of health professions, including cardiovascular perfusion, radiation and physical therapy, many of which also face shortages across the state.

“What we are seeing is a realization that health care can provide steady, good paying jobs with a beneficent mission of providing comfort and care,” said Hugh Bonner, Ph.D., Dean of the College of Health Professions and a member of the NYS AHEC System Statewide Advisory Board. “We’re also seeing an increased interest and understanding in the high schools that the health care jobs are not solely physicians and nurses.”

Last fall, SUNY Upstate Medical University unveiled plans for new classroom and teaching space as a way to accommodate a 30% growth in enrollment. Smith noted, however, that recent cuts in state support for SUNY may slow enrollment growth.

MAPS Students

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outreach expanded with a series of meetings and discussions that included St. Bonaventure University and the University of Rochester, as well as SUNY Geneseo. Students and counselors have identified a need for information on health careers, pre-admission policies, tutorial help in math, sciences and in pre-MCAT areas, and ongoing case management-advisement. In response, R-AHEC has arranged — with the help of Denise McGuigan, MEd., Associate Director of Predoctoral Education at the University at Buffalo (UB) School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and Renee Cadzow, PhD, NYS AHEC System Evaluation Director — a two-day event in January at the UB and Daemen College campuses. It will include four sessions of hands-on activities, lunch with current UB medical students, faculty and staff, and presentations by admissions faculty from the various schools.

In addition, two half-day interactive videoconferences, hosted by R-AHEC and featuring Dr. James Flowers, Harvard/MIT Med School Graduate and Chief Intellectual Officer for Genesis E-Learning Systems, LLC, will be held in February or March. This two-part event will cover verbal reasoning strategies, essay writing strategies, comprehensive and pertinent science and math content

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review, and anecdotes for student success. R-AHEC intends to open the conference to pre-health students from St. Bonaventure, SUNY Geneseo and University of Rochester MAPS members.

Spring 2009 plans include widening R-AHEC’s outreach efforts to include

visits with students and faculty from Genesee Community College, Monroe Community College, Keuka College and Daemen College to assess their needs for R-AHEC pre-health professions programming. In addition, a five-day Summer In-Residence Interdisciplinary Externship is in the early planning stages for 5 to 8 students selected from those participating in R-AHEC’s post-secondary programs. Selected students will spend a week this summer at R-AHEC’s Thiel Hospitality House, meet with various health professionals, listen to invited health professions guest speakers, and shadow in various health care units at the Wyoming County Community Healthcare System.

Recent efforts to target post-secondary minority and underserved students have been very well received by the colleges and universities approached. Many students at the undergraduate level have not made career choices and R-AHEC looks forward to the opportunity to help expose undecided students to the array of available healthcare careers.