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A LASTING LEGACY: DEAN CHRISTINE KENNEDY'S TRANSFORMATIVE YEARS AT RUSH

Kennedy leaves the college stronger with a new generation of faculty, greater transparency and a deeper connection to the community

Page 12

RUSH UNIVERSITY TOP-RANKED PROGRAMS

Rush University College of Nursing is honored to be recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* for our exceptional master's and doctor of nursing practice programs.





CONTENTS

5 **MESSAGE FROM OUR DEAN CHRISTINE KENNEDY, PhD, RN, FAAN**
Reflections on another year of strategic growth and valued partnerships

6 **INVESTING IN PEOPLE: HOW RUSH DEVELOPS ITS GREATEST ASSETS**
By providing mentorship, support and leadership opportunities, the College of Nursing nurtures staff at every stage of their professional journey

8 **DESIGNING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR TODAY'S NURSING CHALLENGES**
Three groundbreaking programs address gaps in nursing education and workforce development

11 **GEM STUDENT SPOTLIGHT**
Aiming to improve access and outcomes for the uninsured



12 **A LASTING LEGACY: DEAN CHRISTINE KENNEDY'S TRANSFORMATIVE YEARS AT RUSH**
Kennedy leaves the college stronger with a new generation of faculty, greater transparency and a deeper connection to the community

17 **PHD STUDENT SPOTLIGHT**
Integrating clinical research into practice

18 **ADAPTING TO CHANGE: HOW FACULTY PRACTICE NAVIGATES NEW REALITIES**
Funding challenges inspire creative solutions to ensure sustainability

20 **DNP STUDENT SPOTLIGHT**
Advocating for patients with mental health needs

21 **EMBODYING EXCELLENCE**
The Rush College of Nursing is proud to celebrate our distinguished alumni who continue to exemplify the impact of our educational mission

22 **SHAPING THE FUTURE OF NURSING THROUGH PHILANTHROPY**
Bedford Falls Foundation's support transforms nursing education locally and nationally

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On the cover: Dean Christine Kennedy, PhD, RN, FAAN, (right) and John A. Rich, MD, MPH

A NATIONAL LEADER IN NURSING EDUCATION SINCE 1865

Fast facts about Rush University College of Nursing

PREPARED FOR PRACTICE

95%

NCLEX PASS RATE

ACADEMIC PIONEERS

1st

endowed nursing dean in the nation

2nd

oldest clinical doctorate in the nation

TOP-RANKED PROGRAMS

#1

Doctor of Nursing Practice
- Illinois

#2

Family Nurse Practitioner; Adult Gerontology, Primary Care; Psychiatric Mental Health
- National

#3

DNP Leadership; Adult Gerontology, Acute Care
- National

DISTINGUISHED FACULTY

30+ AAN Fellows

26 Public Voices Fellows

21 Fellows in National Health Care Organizations

5 American Heart Association Fellows

2 International Nurse Researcher Hall of Famers

Past President of STTI

RUSH UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF NURSING

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Dear Friends,

As we close another transformative year at Rush University College of Nursing, I find myself reflecting on the remarkable resilience and innovation that defines our community. This has been a year of strategic growth, meaningful partnerships and the kind of forward-thinking solutions that nursing education desperately needs.

Our three new initiatives showcase our commitment to addressing the profession's most pressing challenges. The Nurse Educator Certificate program tackles the looming faculty shortage head-on, while our CRNA tuition forgiveness program removes financial barriers for students entering this critical specialty. The Clinical Research Management Certificate demonstrates our dedication to expanding opportunities where nursing science intersects with advancing patient care. Working alongside visionary donors like Bill Conway and the Bedford Falls Foundation has reinforced how aligned philanthropy can accelerate solutions to the nursing shortage while strengthening care for Chicago's most vulnerable communities.

What strikes me most profoundly is how our community continues to embody the values that make Rush exceptional. Our students are launching new organizations, advancing health equity work and building bridges to underserved communities. Alumni are ascending to leadership roles that transform entire health care systems. Staff members are creating pathways for professional growth while strengthening the fabric of our institution. We are also building on our legacy as leaders in the faculty practice space by expanding partnerships with for-profit partners.

This year has tested our adaptability in ways we couldn't have anticipated, yet we've responded with characteristic determination. Whether navigating shifting health care landscapes, evolving educational demands or challenges in research funding, our faculty, students and staff have demonstrated that resilience and commitment to our mission.

These aren't just impressive achievements or innovative programs. They represent a community where highlighting the work of others becomes the standard, where evidence guides our decisions and where every person can contribute to transforming our health care system.

Together, we're not just educating nurses. We're shaping the future of health care.

