

## ANSWERING THE CALL

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Innovative Rivier Success and Visionary Program advances nursing community leadership and diversity



With support from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the University embarked on a program to answer the call for greater diversity in the nursing workforce.

HRSA initiated a Nursing Workforce Diversity grant program, which awarded Rivier nearly a million dollars to fund the Rivier Success and Visionary Program (RSVP) from 2014–2016. The diversity initiative strives to increase nursing education opportunities for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities, which are underrepresented among registered nurses (RNs).

“The Rivier Success and Visionary Program continues the University’s mission and tradition,” says **Sister Paula Marie Buley**, IHM, Rivier’s President. “In accommodating student’s needs and workforce demands, we fill a vital role in the local and nursing communities.”

The goal is to increase the graduation rate for these students and to build a nursing workforce that reflects the growing diversity of U.S. communities. According to a survey cited by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, nurses from minority backgrounds comprise 19% of the RN workforce, while the U.S. Census Bureau identified 37% of the population in 2012 as belonging to ethnic and minority groups and projects minority populations to become the majority by 2043.

RSVP students must meet all University admission requirements for nursing students, which are more stringent than those for students pursuing other academic majors; have demonstrated a strong work ethic; and commit to the summer enrichment program. **Dr. Judith Stanford**, RSVP Coordinator, is impressed with the students' dedication. "I am in awe of their devotion to the nursing profession, to their academic success, and to each other," she says.

The program offers support to RSVP students in several ways throughout the year: academic, communal, and financial. Summer enrichment and bridge programs, developed from grant funds, have provided students with academic and nursing profession workshops, introduction and access to University support services, peer and faculty mentoring, and engagement in community service and cultural enrichment events. Cocurricular activities were funded with an additional grant received from the Endowment for Health. There is also a strong focus on community building within the group; supporting each other through the rigors of the nursing program is a key component to their success. Sophomore **Rebeca Cruz** attests to the value of the RSVP community, "This program helps provide the foundation you need to start the year and opens you up to a circle of people who will see you through your four years—every step of the way."

The ultimate success of this program lies in Rivier's ability to sustain and retain these students through graduation, have them pass the RN licensure exam, and secure nursing positions. Results to date are positive. All students that joined RSVP in 2015 returned to the University for the fall 2016 semester—an impressive 100% retention rate. "These students have excelled in many ways," says **Paula Randazza**, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs. "They became ambassadors to new students, reaching out as leaders; nearly all got involved in extracurricular activities during their freshman year; and many are taking on campus leadership roles as sophomores."

"Our second-year students' achievements are nothing short of remarkable," says **Dr. Paula Williams**, Dean of the Division of Nursing and Health Professions. "What these students have accomplished thus far is a point of pride for themselves and for the University. I have no doubt that Rivier's RSVP graduates will not only serve their patients as highly skilled RNs, but they'll also serve as role models to the next generation of nurses." ■

## ***A Successful Start***

First-year student **Erica Rodriguez '20** shares her RSVP experience.



*Erica Rodriguez, Class of 2020*

### **What were your expectations coming into the program?**

Before the program, I was extremely nervous about having to move on campus. I don't have any siblings so I wasn't sure what to expect. I was also nervous about the classes because I thought I may be behind or not as prepared as other students.

### **What do you think now that you've completed the RSVP summer program?**

Now, I love the program and would do it all over again. The classes were so helpful, and so was all the faculty. I got to meet some amazing people that have the same goals and motivations that I have for the nursing program.

### **What was the biggest benefit of summer program for you?**

The biggest benefit was learning about the resources that Rivier has to offer and to know that there are so many people who are willing to help students in all majors with homework assignments. With this program, I now feel like a prepared freshman who is ready to take on the year.

### **If you had to describe your RSVP and Rivier experience to a high school senior, what would you say?**

Do it! It's a great opportunity to get a head start. By the end of the program, you won't want to leave all the new friends you've made.