

June 2020

# RN to BSN

A newsletter from  
THE DEPARTMENT OF NURSING

AT SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

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## RN to BSN Day at SMSU

The Department of Nursing is excited to share a new, upcoming event for all of our SMSU Nursing Students. We are planning for our first RN to BSN Day at SMSU in the Fall 2020 semester.

In the past, the Department of Nursing has created opportunities for our RN to BSN students to come to campus for three specific courses in the RN to BSN Program. Listening to our students, we have learned that there are things students really liked about our on-campus days, but there were also challenges they faced with those on-campus days. Following our student needs, we are moving to an **RN to BSN Day at SMSU** starting this fall. The RN to BSN Day at SMSU will provide students with the opportunity to meet faculty and peers while being surrounded by resources that will help them facilitate their success in the RN to BSN Program. Some examples of resources include:

- an overview of each course, including the major assignments
- guidance using SMSU Library resources
- guidance using One Drive
- help with APA style writing, as well as using the Writing Center and Tutor.com
- tips for navigating D2L Brightspace effectively and efficiently
- opportunities in Public Health and how to register to be a Public Health Nurse
- organizational skills helpful to the RN to BSN student
- using the RN to BSN Program Information Center
- scholarships
- SMSU Health Services
- Financial Aid
- Career Services
- Counseling and Testing Services

We plan to continue to hold this event once a semester for all RN to BSN students and are pleased to be able to continue to meet the needs of our nursing students!

written by Laurie Johansen



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# Nursing Student Services Coordinator



## **Stella, what brought you to SMSU?**

Love brought me to Marshall, MN from Texas. I have lived in Marshall for approximately 10 years. I graduated from SMSU in the fall of 2015 with my Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). During my time as an RN to BSN student at SMSU, I received a quality education and excellent experience; I will like to provide the same experience to prospective and current nursing students. As alumni, I have attended several events at SMSU. I loved the community/ family-like environment SMSU represents. I am excited to be part of the Mustang family.

## **Stella, what do you look forward to as a new team member in the SMSU Department of Nursing?**

Every nurse has an area of expertise. I look forward to the knowledge sharing, open communication, collaboration, and learning from the incredible faculty and staff members in the SMSU Department of Nursing and other areas of the campus community. I look forward to teamwork towards the success of students and the nursing program.

## **Stella, what do you feel you will add to the student experiences in the SMSU Department of Nursing?**

I am a nurse who naturally cares, supports, and assists people. I plan to provide excellent one on one support to students to ensure they succeed. Most nurses in the RN to BSN program are working nurses and have different work schedules. I plan to be available in person or remotely to ensure their educational plan and goals are met. I will continue to build a strong professional connection with my fellow nursing colleagues in the SMSU RN to BSN Program to better advocate and serve them.

## **Stella, beyond the walls of SMSU, what are your personal interests and hobbies?**

I love to spend quality time with my family. I enjoy cooking, going to church, traveling, watching movies, and of course dancing.

written by Laurie Johansen

### **Application Process:**

- Apply to [SMSU](http://www.smsu.edu)
- Apply to RN to BSN Program

### ***RN to BSN Applications***

*The SMSU RN to BSN Nursing Program continues to admit nursing students every fall and spring semester. We are still accepting applications for fall 2020 and spring 2021. Information is available at <http://www.smsu.edu/academics/programs/rntobsn/>.*

*Associate Degree nursing students may apply in the last semester of their nursing program, with acceptance into the program contingent upon successful completion of their NCLEX-RN exam.*

## RN to BSN Students Face Unique Challenges

Faculty, staff and students have been adjusting to a new learning environment at Southwest Minnesota State University since returning from an extended spring break on March 30.

And while those adjustments have in some ways affected every area of the University, students enrolled in the RN to BSN program at SMSU are perhaps most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“All (medical) facilities are looking at manpower right now,” said Laurie Johansen, professor and department chair of the RN to BSN program. “They are creating lists of those who can be in acute care, or can be trained in a short amount of time. Our students are wrapped up in this. They are learning how to run ventilators; they are taking care of projected needs.”

Most of the 150 students in the RN to BSN program are working nurses, and the coursework is delivered primarily online. The demands of their jobs as they relate to COVID-19 have increase exponentially, she said. That means that flexibility is at a premium for both faculty and students, who a month ago were looking forward to the nurses’ pinning ceremony on May 8, which has been postponed to a later date.