Sincerely,

Christine Kennedy, PhD, RN, FAAN
John L. and Helen Kellogg Dean
Rush University College of Nursing



Christine Kennedy, PhD, RN, FAAN



INVESTING IN PEOPLE: HOW RUSH DEVELOPS ITS GREATEST ASSET

By providing mentorship, support and leadership opportunities, the College of Nursing nurtures staff at every stage of their professional journey

KimberLee Goodar, College of Nursing student pursuing MSN degree

At Rush University College of Nursing, career development isn't confined to traditional pathways. It's about discovering potential, fostering growth and creating opportunities that align individual aspirations with the institution's transformative mission. Three staff members' journeys illustrate how the college creates an environment where careers don't just advance, they evolve in unexpected and meaningful ways.



Tawana Ellington, MPA, director of administrative operations



Anthony Mask, MS, assistant dean of strategic operations

Moving from IT to operations

When Tawana Ellington started at the IT helpdesk 11 years ago, troubleshooting computer problems seemed far removed from the heart of nursing education. Today, her story exemplifies how Rush recognizes talent wherever it emerges.

"I began my journey in the College of Nursing in 2014 as a project coordinator," Ellington reflected, describing a trajectory that moved from technical support to director of administrative operations. Her proudest moment came when she spearheaded the college's Adopt-a-Family initiative, demonstrating how the institution empowers staff to create meaningful change that extends far beyond job descriptions.

Finding support and success

KimberLee Goodar's nine-year evolution from part-time research assistant to a student in the Generalist Entry Master's program represents another dimension of the college's support philosophy. Her journey took on deeper meaning during a personal crisis in 2021, when an apartment fire left her displaced and overwhelmed.

For Goodar, "the outpouring of support from not only the college, but the entire Rush community" revealed the depth of care that characterizes the institution. This experience reinforced that Rush doesn't just employ people, it embraces them as family.

Now pursuing her MSN degree, Goodar reflected on the guidance and encouragement she's received: "I have been able to finish my bachelor's degree with more support than I could have imagined."

Pivoting during the pandemic

For Anthony Mask, 12 years at the college have been defined by what he called "progressive" growth, culminating in leadership that proved essential during unprecedented challenges.

His proudest moment came during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the college executed "an overnight pivot" that required nimble leadership and innovative thinking. This crisis response showcased how Rush empowers its staff to lead during critical moments, trusting them with significant responsibilities while providing the support necessary for success.

Thriving through mentorship

The common thread weaving through these diverse journeys is the college's robust mentorship culture. These relationships extend beyond traditional mentor-mentee dynamics. They represent a culture where faculty and staff naturally form supportive networks, creating an environment that both challenges and embraces. The accessibility of senior faculty and staff reflects the institution's understanding that collective growth strengthens the entire organization.

The college's approach to staff development reflects its broader mission of transforming health care through education and community engagement. By investing in its people, Rush ensures that staff members aren't just contributors to the mission, they're partners in its realization.

"The work done by the staff in the college is often not seen by the outside observer," said Christine Kennedy, PhD, RN, FAAN, the John L. and Helen Kellogg Dean, Rush University College of Nursing. "But their impact on our students, faculty and community is, without question, one of our greatest assets. We are so proud to be part of their careers."

DESIGNING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR TODAY'S NURSING CHALLENGES

Three groundbreaking programs address critical gaps in nursing education and workforce development



A new program at Rush provides tuition forgiveness for student registered nurse anesthetists.

The nursing profession stands at a crossroads. A looming faculty shortage threatens to exacerbate an already critical need for nurses, while specialized areas like clinical research and nurse anesthesia face their own workforce challenges. Rising education costs create additional barriers for students seeking advanced degrees, potentially limiting the pipeline of future nursing leaders.

Recognizing these interconnected challenges, Rush University College of Nursing has launched three innovative programs designed to strategically address gaps in nursing education and workforce development. Each initiative targets a specific challenge while contributing to a broader vision of strengthening the nursing profession.

Addressing the faculty crisis

The statistics are sobering: A significant number of nursing faculty are nearing retirement, and the profession isn't doing enough to ensure a robust pipeline of future educators. Although there are efforts at both national and state levels to prepare more graduate-level nurses, many don't receive the background in educational theory and practice needed to make a lasting impact in teaching roles.

"This is the time for bold, innovative strategies that bring our master's and doctorally prepared nurses into the fold as educators," said Frank Hicks, PhD, RN, CNE, associate dean for academic programs at the college. "When given the tools they need to be successful, I am confident nurses will answer the call to help educate the nurses of tomorrow."

Rush's solution is the Nurse Educator Certificate program, a five-course, 12-credit initiative designed to prepare experienced nurses to step confidently into teaching roles. The program gives nurses the skills, tools and perspective to thrive as educators in both academic and practice-based settings.

