

CCGA Nursing Program Ranked Second Best in Georgia

By LAUREN MCDONALD The Brunswick News

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College of Coastal Georgia's Nursing Dean of Education, Health Sciences, and Nursing Patricia Kraft stands in the nursing program's simulation lab. Photo: Bobby Haven/The Brunswick News

A recent ranking recognized College of Coastal Georgia's nursing program as the second best in the state.

“The NCLEX-RN exam is used by all state boards of nursing across the United States to help assess a student's competency and is required for licensure,” according to the website. “Also, many state boards of nursing use the total overall NCLEX-RN pass rates for a school as one of the main ways to approve a school's ability to provide a nursing education in the state.”

This year's ranking is based on data from 2014-2017.

Southeast Technical College in Vidalia earned the No. 1 spot in the ranking.

CCGA's program includes both a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and an Associate of Science in Nursing program. The nursing program currently enrolls about 200 students.

Lydia Watkins, chair of the School of Nursing and Health Sciences at CCGA, said the program has had high pass rates in both its BSN and ASN programs for the past five years.

“There was a year our pass rates were not good, and we were not OK with that,” Watkins said. “... So we reviewed the curriculum in both programs to make sure there were no gaps in the curriculum.”

That effort led to a curriculum that focuses more on applied learning, rather than lecture-based teaching.

“We teach them how to think,” said Patricia Kraft, dean for the School of Education, Health Sciences and Nursing at CCGA. “We don’t teach them how to memorize. We teach them how to apply it, with hands-on learning.”

The program’s administrators also constantly research products that can better educate the students, Watkins said. Today they use an adaptive question program to help students review important course concepts that they can then apply in a hands-on learning setting.

The professors also write their own test questions and do detailed data analyses after each test.

“You’re able to see a lot of statistical analysis,” Watkins said. “We’re able to modify the exam based on that, to keep improving.”

CCGA’s nursing students also venture frequently out into the community for service learning projects, Watkins said, which benefit both the students and local organizations.

“That also is a different way to teach concepts, instead of just lecturing the material,” she said. “You teach them something, and they’re able to apply it.”

The program focuses on teaching leadership skills and professionalism as well, Watkins said, to prepare students for the work environment.

“We have such rigor with our program and such high expectations, that the students have to come up to our level of what we expect,” she said. “... We tell them that reflects on the school of nursing. Our expectations are very high in everything we do, and that just helps to mold the students. Then they expect more from themselves.”

Kraft said it’s the education in critical thinking that makes the nursing program stand out.

“We teach them to think and to analyze and synthesize and apply that knowledge,” she said. “That’s what makes them great nurses.”

Meg Amstutz, interim president of CCGA, said the college is honored to be recognized as one of the best in the state.

“This ranking speaks to both the caliber of our nursing programs as well as the commitment of Dean Patty Kraft, Department Chair Lydia Watkins, and all of the faculty to our students’ success,” Amstutz said.

Coastal’s ASN program received a 100 percent pass rate in 2016 and 2017. The BSN program received a 100 percent pass rate in four of the the last five graduating classes.

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing ranked CCGA’s BSN program as the No. 1 out of more than 2,000 programs nationwide in 2015 and 2016.

“The faculty, staff and students have had to work incredibly hard, and they’re extremely dedicated, and it shows in these national and statewide rankings and results,” Watkins said.