

Wisconsin Bridges Case Study

ELL/CNA BRIDGE

Northcentral Technical College

Just as colleges strive to attract and retain students that represent the diversity of their district, health care organizations strive to develop a culturally competent workforce that represents the diversity of the community. However, these goals may be difficult to achieve. This problem is reflected at Northcentral Technical College (NTC), which provides training for the next generation of health care workers in the region. For example, the Southeast Asian population represents over 10 percent of Wausau's inhabitants, yet fewer than 3 percent of the more than 330 students enrolled in NTC's 2007-2008 Nursing Associate Degree program were of Southeast Asian descent.

The Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program is considered the "first rung" of the health career pathway. However, to date very few of NTC's Southeast Asian English Language Learning students have been able to successfully step onto this rung. Over the last two years, nearly 40 percent of Southeast Asian students enrolled in the program have either failed or withdrawn, and almost none have returned for a second try. Next steps along the health care pathway are subsequently beyond their reach.

Employers' desire for a more culturally representative workforce, combined with NTC's desire to increase the success rate of Southeast Asian students, led to the development of NTC's ELL/CNA Bridge program. The ELL/CNA project bridges the cultural and language gap, giving learners the necessary skills and confidence to move forward with greater success in the future. The ELL/CNA Bridge provides English language instruction that is directly relevant to the CNA program, in addition to covering federally-mandated health curriculum. Formulated with the Southeast Asian community in mind, the program involves two components: the contextualized ELL/CNA course delivers 140 hours of instruction over ten weeks, team-taught by an ELL instructor and a CNA instructor; ELL for CNA, which entails an extra 36 hours of instruction delivered concurrently by the ELL instructor, provides additional English language instruction plus skills like test-taking techniques or communication strategies designed to help students succeed in postsecondary education and the workplace.

While students can choose to stop their postsecondary education at CNA certification, NTC has formulated an extensive health career pathway which students can move along from the ELL/CNA Bridge Program entry point. As students move forward, they can choose from a variety of rungs on the health occupations pathway that do not require acceptance into the nursing program. CNA instruction and subsequent steps along NTC's career pathway create a solid foundation from which students can advance towards Registered Nurse should they choose to continue their studies. Whatever path each individual student chooses to take, the ELL/CNA Bridge is a valuable starting point, setting the stage for English language learner success as students benefit from increased language and college success skills.

NTC's Fall 2009 pilot of the ELL/CNA Bridge was a success. Seven students were enrolled, and all passed the program (including, notably, two students who had previously failed the traditional CNA program). One student was concurrently enrolled in General Anatomy and Physiology in which she earned an A-; she attributed this success to her ability to transfer the skills and strategies she learned in the ELL/CNA program. To date, all of the students except one have passed the state CNA exam, and two are working toward admittance into the nursing program.



"The students were competent and performed at a level that was, at times, above and beyond what was expected of a student. Both the instructor and the students seemed to blend in with the staff, and their presence was a benefit to all here at Marywood."

Colleen M. Hruska, Marywood Convalescent Center (clinical site for Northcentral's ELL/CNA students)

"We are true believers in this model. CNA and ELL faculty share their knowledge with students in a way that they can understand. Faculty and employers offering clinical sites have noticed the difference. Our students are more confident in their abilities. With this collaborative approach, we have seen 100 percent of our ELL/CNA students successfully complete the program. Because of this success, we are very interested in expanding this model along the health career pathway."

Deb Stencil, Associate Dean of Nursing, Northcentral Technical College

C O W S

center on wisconsin strategy