"We created this certificate because it allows nurses whose graduate work focused on advanced practice or research to build essential educator skills," explained Jennifer B. Rousseau, DNP, WHNP-BC, CNE, FAWHONN, NEC program director. "They leave the program ready to guide and inspire the next generation of nurses."

The program stands apart through its emphasis on culturally responsive pedagogy and health equity. Students learn to apply teaching strategies grounded in universal design for learning, while integrating topics like social determinants of learning, social justice and health equity throughout the curriculum. This approach ensures that new educators are prepared to teach diverse student populations effectively while addressing contemporary health care challenges.



Jennifer B. Rousseau, DNP, WHNP-BC, CNE, FAWHONN, NEC program director

(continued on page 10)

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Investing in specialized care

Nurse anesthesia represents one of nursing's most demanding specialties, requiring extensive education and training. The financial burden can be prohibitive for many qualified candidates, creating potential shortages in this critical area of patient care.

Rush has responded with an innovative tuition forgiveness program specifically for student registered nurse anesthetists enrolled in Rush's nationally recognized program. The initiative covers full tuition costs in exchange for a commitment to practice at Rush after graduation.

"This program represents a strategic investment in ensuring we have the highly skilled CRNAs needed to provide exceptional patient care," noted Maiko Yamashita, DNP, CRNA, track director for the CRNA program at Rush. "By removing financial barriers, we can attract and retain the best candidates while ensuring they're prepared to serve our community's needs."

Beyond addressing immediate workforce needs, the program reflects Rush's broader vision to develop nurse leaders who will advance the specialty. The two-year commitment allows new graduates to gain valuable experience in a supportive environment while contributing to Rush's mission of providing exceptional patient care.



Maiko Yamashita, DNP, CRNA, track director for the CRNA program at Rush

Expanding research opportunities

The growing complexity of clinical trials requires nurses with specialized knowledge in research methodology, regulatory compliance and participant care. Yet many qualified nurses lack formal training in clinical research management, limiting both career opportunities and the quality of research conducted.

"We recognized a significant gap between the demand for skilled clinical research nurses and the available educational pathways to develop these competencies," explained Marie Statler, PhD, MSN, BSN, RN, assistant professor and faculty lead for the initiative. "This certificate program provides nurses with the specialized knowledge they need to excel in clinical trials while contributing to advances in patient care."

The Principles of Clinical Research Management Certificate program, launching January 2026, offers four modules providing eight continuing education units. Designed for RNs working in or interested in clinical trials, the online program covers essential topics, including research ethics, regulatory requirements, data management and participant advocacy.

The program will initially launch for Rush employees before expanding to a national audience, reflecting Rush's strategy of piloting innovations internally before broader implementation. This approach allows for refinement based on real-world feedback while ensuring Rush nurses have access to cutting-edge professional development opportunities.

"Clinical trials research is becoming increasingly important in health care delivery," observed Christine M. Kennedy, PhD, RN, FAAN, the John L. and Helen Kellogg Dean of the College of Nursing. "By providing our nurses with specialized training in research management, we're not only advancing their careers but also strengthening our capacity to conduct high-quality research that benefits patients everywhere."



Marie Statler, PhD, MSN, BSN, RN, assistant professor and faculty lead

A coordinated response to complex challenges

These three initiatives reflect the College of Nursing's innovative approach to addressing workforce challenges in nursing. Rather than treating each issue in isolation, the college has developed coordinated solutions that leverage the institution's educational excellence and clinical expertise. Together, these programs demonstrate how academic medical centers can take the lead in addressing profession-wide challenges.



Ohany Vasquez, student in the College of Nursing's Generalist Entry Master's program

GEM STUDENT INSPIRED TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND OUTCOMES FOR THE UNDERSERVED

When Ohany Vasquez was choosing her undergraduate major, one prevailing issue inspired her decision: the high cost of medical care that creates barriers for many populations. "That realization motivated me to pursue a career where I could help address disparities in health care access," she said. This early awareness would become the driving force behind her journey into nursing.

Committed to the community

Vasquez, a student in the College of Nursing's Generalist Entry Master's program, is set to graduate in December 2025. When deciding which nursing program to pursue, she was immediately drawn to Rush's strong commitment to community service. "What sets Rush apart for me is its deep engagement with the community and its dedication to addressing social determinants of health," Vasquez said.

Her passion for education and community connection shines through her extensive involvement at Rush. In addition to helping launch the Latinx Nursing Student Association, she serves as cohort representative lead and contributes to the Size-Inclusive Care Coalition. One of her most impactful experiences was volunteering with Rush's Office of Global Health in Villa Verde, Dominican Republic, where she worked alongside community members to lay cement floors in local homes.

Focused on advancing public health

A standout clinical moment came during her mental health rotation at a community site, where Vasquez discovered her love for patient education. She created lesson plans and taught a game demonstrating how drug use disrupts brain communication. "I realized how much I enjoy patient education beyond traditional clinical responsibilities," she reflected.

