Hafner: A nursing milestone at SCF

By LARS HAFNER

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History will be made tonight at State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota when 38 students — SCF’s first baccalaureate graduates — receive a bachelor of science in nursing degree.

The graduates' proud march across the stage at Neel Performing Arts Center can be traced to a community demand that culminates with a fulfilled promise by SCF to meet our region’s higher-education and workforce needs.

In July 2008, my first month as president of the college, the most forceful voices I heard in community meetings were those of key health care leaders and nurses frustrated with unsuccessful attempts at having a locally available, full bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) program.

As a result, with approval of our forward-thinking Board of Trustees, we proposed the BSN as our first baccalaureate degree in the process of becoming a four-year state college.

Defining characteristics of SCF are a commitment to engage our community and an ability to move quickly and decisively.

On March 17, 2009, hospital and business leaders went with college officials to a meeting of the State Board of Education, where a strong outpouring of community support won approval for our proposal.

We appointed a dean and hired outstanding faculty with doctorates who designed, with involvement of local health care professionals, an innovative registered nurse-to-BSN program that could be completed in 15 months.
By July 2009, we had secured the necessary, difficult approval from the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to offer baccalaureate degrees.

More than 200 students applied for 50 available seats. In January 2010, as promised, classes started.

This beginning marked a milestone in transforming SCF into a four-year institution. Listening to and acting on community requests established a model for how we choose, plan and develop our baccalaureate programs based on quality and affordable access.

Already the SACS has fully accredited our nursing program. A visiting team of peer evaluators recently recommended, in the highest terms, accreditation by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission.

In the coming year we will offer bachelor degrees in early-childhood education, public-safety administration, homeland security, health-services administration (with gerontology and nutrition tracks) and energy-technology management.

In the approval stages are four-year degrees in middle school and secondary math and science, international business and trade, marine-industry management, athletic training and technology management.

While becoming a state college, SCF maintains its rock-solid foundation of two-year associate degree programs, including a new A.S. in biotechnology.

We have created a vital continuum of education, including partnerships with other institutions. For example, a student can complete our associate and bachelor degree in nursing and continue to a master’s and doctorate in nursing on our campus through our partnership with Florida State University.

Each diploma handed out to the BSN graduates will represent individual accomplishment, but also a promise kept to our community.

In the region’s education, economic and cultural life, we take great pride in being the change agent. The community speaks, SCF listens and acts, and our community benefits.

Dr. Lars Hafner is president of State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota.