



SALPY AKARAGIAN ALWAYS INTENDED TO ATTAIN A PH.D. IN NURSING. Then life happened — she had a family, she was appointed to the California Board of Registered Nursing, she survived cancer (twice) and became involved in medical missions in Armenia. But last year, she was co-authoring an article with faculty member **HUIBRIE PIETERS**, who encouraged her to pursue her doctoral degree. “I knew it would be a lot of work, but after much thought I decided to put some of my other commitments on hold and do something for myself.”

Three years after the publication of the landmark *Future of Nursing* report, an update presented at the Institute of Medicine in December showed great progress in expanding and growing the profession of nursing. In one of the key areas — Transforming Education — the goal is to double the number of nurses with a doctoral degree by 2020. **DAVID VLAHOV**, dean of the School of Nursing at the University of California, San Francisco, cited the growth in the number of students in and graduates of the doctoral nursing programs.

The UCLA School of Nursing is doing its part. Since 2010, the number of doctoral students has increased 25 percent — from 47 to 62. And the School has developed innovative programs to increase the number and diversity of its Ph.D. candidates.

Returning to School — Or Staying On...

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the average age at which nurses get their Ph.D.s in the U.S. is 13 years older than Ph.D. earners in other fields, meaning that many nurses who return for their Ph.D. have spent a lot of time working in the clinical field. So what is prompting those nurses who have had years in their careers to come back for a doctoral nursing degree?

“It’s never too late to go back to school,” said Akaragian who helped to establish Armenia’s first baccalaureate-equivalent nursing program. She is hoping to engage the nursing students in Armenia in her research on high blood pressure and risk factors for the population there.

To encourage students to pursue a degree while they are still in school, the Bridges program targets highly qualified students to pursue doctoral study directly from their B.S. program.

MARIA YEFIMOVA, now in the Ph.D. program, did just that. “I do believe that continuing my education through the accelerated B.S.-to-Ph.D. program gives me an advantage over the traditional path of taking the time to work between degrees. I am more mobile and flexible, and my attention is not divided between various responsibilities that come with age. It is easier for me to adjust to the pace of the academic setting as I retain my skills as a student. Moreover, research skills I obtained from my undergraduate experiences have been invaluable in the doctoral program.”

THE FUTURE OF NURSING: BRIDGES TO PH.D.

Doctoral candidates at the UCLA School of Nursing are working on research that has implications for patient and public health.

Using group music therapy to reduce anxiety among people with Alzheimer’s Disease.

Documenting the physical effects of hookah smoking.

The experience of Latino adolescents with type 2 Diabetes Mellitus. (Funded by a National Research Funding Award)

Latent Tuberculosis Infection among Vietnamese in Orange County.

The use of Smart Home Technology to measure the daily activities of older adults.

Increasing Diversity in Ph.D. Students

The nursing program at UCLA is the most diverse program on campus and the doctoral program reflects that demographic too — 20 percent of the students currently in the program are African-American and 20 percent are Asian.

Because driving diversity is so important to caring for an increasingly diverse (and aging) population, in October 2012 the School and Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (CDU) received a five-year, \$1.4 million grant from the NIH to begin a partnership for enhancing diversity of nurses with research careers. With this grant, UCLA and CDU implemented an integrated plan of individual and institutional activities to prepare master’s degree nursing students from underrepresented minority groups with the tools needed to make a seamless transition to doctoral education.

Nursing students in the master’s program at CDU now learn about the role of the doctorally prepared nurse and research opportunities in nursing, particularly in contributing to reducing health disparities. “Health disparities among ethnic groups are becoming more pronounced as the population ages,” said **LINDA PHILLIPS**. “We need to find nurses who reflect these growing, diverse populations, have a better understanding and are more sensitive to their health needs and can design research leading to improved health outcomes.”

HAFIFA SIDDIQ is one of the doctoral students who moved from CDU to UCLA. “When I decided to become a registered nurse in high school, I wanted to be involved in the community in some way or another. I decided early on that community health/public health nursing would be a perfect fit for me. When I heard about the possibility of having a Bridges program (direct entry from M.S.N. to Ph.D.) at CDU, I was overwhelmed with excitement because I realized I didn’t have to go through five years of so much hospital experience to really do what I wanted to do. The Bridges program definitely had a huge impact on my decision because without it, I don’t think I would have realized my full potential of starting a research career very early on.”

Have You Thought About Getting a Doctoral Degree?

TIFFANY MONTGOMERY, a Ph.D. candidate wrote in *Reflections On Nursing Leadership* about what do with a Ph.D. in nursing. “Whatever you want! There are Ph.D.-prepared nurses who teach, conduct research, evaluate programs, write books, lead health care organizations and work for the government. At the doctoral level, nursing is less about hands-on patient care and more about the abstract thinking that helps move the profession forward. More than anything else, a nurse with a Ph.D. has the education needed to conduct research and add to the body of available nursing research knowledge.”