After graduation, Vasquez plans to return to New Jersey and gain bedside experience before transitioning into community health nursing. She hopes to pursue a DNP with a public health focus, staying true to her original mission of addressing health care disparities and building bridges to better health outcomes for underserved communities.



A LASTING LEGACY: DEAN CHRISTINE KENNEDY'S TRANSFORMATIVE YEARS AT RUSH

Kennedy leaves the college stronger with a new generation of faculty, greater transparency and a deeper connection to the community

When Christine Kennedy, PhD, RN, FAAN, arrived at Rush University College of Nursing in October 2020, Chicago felt like a ghost town. The pandemic had quieted streets, emptied classrooms and strained hospitals across the city.

For Kennedy, stepping into the deanship of one of the country's most respected nursing programs during such unprecedented times felt both daunting and clarifying.



Dean Kennedy (right) shaking hands with a nursing graduate at the 2025 Commencement

“I don’t think I’ve ever started a job that felt so surreal,” Kennedy recalled. “But even then, I knew I was in the right place.”

As Kennedy prepares for her retirement in 2026, she leaves behind a college fundamentally transformed: stronger in research, more committed to health equity, more transparent in its operations and deeply connected to the communities it serves.

(continued on page 14)

(continued from page 13)

Finding a path to nursing

Kennedy's path to nursing wasn't linear. As a young girl, she dreamed of becoming a veterinarian, spending countless hours with horses. But volunteer work at a camp for children with muscular dystrophy shifted everything. She still remembers watching children who had never controlled their own movement suddenly take charge as they guided horses around the ring.

"It was incredible to see these little kids light up and ask, 'Can I make this horse go there?'" she said. "That was the doorway that opened for me. I realized I wanted to help people live more fully."

Encouraged by family members who were nurses, Kennedy pursued pediatric nursing, working in neonatal intensive care. Clinical questions arising from her work led her to pursue a PhD in developmental and experimental child psychology at Brown University, studying the early influences on behavior.

"It was always about asking, 'What do we know, and what don't we know?'" Kennedy reflected. "That research mindset shaped everything that came after."



From left: Kennedy and a nursing student getting a COVID vaccine

The reluctant administrator

Administration was never Kennedy's goal. She thrived as a pediatric nurse practitioner, educator and researcher, spending much of her career at the University of California San Francisco. But leading academic programs at UCSF and later the University of Virginia positioned her for larger roles.

"I didn't go looking to be a dean," she admitted. "But eventually the work I was doing — directing programs, fundraising, building teams — made it a natural next step."

When Kennedy considered Rush, she was intrigued by something unique: its commitment to faculty practice as a cornerstone of the academic mission, alongside education and research.

"Most schools focused on education and research," she explained. "Rush recognized practice as equally essential. That three-way combination was exciting."

Chicago itself was unfamiliar territory. Kennedy had never lived in the Midwest. But the opportunity to lead a college with strong clinical ties and potential for growth drew her in.

Kennedy arrived at Rush during a period of significant transition. Beyond pandemic disruptions, the college faced the challenge of faculty and leadership turnover, with many senior researchers having recently retired.

"Eyes wide open, I knew that it would take time to rebuild," said Kennedy.

That rebuilding became one of Kennedy's proudest accomplishments. Over five years, she recruited a new generation of faculty, particularly young investigators focused on health equity research, work she saw as essential both to nursing science and to the Chicago community.

"Health equity work had to be part of our identity," she said. "It's essential to nursing science, and it's essential to this city."

A data-driven approach

Among colleagues, Kennedy earned the nickname "the Data Dean," a moniker she embraces. Drawing on her research background, she pushed for evidence-based decision-making, financial transparency and data-driven planning throughout the college.

"That framework wasn't about numbers for numbers' sake," she explained. "It was about fairness, ensuring decisions weren't based on personality or who asked first but rather on evidence."

This approach extended to budget processes, where Kennedy worked to increase financial literacy across the college, helping faculty and staff understand how decisions were made and what information was needed to support new initiatives.

"I hope it helped people see that the college would be a fair and transparent space in its decision-making, both for easy and hard decisions," she said.

Strategic vision in action

Kennedy's vision for Rush coalesced around five strategic priorities:

1. Support inclusive excellence
2. Foster innovation, including new work options, tracks and scholarships
3. Further integrate faculty practice into the college
4. Promote education, research and practice for the health of an urban city population by advancing climate change research that impacts health
5. Develop actions that increase diversification of revenue streams

The health equity work flourished through faculty recruitment, the creation of an associate dean role and the establishment of endowed chairs. Kennedy helped secure the Goodman Scholar in Health Equity position for Wrenetha Julion, PhD, MPH, RN, FADNL, FAAN, and the Judd and Marjorie Weinberg Presidential Professorship for Angela Moss, PhD, MSN, APRN-BC, RN, FAAN, FAANP.

