

HELENA COLLEGE NURSING ADVISORY BOARD

Meeting on 11/13/2025 at 4:00pm Teams/DON 109

Minutes

Helena College Mission: Helena College Supports our diverse community by providing the paths and tools necessary to assist learners in achieving their educational and career goals.

Program Mission: To provide exceptional nursing education using innovative academic, simulated, and clinical experiences that prepare our graduates as safe, competent, direct-care nurses poised to meet the diverse healthcare needs of our community.

ATTENDEES

Sevda Raghیب – HC Director of Nursing	Deb Esposito – Helena Surgi Center
Laura Senn – HC Nursing Faculty	Joseph May - Touchmark
Courtney Radke – HC Nursing Faculty	Katie Manion - Shodair
Mary Bengtson – HC Nursing Faculty	Deb Charlton – MT VA
Jamie Garcia – HC Nursing Faculty	Brook Feist – St. Peters Health
Emily Gage – HC Nursing Sim Lab Manager	Molly Litchfield – St. Peters Health
Natasha Dalton – HC Nursing Coordinator	Kelli Dailey – St. Peters Health
Emma Watne – HC Nursing Student	Kimberly Guerrero – St. Peters Health

AGENDA

Program/Department Updates

- Introductions and updates to personnel
 - Full Time Faculty: Laura Senn, Courtney Radke, Jamie Garcia, Mary Bengtson
 - Sim Manager Emily Gage & Coordinator Natasha Dalton
 - 3 adjunct faculty – part time, teach 1-2 classes
 - 7 Clinical Instructors – Help supervise students in their clinical rotations and work closely with our faculty to be sure they are aligning the student learning in the clinical space with what they are learning in the classroom
- Enrollment updates & recruitment events
 - Enrollment: 20 Freshman cohort – first semester
 - 10 Sophomore cohort – second semester
 - 13 Junior cohort – third semester
 - 16 Senior cohort (Graduating Dec.2025) – fourth semester
 - 11 LPN students – 6 in Helena and 5 in the Hamilton area
 - Our Nursing application window is open – goal is to fill 20 RN spots and 16 LPN spots

Events: Courtney: We had our Career Fair in October. A lot of our community partners come to share job the opportunities and always have awesome swag. We encourage all levels of nursing students to attend. We received great feedback – it was brought to our attention a lot of the students would go to one or two booths, get the swag but not engage and ask about the opportunities they to offer. We are looking into

implementing a Career Fair Passport to be stamped by the vendors and can then be turned in for credit for their class – we hope this will help them to be engaged and get the most of the Career Fair.

The mock interview event brings together students and community partners for short, rotating interview sessions. Although students are initially apprehensive, they end up enjoying the experience and find it helpful for reducing anxiety about real interviews after graduation. Community partners volunteer to ask realistic interview questions, and both students and partners give positive feedback.

Natasha will send out save the dates for our upcoming April Nursing Career Fair. We have a lot of people from the community that want to come in and talk with our students in class – but due to the limited classroom time we would like to have them join the Career Fair to set up those presentations/conversations.

- Summary of last year's meeting and how we have used the information
Emily and Sevda met with some of the clinical partners over the summer and they shared some more specific feedback. Based on feedback, we added a more intensive pre-clinical day with skill stations to refresh nursing skills before students begin clinicals. The goal is to better prepare students, especially for their first clinical experience. The program is also working to improve students' critical thinking and time management through added practice in simulations and will continue evaluating these changes to enhance the clinical experience.
- Updates to equipment & curriculum
Equipment: We are always on the lookout for donated supplies, equipment, and grant funding to support student learning, especially for expensive items like bladder scanners, EKG machines, and medication dispensing units. Recent purchases, such as new beds and bedside tables, have helped replace outdated equipment. Overall, the goal is to continually improve the program by providing students with up-to-date resources and realistic clinical exposure.

Curriculum updates:

Jamie - OB and pediatrics courses to reduce student overload from using both ATI and a separate textbook. Previously, students found managing multiple resources overwhelming and costly. Starting this fall, the courses now rely solely on ATI, which uses a concise, bullet-style book and interactive "engaged modules" that loosely align with course content.

These ATI modules include interactive readings, audio options, videos, self-check questions, virtual simulations, client charting activities, and short post-assessments that guide students back to relevant content when they miss questions. Learning is student-led, allowing flexibility based on time and effort.

This shift has reduced the need to cover all content during class time, allowing more focus on key topics, case scenarios, and in-class activities. ATI's instructor resources, including detailed PowerPoints with notes, have been especially helpful and well received by students for studying and review.

Overall, the change has simplified learning resources, reduced conflicting information and costs, improved student engagement, and allowed for more effective use of class time, with plans to continue refining the approach based on student feedback.

Mary - redesigned the lab course after noticing that while students could perform individual skills well, they struggled to integrate multiple skills, communicate with patients, and think critically in realistic settings. To address this gap, the lab shifted from isolated skill check-offs to **mini simulations (SIMs)** that combine two to three skills along with patient interaction and education.

Initially, conducting in-person SIM check-offs was challenging due to time constraints and class size. After adopting Canvas, students were able to **record their SIMs using Canvas media recording**, which cannot be edited, ensuring authenticity. Students can practice and re-record as many times as needed before submitting, allowing them to manage test anxiety, practice intentionally, and submit their best performance.

Watching their own recordings has helped students self-reflect on communication, posture, and professionalism, effectively turning the process into a learning tool. This approach has improved students' ability to group skills, manage time, and apply critical thinking earlier in their training.

While occasional video upload issues occur, these are typically resolved by using library computers, indicating a device-related issue rather than a Canvas problem. Overall, the approach has received positive feedback and has been effective in making skills practice more realistic and cohesive, helping bridge the gap between lab and clinical practice.

Emma (senior nursing student) completed many prerequisites through dual enrollment in high school, which eased the transition into the nursing program and reduced the course load. She had a very positive freshman semester, appreciating the lab structure and strong first clinical experience, where students felt confident using their skills.

The small class size has been a major benefit, allowing for close relationships with faculty and peers and more individualized support. Clinical experiences across multiple sites—including the VA, Shodair, and St. Peter's—have been highly positive, with supportive nurses that helped ease fears about working on inpatient floors.

Overall, felt well guided through a challenging but manageable program with strong resources, especially the library and computer access. While technology can be challenging for some students, available support has been helpful. She values the increased integration of ATI into coursework and exams, noting that ATI-style practice is important since exams rely heavily on it. She suggests that even more ATI practice earlier in the program could better prepare students for testing and success. ATI follows the format that the NCLEX follows for their completion exam.

Emily – SIM/VR - describes simulation as an engaging and evolving way to prepare nursing students for real-world practice, including both physical mannequins and virtual reality (VR). While initially hesitant due to limited comfort with technology, increased support, exploration, and training helped reveal how beneficial VR can be.

VR places students in realistic hospital environments where they act as the lead nurse, allowing them to practice teaching, therapeutic communication, clinical decision-making, prioritization, and SBAR reporting in a safe space. Although students often struggle at first

due to unfamiliar technology, many report that after a few sessions they recognize its value and become more confident.

Students appreciate that VR provides a safe environment to make mistakes, reflect, and debrief, with learning reinforced through pre-work and post-simulation discussions. The wide range of available scenarios—including med-surg, mental health, pediatrics, and labor and delivery—helps deepen knowledge and reinforce concepts, especially when VR simulations align with upcoming live simulations.

Pass rates and relevant data:

Program Capacity

- LPN (Practical Nurse CAS): 16 students admitted per year (14 in 2024).
- RN Program: Up to 40 students per year (20 fall, 20 spring).
- RN/LPN application window currently open (closes Dec. 1 at 5:00 pm).

NCLEX Pass Rates

- **LPN NCLEX:** Nearly 100% pass rate across years; only exception in 2022 when 1 of 5 students passed on the second attempt. 2025 results pending.
- **RN NCLEX:** Strong outcomes—27 passed on first attempt and up to 31 on second attempts (2022–2024). All May graduates achieved a 100% pass rate.
- Retesting allowed after 45 days; Montana allows unlimited attempts.

Student Retention

- **Pre-LPN retention:** Improved from 50% (2023) to 86% (2024), reflecting strong advising and student support.
- **Pre-RN retention:**
 - Spring start: 69–70% (2023–2024).
 - Fall start: 72% (2023) but dropped to 56% (2024); reasons unclear—possible need for gap semester or life demands.

Student Demographics

- Average age:
 - LPN students: 33 years old.
 - RN students: 29 years old.
- Many students balance school with jobs and family responsibilities.

Dual Enrollment

- Allows high school students to earn college credit.

- Most common courses: Writing 101, College Algebra, Intro to Psychology.
- Benefits: Reduces course load during nursing program and accelerates progress.
- Availability:
 - 90% of Montana schools offer dual enrollment (slightly above national average).
 - Participation is lower: 18% of Montana students vs. 21% nationally.

Workforce & State Initiatives

- Governor prioritizes workforce development; healthcare is one of the top six focus areas.
- Encouraged to participate in workforce-focused forums and advocacy efforts.