“Our RN to BSN students are already working in, or being called to, the front lines, and are feeling taxed because many seasoned, experienced nurses need to move to critical care to care for the sickest patients. Ultimately, all areas of hospitals and nurses are being taxed,” said Lindsay Rohlik, Assistant Professor in the RN to BSN program.

Another barrier facing students with a two-year degree who want to pursue a four-year BSN degree is that testing centers – where AA students take their nursing board exams – were temporarily closed. “These are (potential) incoming students into the workforce and they need to take their boards before they can practice (and pursue a BSN degree),” said Johansen. “The logistic of that are being worked out.

“The format for course delivery hasn’t changed that much,” said Johansen. “Now we have to evaluate what’s appropriate for our students’ needs, and adapt what was originally set up for the online teaching environment. We are going to meet our students’ needs when they have time to have those needs met.”

What’s that mean? “We want the people they are caring for to be the priority right now,” said Johansen. “Our nurses have been in the know before the general public and the health care organizations in our region have done a good job about educating the workforce, and advocating for them. They saw this coming.”

Area counties have in recent weeks saw their first reports of confirmed COVID-19 cases. “It’s the tip of the iceberg,” Johansen said. “I project our curve will peak later than Minneapolis – we’ll have a slower peak, but we’ll hit it. We are ramping up right now.”

Faculty members like Johansen and Rohlik – themselves nurses – have a unique understanding, and empathy, for the RN to BSN students. “As nurses, we play a leading role in reducing confusion, correcting the flow of misinformation and providing health care at the front lines – it can be scary, yet rewarding,” said Rohik.

Johansen said faculty are being flexible regarding coursework. “We are looking at individualized plans for our students, while maintaining consistency,” she said. “What we need to do is reach out, and show our gratitude for our nurses on the front lines, and offer our support in any way we can. It takes a village to get through these times.”

There are 150 alumni who are graduates of the RN to BSN program, and they are the unsung heroes fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

written by Jim Tate



Laurie Johansen, left, pins an RN to BSN graduate. There are 150 alumni in the RN to BSN program.



## Avera Marshall Nursing Scholarship Recipient

The SMSU Department of Nursing is grateful for the generosity of Avera Marshall as they continue to provide the Avera Marshall Nursing Scholarship for our nursing students. The scholarship was developed to encourage nurses in the region to build upon existing knowledge and skills in order to advance their education. Scholarships do so much to assist the SMSU RN to BSN Program in meeting the healthcare needs of the region by providing a local opportunity for registered nurses to advance their education and pursue their career goals. A strong healthcare workforce is essential to provide access to quality medical care in our rural areas, and scholarships such as this help support the region by aiding in the building and sustaining of a skilled healthcare workforce.



The Avera Marshall Nursing Scholarship annually supports one student who is a resident of the region. The SMSU Department of Nursing is proud to announce that Sara Swenhaugen is the 2020 recipient of the Avera Marshall Nursing Scholarship. Following receipt of the scholarship, Sara sincerely shared the following:

*I am incredibly honored to be awarded the Avera Marshall scholarship. It took me many years to decide to continue my education in nursing and attain my BSN. I have four children and my husband at home who are my main focus always; they've encouraged me to put myself first and achieve this goal that I have. I feel I have been called to be exactly where I am in my nursing career. I work in a small, rural hospital where I know most everyone that I care for. There have been numerous times that I have made a life-changing difference in the life of my patients and their families; there is no greater reward than this. To be awarded this scholarship is so incredibly humbling for me. This scholarship justifies that I am in the right place in my education, my career and financially it helps ease the burden of paying for my education. I am honored to be a nurse, now more than ever during this pandemic. Nursing is stressful at times but also an incredible gift. Thank you for this scholarship to help me continue to achieve my goals.*

The SMSU Department of Nursing is grateful for generous donations to support our nursing students.

written by Laurie Johansen



Husband: Josh  
Aidan (13), Brooke (11), Chanse (8), Dominic (5)

**SMSU Nursing T-shirt** - SMSU Nursing Students or Alumni who refer a nurse to the SMSU RN to BSN Program will receive a SMSU Nursing t-shirt once the student is enrolled in the nursing program!