She also championed the creation of the Kellogg Scholars program, carved from existing endowment funds to support early-career faculty beginning with Chuka Nestor Emezue, PhD, MPH, MPA, CHES. "That's three endowments in five years," Kennedy noted. "Pretty remarkable for a pandemic era."

Innovation initiatives gained traction across multiple areas, while climate-focused work, led by faculty champion Heide Cygan, DNP, RN, continues to develop.

Kennedy's impact extended well beyond nursing. Unexpectedly, she served as interim provost of Rush University for three years, helping stabilize leadership during a period of transition.

"It wasn't in the plan," she said. "But it was a clarion call. It allowed me to contribute at the university level and ensure we had time to find the right new leaders."

Balancing the provost role with the deanship for three years added complexity to her tenure but also provided opportunities to advocate for the college at the highest university levels.

A culture of growth and recognition

Kennedy's communication style became another hallmark of her leadership. She gives frequent updates, is open about challenges and focuses on faculty and staff accomplishments.

"The role of a leader is to make visible the work of others," she said. "That means calling it out, rewarding it and supporting it in whatever venue appropriate."

This philosophy extended to her work revising faculty promotion criteria, which had privileged research over other contributions. Kennedy aligned criteria with the college's three-part mission of education, research and practice.

"It was about ensuring faculty could be recognized for the full range of what they bring," she said. The revised criteria, implemented after three years of discussion, now better reflect the college's comprehensive mission.

Kennedy takes particular pride in fostering a culture of mentorship and mutual support. Under her leadership, the college established new pathways for staff advancement and recognition, emphasizing that success for one contributes to success for all.

She also worked to integrate the faculty practice enterprise more closely into the college's academic mission, ensuring practice faculty were no longer operating in isolation but as full partners in the college's work.

"They weren't an island anymore," she said.

Despite the challenges of fundraising during a pandemic, Kennedy helped raise approximately $20 million in grants and philanthropic support over five years, roughly $4 million annually. This included support for student scholarships, faculty positions, research and program development.

"I brought experience in that area from my previous roles," she said. "It's an essential skill for academic leaders, and it was something the college needed."



From left: Eugene Robinson, columnist and 2025 Commencement speaker, and Kennedy

(continued on page 16)

(continued from page 15)

Looking forward

Asked about challenges facing nursing education, Kennedy pointed to shifting health care delivery models, tightening research funding and the affordability of advanced education.

"The next dean will need to be creative in supporting students and sustaining the work we've built," she said.

As for her own legacy, Kennedy hopes it's one of strategic rebuilding and cultural transformation. "I came in after a period of transition. My goal was to restore strength in research, integrate practice and elevate faculty and staff. I think we did that," she said.

She particularly hopes to be remembered for highlighting the contributions of faculty, staff and students whose work drives the college's mission.

"Making the invisible work visible. That's what leadership should be," she said.

Kennedy has spent her life in service to nursing as a pediatric nurse, educator, researcher, mentor, fundraiser and dean. Her years at Rush, marked by pandemic challenges and institutional transformation, became the capstone of a distinguished career.

"Starting with a pandemic and ending with a dramatically changed health care and education landscape wasn't the trajectory I would have imagined," she reflected. "But it was meaningful work. And I'm proud of what we accomplished together."

The college Kennedy leaves behind is stronger, more integrated and better positioned for future challenges. Her research-driven approach to leadership, commitment to transparency and focus on elevating others has created lasting change that extends far beyond her tenure.

"That framework of evidence-based decision-making, of making the work of others visible — I hope that continues," she said. "That's how institutions sustain excellence over time."

> **"Most schools focused on education and research. Rush recognized practice as equally essential. That three-way combination was exciting."**
>
> **Christine Kennedy**, PhD, RN, FAAN



From left to right: Dr. Larry Goodman, past president of Rush University and former CEO of Rush University Medical Center; Dr. Omar B. Lateef, president and CEO of Rush University System for Health and Rush University Medical Center; U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood; and Dr. Kennedy.



PHD STUDENT BENEFITS FROM RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES AT RUSH

Susan Price, MSN, BSN, FNP-BC, always had a strong interest in science, especially human medicine and biology, but she also loved interacting with and educating others. Nursing seemed like the ideal way to combine these interests, allowing her to have a lasting impact on people. While in nursing school, she shadowed a nurse practitioner who showed how listening to patients and providing compassionate care could make all the difference.

In 2020 Price decided to pursue her PhD. She had been working as a nurse practitioner in neurology for more than 15 years but wanted to better integrate clinical research into her practice.