Program Development & Pathways

- Exploring reinstating:
 - **CNA program** to create a pathway into nursing programs (high demand: 42–60 applicants for 20 slots).
 - **Formal LPN-to-RN Bridge program** (currently informal).
- Strong licensure outcomes and improving retention.
- High student interest in healthcare pathways.
- Continued focus on access, advising, and flexible pathways to support nontraditional students

Board Discussion

- **Student Performance (while in school or at clinicals)**
 - Clinicals - How are our students doing in their clinical rotations?
Debera Charlton MT VA: Have heard very good things from the students and their clinical rotations. J.M. the clinical instructor is incredible. She has built great repour with nurse managers and nurses across MT. J.M. is the reason the students are successful in their clinical rotations.
St. Peters: HC students are some of the strongest students we have, during their rotations on the impatient units – they are engaged, prepared and always willing to step in and learn.
Katie Manion - Shodair: Agrees, HC students are some of the strongest students.
 - Student Employment - Do you employ Helena College Nursing students? How are they doing?
Joseph May - Touchmark – Love having them. Hire them as casual employees with flexible schedules.
Sevda – no classes over the summer – class load changes each semester. School year can be more challenging.
St. Peters – had several HC students past and current are significantly more prepared than other students. This year they have had several that were interns that were kept

on throughout the fall on each inpatient unit. Majority speaking the HC students are well adjusted and are able to handle independent events of nursing after school.
MT VA – Hires HC nursing students – currently on a holding pattern.

- On the Job - What skills do our nursing students struggle with the most?

MT VA – We are an interprofessional team-based approach to care – so this might be a newer approach to students. Haven't heard any complaints.

Kelli Dailey – St. Peters Health - Time management is the biggest barrier/issue we hear about with our new grads.

Kimberly Guerrero – St. Peters Health – Documentation, time management, critical thinking, all very common and something we try to address in our Nurse Residency Program.

- Internships – Are you interested in offering winter break externships or summer internships to HC students?

- **Student Preparation (After Graduation) – will spend more time on this at our spring meeting**

- Nursing Employment - Do you employ any Helena College graduates?
- New Grad Hiring - What does a new grad need to know on day one of a new job with your company?
- On the Job - What non-technical (soft skills) are most important to you?
- Gaps in Knowledge – Have you identified gaps in knowledge or program offerings? What are your ideas?

- **Upcoming Needs (Healthcare Industry Changes)**

- Skill Sets - What trends, in technology or other areas, do you see in your industry that may require new skill sets for workers?

Debra Charlton - VA – AI

Laura Senn – we are looking at changing our policies to try and encourage more critical thinking about AI. It is being incorporated everywhere and we want our students to be able to evaluate AI and critically think about it rather than blindly believing the things AI tells you.

Sevda: We plan to update policies to encourage critical thinking about AI. Students often turn to AI because they feel overwhelmed, lack confidence or need help knowing where to start an assignment. We want to focus on teaching meaningful and appropriate ways to use AI. Instruction should highlight both the benefits of AI and the risks, and to teach students how to identify those risks. AI will affect everyone, so students need skills to think critically and responsibly about its use.

- Workforce Needs - What are your anticipated workforce needs? In 1 year, 3 years, 5 years?

Sevda: There is a strong statewide discussion and engagement around the need to graduate more nurses and expand the nursing workforce. Each nursing program has

an approved enrollment (20 RNs and 16 LPNs). If programs reach their capacity they can request a substantive change from the BON to increase enrollment.

Great Falls is seeing major activity and growth in nursing education –

- New nursing school being built by Bozeman Health
- Existing programs at Great Falls College and Providence
- Tuoro University looking to add a nursing program
- Providence moving to an accelerated nursing online program from Livingston and Great Falls

Other statewide expansions include Bitterroot College in Hamilton – they have a non-credit LPN online program with a flexible format.

All programs report to and are regulated by the BON – their primary focus is patient safety. Any changes must go through a review and approval process with the BOR.

Most programs pursue accreditation. There is a shared statewide curriculum, but each program delivers differently. Nursing programs stay in close communication to coordinate changes and support one another

- Collaboration - How can we better partner/collaborate with you to support industry changes?
- Satisfaction - Please rate your satisfaction with our graduates, specifically their ability to meet your workforce needs on a scale of 1-5.

Debera Charlton - VA – 5

Katie Manion - Shodair – 5

Kelli Dailey – St. Peters Health – 5

- **Program and Community Collaboration – for spring discussion**

- Nursing Program Presentations – Do you have any interest in presenting or helping train skills?
- Nursing Program Equipment – Do you have outdated supplies or equipment that you would be able to donate to our program?
- Student recruitment - What ideas do you have for recruiting new students?
- Membership - Are there other people or employers you would recommend for this advisory board?

Wrap-Up & Summary of Takeaways

Sevda: A follow-up will be sent to gather feedback, with the option for individual conversations if people prefer not to share online.

Developmental Psychology is strongly recommended for nursing students, especially in the summer, since it is required for the BSN curriculum.

Some students are completing RN-to-BSN coursework while still in the RN program, making Developmental Psych especially useful.



Statistics is also recommended, as it is a required course.

Next meeting will be in April, Natasha will send a save the date – welcome to come in person or there will be a Teams option.

If you have any questions or concerns we have a group email – hcnursing@helenacollege.edu. Reach out anytime or reach out to any of us individually and we will be happy to chat with you.

- Are there any other data points or discussion items that you would like to see included for the next meeting in April 2026? – no suggestions