

BUILDING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES:

Patricia Garrity
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Judi O'Hara, CAGS, MS, RN, CNE, Assistant Professor, Director of Undergraduate, Nursing Education, Director, RN-BS Online Program



A passionate educator, lifelong learner and health advocate, Assistant Professor Judi O'Hara has served as a mentor and role model to hundreds of nurses. A nurse educator at Rivier since 1991, O'Hara joined the faculty after being impressed with the quality of the education that her brother received as a nursing student.

O'Hara brought to Rivier vast experience in a number of specialties. She served as an oncology/hematology nurse at New England Medical Center in Boston, a cardiac critical care nurse at Saint Louis University Hospital, a home hospice care nurse for the Visiting Nurse Association, and a clinical instructor at Jefferson Memorial Community College in Missouri, where she first experienced the rewards of being an educator. "The thing I enjoy most about teaching is inspiring students on their journey to become the best nurses they can be."



O'Hara's expertise has been put to good use within the Division of Nursing and Health Professions at Rivier University. There is constant activity in an environment where learning is not passive but very active. "You can find students in the Sim Lab caring for the Sim Family, or at bedsides in hospitals and other healthcare facilities throughout New Hampshire and Massachusetts," says O'Hara.

Advocates for the poor and powerless within our society, O'Hara, Nursing Instructor Bobbie Bagley, and their students help build healthier communities by engaging with representatives, senators and other leaders within the State. In recognition of their outstanding advocacy for Senate Bill 286, the Prescription Monitoring bill, they were presented with the 2012 Group Advocacy in Action Award by New Futures, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates, educates and collaborates to prevent and reduce alcohol and other drug problems in New Hampshire. O'Hara served for many years as co-chair of Rivier's Task Force on Alcohol and Other Drugs and serves on the New Hampshire Higher Education Alcohol and Other Drug Committee.

In addition, O'Hara and colleagues founded the Rivier Nursing Wellness Connection—serving the unmet needs of underserved and vulnerable populations within Greater Nashua. The Wellness Connection allows faculty to mentor students in clinical settings, provides hands-on opportunities for students to perfect their skills, and offers preventative services to Rivier and local communities. "The most valuable lesson I can teach my students is to respect the human dignity of each individual," says O'Hara. "This is the essence of the nursing profession and the mission of Rivier University."

Director of Rivier's online RN to BS program, O'Hara says she is amazed at how much she enjoys teaching online. "I feel like I know students better because everyone responds to discussions—I may not know what they look like, but I know the students through their posts." O'Hara makes sure the students get to know her, too. For the lab component of the Health Assessment course, O'Hara videotaped herself demonstrating some of the lab skills students need to learn. "In some ways, I'm doing the same things I would do teaching face-to-face," she says. These faculty online interactions continue the Rivier tradition of providing personal attention—even over the Internet.

For some nurses, it has been many years since they have been in school, and they may be anxious about returning to the classroom. The online RN to BS faculty are very attuned to the needs of adults returning to school and provide valuable support. "One of the best feelings is when these same nurses, who were so

anxious about starting the RN to BS program, meet with me just prior to graduating to announce they are applying to Rivier's graduate nursing program," proclaims O'Hara.

O'Hara brings enthusiasm and new ideas into the classroom by constantly refreshing her own skills. She is currently enrolled in Rivier's Ed.D. in Leadership and Learning, Nursing Track, and attends nurse educator conferences regularly. "Every day I am learning," says O'Hara. "I love to learn and this program has encouraged me to grow professionally as a nurse educator."

For O'Hara, Rivier is like a second home—a place where she is surrounded by caring and supportive colleagues who are role models and inspirations to her. "When I look up at the new statue of Blessed Anne Marie Rivier, I just feel so blessed and so proud to be a part of the Rivier community," says O'Hara. "I am so inspired by the Sisters who have moved the vision of Anne Marie Rivier forward." ■

Bio: Judi O'Hara

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Director, Undergraduate Nursing Education
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Specialties

- Multicultural Health
- Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention in Higher Education
- Health Assessment

Classes Taught

- Families and Health in a Multicultural Society
- Health Assessment
- Nursing Leadership
- Policy and Politics in the Nursing and Professional Nursing Capstone

Academic Philosophy

"As a facilitator of learning, I foster a learning environment that is inclusive and welcoming and where "kindness matters" is role-modeled and expected. Each individual brings a unique perspective formed by beliefs, values, and past experiences to the learning community. Within the community an individual's cognitive and emotional intelligence are appreciated and growth within the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning is facilitated.

Learning is an active process that takes place both inside and outside the classroom. Confucius sums up the importance of experiential learning through the quote, "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Active learning through simulation, clinical nursing experiences, and immersion allows students to interact with others. Students are given the opportunity to see, to do, and to understand through connections within the greater communities in which we exist. A guided reflection of the experience promotes deeper meaning of the learning for the student. My hope is to inspire students to be the best they can be, to make a difference in the world, and to respect and advocate the human dignity of each individual."