Price chose Rush based on recommendations from other nurses who had completed their degrees at Rush. She was seeking a program with both a strong reputation and the flexibility to complete the degree while continuing to practice.

'Incredibly rewarding' experience

Her research interest focuses on dietary interventions to improve motor function in Parkinson's disease. She is developing an assessment tool to improve attrition rates for dietary interventions for patients with this condition.

For Price, one of her most memorable experiences was completing her first poster presentation during Research Days at Rush.

"This was so new to me, and I felt like such a novice, but the experience was incredibly rewarding, and I was able to meet others with similar research interests," Price said.

In the PhD program, students like Price complete courses to support their dissertation research. Price took a nutrition epidemiology class to further enhance her understanding of the science.

"It was unique being in a course with only nutrition science students and challenging, as it was out of my usual nursing studies," she noted.

Applying her newfound expertise

Price is a member of Rush's chapter of Sigma Theta Tau and participated in the Midwest Nursing Research Society conference, presenting her Rush poster with other nursing students. As her expertise in research has grown, she has become more involved in clinical trials in her workplace.

After graduation, Price hopes to continue her clinical research in neurodegenerative conditions while working as a nurse practitioner with this population.



ADAPTING TO CHANGE: HOW FACULTY PRACTICE NAVIGATES NEW REALITIES

From left: Lydia Bryant-Pettis and GEM graduate Francelia Espinoza

For more than five decades, Rush University College of Nursing has operated at the intersection of education, research and practice by offering community care in Chicago. What began in 1972 as the pioneering vision of inaugural Dean Luther Christman evolved into the nation's first academic practice nursing department in 2023. Today, the Department of Academic Practice Nursing provides more than 45,000 hours of direct patient care annually across the city's South and West Side neighborhoods, and across the country.

The department's scope is significant: Faculty clinicians work with over 90% of patients who identify as racial or ethnic minorities and live below the federal poverty line. Through academic practice partnerships with organizations like Flying Food Group, St. Leonard's Ministries, Mercy Home for Boys and Girls, and community health centers, DAPN has built a nationally recognized model that integrates clinical care with student education while maintaining financial sustainability.

However, recent funding shifts at the federal, state and city levels brought substantial changes to community practices. In less than one year, eight long-standing partners had to cancel their contracts following the funding reductions. The impact was immediate: DAPN's academic practice partnership revenue dropped, and leaders were forced to confront the new realities of funding.

"The sudden elimination of funding sources revealed the fragility of the entire community health ecosystem in Chicago," said Angela Moss, PhD, MSN, APRN-BC, RN, FAAN, FAANP, the Judd and Marjorie Weinberg Presidential Professor and chairperson of the Department of Academic Practice Nursing. "These changes affected not just us, but

also the broader network of organizations providing care to historically underserved populations."

The effects extend to student learning opportunities. Clinical rotations dropped from 24 groups in 2023 to fewer than six projected for 2025. Doctoral projects and nurse practitioner placements have similarly declined, affecting the pipeline of nursing professionals trained in community-centered care.

Partnering for value

Rather than simply weathering this disruption, DAPN is accelerating a strategic business plan led by Anthony Mask, assistant dean of strategic operations, and Moss, to further enhance its existing strategic priorities. The approach centers on expanding practice partnerships with for-profit companies that share the college's commitment to improved health outcomes in alignment with Dean Christine Kennedy's strategic vision for the college.

"We're fundamentally expanding how academic practice creates value for the college, our partners and for patients served," said Mask. "The Flying Food Group partnership demonstrates our model's potential. We're providing direct health care services to employees across multiple sites nationwide, creating measurable health improvements while supporting our educational mission. This shows that businesses can be strategic partners in addressing health equity while achieving their own operational goals."

The Flying Food Group program operates clinics in California and New York, serving approximately 5,500 patients. This model creates mutual value: Companies gain healthier workforces while DAPN maintains its community impact and student training opportunities. The partnership generates revenue through service contracts rather than traditional grant funding.

Moss views this transition as essential for preserving the college's integrated mission. "We cannot allow external funding pressures to compromise our tripartite mission," she emphasized. "Research, education and practice must remain interconnected. Our response has to strengthen all three pillars simultaneously."

"What Anthony and Angela are building reflects our commitment to sustainable innovation and diversification of funding sources, one of our strategic goals," said Christine Kennedy, PhD, RN, FAAN, the John L. and Helen Kellogg Dean of Rush University College of Nursing. "DAPN's evolution demonstrates that academic nursing programs can adapt to changing landscapes while strengthening their impact on both education and community care."

Ensuring financial sustainability

The department secured significant philanthropic support, including gifts from the Bedford Falls Foundation ($1 million) and the Sue Ling Gin Foundation ($1.2 million) in the past year. These investments enable the department to maintain core programs like the Sue Gin Health Clinic and St. Leonard's Ministries while developing new partnerships.

This strategic plan envisions a well-positioned DAPN that is ready to adapt to evolving political and economic climates when things change. "We're creating a business model that demonstrates nursing's value proposition in measurable terms," Mask said. "When companies see improved employee health metrics, reduced health care costs and higher satisfaction scores, they understand the return on investment."



GEM students learning in the community at DAPN partner site, St. Leonard's Ministries

Innovating for the future

The transformation reflects broader changes in health care delivery and nursing education. As traditional safety-net providers face unprecedented pressures, academic institutions must innovate to maintain community connections. DAPN's historically diversified revenue model positions it as a potential template for other nursing schools facing similar challenges.

"This isn't just about surviving the current crisis," Moss said. "We're continuing our practice legacy in an even more sustainable and impactful way. The communities we serve deserve health care partners who can adapt and thrive regardless of external pressures."

As DAPN navigates this pivotal moment, the college's 50-year legacy of practice partnerships provides both the foundation and motivation. The department that pioneered the integration of practice and education is once again breaking new ground, demonstrating that academic nursing can evolve while maintaining its commitment to serving those most in need.



Molly Narrod, MSN, RNC-NIC, CN

DNP ADVOCATES FOR PATIENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Molly Narrod, MSN, RNC-NIC, CN, originally thought she wanted to be a physician. She entered college with a goal to be pre-med, but after taking a course on the sociology of health care and illness, her world was opened to the disparities in health care within the United States. She then set her sights on public health, majoring in neuroscience and Spanish. After graduating, she worked for a year as a preschool teacher with Teach for America before realizing nursing was her true calling.

The journey from GEM to DNP

Narrod chose Rush for her nursing education because of its focus on professional development outside of the classroom and emphasis on diversity and inclusion. She was also excited about the prospect of getting her master's through the Generalist Entry Master's program and later continuing her education through the DNP program.

"My most memorable experiences were with my classmates, in the classroom and outside of it," Narrod said. "I have maintained friendships from both the GEM program and the DNP program, along with relationships with professors."

Gaining clinical acumen and confidence

When she started in the Psychiatric-Mental Health DNP program, Narrod thought she would focus on pediatric mental health. While completing the DNP program, she narrowed her focus to perinatal mental health and LGBTQ+ mental health.

The GEM and DNP programs have given Narrod confidence in her skills as a nurse and taught her to be resourceful in advocating for her patients.

"I am more confident, calm and evidence-based," she said. "I know where to go to look things up when I have questions, and I am not afraid to speak up when I think improvements can be made."

Narrod earned her DNP in August 2025. She plans to transition to a nurse practitioner role, where she can apply her specialized knowledge of perinatal mental health to support families during critical transitions.

Embodying Excellence

Rush College of Nursing is proud to celebrate our distinguished alumni who continue to exemplify the impact of our educational mission



Julie Hoff,
PhD, RN, FNAP, FAAN

BSN 1986 | PROVOST, RUSH UNIVERSITY 2025

Julie Hoff's appointment as provost of Rush University represents a homecoming decades in the making. The 1986 BSN graduate returns to where her health care journey began, bringing distinguished experience in academic leadership and clinical research.

"I started in health care as a student at the College of Nursing, and the experience and values I gained here have stayed with me throughout my career," Hoff reflected. "I am excited to return to the place where it all began."

From her foundational education at Rush, Hoff earned advanced degrees from the University of Illinois Chicago and built a research portfolio in cardiovascular health promotion and disease prevention. Her work included leading clinical trials and developing infrastructure to bridge research and clinical practice.

Most recently serving as dean at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Hoff has led transformative institutional growth while strengthening academic infrastructure and advancing faculty engagement. Her commitment to health equity and educational innovation aligns perfectly with Rush University's mission.

As provost, Hoff will execute the university's strategic plan while ensuring the research and education divisions continue to thrive. Her return represents a full-circle moment that underscores the lasting impact of a Rush nursing education.



Steven Brockman-Weber,
DNP, RN, MSHSA, FACHE, NEA-BC, CENP

DNP 2015 | FELLOW, AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NURSING 2025

Steven Brockman-Weber knew at age 12 that nursing was his calling. Today, he is president of five hospitals within Ascension, one of the nation's largest health care systems, and serves on the Rush Nursing Alumni Association board of directors. His journey illustrates the transformative power of the global systems thinking that Rush instills in its doctoral students.

When Brockman-Weber decided to pursue doctoral work, he chose Rush specifically for its reputation in developing outcomes-focused leaders. "I had completed two master's programs, but I was looking for a program that would allow me to advance my leadership," he said. "Rush offered exactly what I needed."

The DNP program's emphasis on systems-level thinking proved immediately valuable. "Having completed my DNP, I was able to advance to a system CNE role and then to a hospital president role," Brockman-Weber explained. "The education at Rush prepared me well for my role."

Brockman-Weber will be inducted as a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing in October 2025 in recognition of his significant contributions to nursing and health care leadership.

Hoff and Brockman-Weber exemplify Rush's commitment to developing leaders who transform health care delivery, education and policy.

Shaping the Future of Nursing Through Philanthropy

Bedford Falls Foundation's generous support transforms nursing education locally and nationally

How does an exchange with a waitress lead to a transformative impact on health care? It all started with a conversation between the late Joanne Barkett Conway and a waitress, who was an aspiring nurse and struggling to pay for her nursing degree. That led Joanne and her husband, William "Bill" Conway Jr., to develop a plan to empower individuals with opportunities to build fulfilling careers.

Since that initial exchange, the Conways have made a transformative impact on the nursing profession through generous philanthropic gifts to nursing schools across the country. Rush University College of Nursing is among the select group of philanthropic partners working with the Conways' foundation, the Bedford Falls Foundation, which is committed to supporting nursing education and ending the nursing shortage.

Building the nursing workforce and investing in communities

Christine Kennedy, PhD, RN, FAAN, the John L. and Helen Kellogg Dean of the College of Nursing, first met Bill Conway in 2015 while serving as associate dean for academic programs at the University of Virginia School of Nursing. When Kennedy came to Rush in 2020, she reconnected with Conway to explore an expansion of his philanthropy in the Midwest. She reached out to tell him about one of the things that makes Rush so special — its commitment to practice in the community.

"I knew Rush would be able to address the foundation's highest priority of creating new nurses," said Kennedy. "I wanted to show them what is unique at Rush, and that is how our nursing students engage in our network of community sites, learning from nurses delivering care."

Established over 50 years ago, Rush's Nursing Faculty Practice program developed an innovative approach to deliver comprehensive, direct health care to patients in historically underserved communities on the South and West Sides of Chicago. Faculty nurses provide on-site care to thousands of individuals and families annually, significantly improving their health outcomes. In the process, Rush nursing students gain valuable experience with care delivery in a community-based setting.

Supporting nursing education

Over the past five years, Bedford Falls Foundation has expanded its giving to more than 20 states facing a critical nursing shortage, including Illinois. In 2024, the foundation made a $1 million gift to enhance Rush nursing education and clinical care across Chicago.

The Bedford Falls Foundation's support has provided both immediate and long-term opportunities for Rush, according to Angela M. Moss, PhD, MSN, APRN-BC, RN, FAAN, FAANP, the Judd and Marjorie Weinberg Presidential Professor and associate dean of faculty practice.

"Support from the Bedford Falls Foundation has lifted up our entire department," Moss said. "I can't express how grateful we are for this gift. It has been incredibly impactful, even in the first year."

Ensuring access to care

Funding from Bedford Falls Foundation helped reopen the Sue Gin Health Center — which provides affordable health care to patients of all ages on Chicago's West Side — in January 2025. The gift also supported the hiring of a faculty psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner, Erin Miller, DNP, PMHNP-BC, who sees patients in an integrated model alongside faculty primary care nurse practitioners, and Michelle C. Zolfo, DNP, RN, CNML, clinical manager for the Department of Academic Practice Nursing. Zolfo is building an infrastructure of standard operating procedures



Bill Conway, founder and trustee of the Bedford Falls Foundation



The late Joanne Barkett Conway, who provided the original vision for the Bedford Falls Foundation

across the department that make it easier for both faculty clinicians and students to focus their time on seeing more patients — ensuring expanded access to care, along with quality practice and instructional time.

As Rush innovates, these procedures are the building blocks of an evidence-based, highly effective model that allows the college to train more students for the future, Moss said.

"It is truly meaningful to see students already gaining more hands-on training experience to better prepare them," Conway said. "These types of experiences are needed to build a strong path for the next generation of nurses to become confident and skilled in their work."

Disseminating the faculty practice model

Rush is also sharing its knowledge with the support of the gift. Moss, as part of her leadership of the College of Nursing's Faculty Practice Learning Institute, helps schools of nursing locally and across the country develop their own nursing faculty practices.

"We need to make more nurses, but we can't make more nurses if we don't have more training sites," Moss said. "With support from Bedford Falls, we have the bandwidth to get the institute off the ground and help other schools develop their own nursing faculty practices, so that it's not just us doing it. We believe this will have a lasting impact on nursing education and our nation's health."

For their extraordinary philanthropic contributions to nursing nationwide, the Conways are being recognized as Honorary Fellows of the American Academy of Nursing. The recognition of Joanne (in memoriam) is most meaningful to the family, as it is her vision of helping nursing students that continues to guide the Bedford Falls Foundation's work.

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COLLEGE OF NURSING

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