Date: 4 April 2012

To: Provost Paul DeLuca  
University Academic Planning Committee

Fr: Katharyn May, Dean – School of Nursing

Re: Closure of BS Nursing Program Offering – La Crosse

The School of Nursing at UW Madison and the Gundersen Lutheran Health System (GLHS) have decided to close admissions to the BS Nursing program offering in La Crosse, effective Spring 2012. This unique partnership, in which nurses holding graduate degrees employed by GLHS collaborated with faculty at the School of Nursing to offer 48 spaces (24 per year) in the upper-division BS Nursing major in La Crosse. The major impetus for this innovative program offering, which was approved by UAPC in February 2003 and enrolled its first class in Fall 2012, was to increase the number of university-educated nurses practicing at Gundersen Lutheran Health System and in the Coulee Region.

This program has been successful, with 133 graduates now in professional practice, many practicing at GLHS, in La Crosse or in the Madison area. Gundersen Lutheran Health System has employed nearly a third of Western Campus graduates, and as a result has increased the proportion of its nursing staff holding BS degrees substantially since the program began. However, several factors have led to the two organizations to decide to phase out this program offering, with the last class graduating in May 2013.

First, the proportion of applicants coming to the program from the region as well as the proportion of graduates remaining in the La Crosse area to practice has been declining over the last few years. This is likely because other BS nursing programs in the area have increased enrollments, thus increasing access to public BS nursing programs for local students.

Second, the School of Nursing is now revising its BS curriculum to employ teaching methods suitable for use in their new facility, which will open in Fall 2014. These changes emphasize more small group learning and team projects, and far fewer lectures to large groups of students than in the past. This process will make it increasingly difficult to keep the two program offerings linked, since at present, a significant number of course lectures are being telecast to students in La Crosse.
Third, the original goals of the project have largely been met. The Western Campus was funded largely by GLHS; given that the goals have been met, neither partner can make a strong justification to make this program a priority, given very limited resources.

This change will have minimal impact on students. The number of spaces for new BS-Nursing students will increase in Madison to off-set the loss of the seats in La Crosse, using funding from our Madison Initiative for Undergraduates award. In Fall 2012, overall BS admissions will be down by 10 seats, but by Fall 2013, we will have returned to the combined Madison/La Crosse site enrollment. Further, there is an added benefit as all BS-Nursing students will on one site, here at UW-Madison, under one pedagogical model.

Formally, the request we are making is to discontinue the UW-Madison “additional site” known as the “Western Campus” at Gundersen Lutheran Health System in La Crosse, Wisconsin. There is no change to the academic structure of our BS-Nursing program.

However, while the BS Nursing program offering will end, it is the intention to continue with new initiatives within the Western Campus model. The School of Nursing and GLHS are interested in exploring new challenges and opportunities in their collaboration, including:

- Partnering to address the need to facilitate registered nurses with associate degrees to progress to the BS and beyond, in keeping with the Institute of Medicine’s 2010 report calling for 80% of the nursing workforce to be prepared at the BS level or higher by 2020;
- Greater collaboration on care improvement projects, involving undergraduate and graduate students;
- Potential new clinical placements for Madison-based UW nursing students at GLHS to support the projected program expansion.

The two organizations are proud of their Western Campus students and graduates, and are looking forward to taking on new challenges in nursing education, research and practice.
Western Campus: The “Next Generation” - Discussion Points

- Since 2003, the UW-Madison School of Nursing and Gundersen Lutheran Health System have partnered on a unique bachelor of science (BS) in Nursing program offering that allowed students to complete their junior and senior years at the UW-Madison Western Campus in La Crosse.

- The program offering has largely met its goals, and UW-Madison and Gundersen Lutheran will phase it out, with the last class graduating in May 2013.

- We are proud of the partnership and our graduates. However, it is time to move on to the next phase of our partnership. Needs have changed and we are exploring new opportunities for collaboration.

Was the program not successful?

- The program offering was very successful, graduating 133 bachelor of science-prepared nurses who now in professional practice.

- Gundersen Lutheran employs about one-third of the graduates. Many of the other graduates are working in the La Crosse or Madison areas.

Why is the program being phased out?

- One of the original intents of the Western Campus program was to increase the number of graduates from the region who stay in the La Crosse area to practice.

- The numbers of applicants from the area have declined in recent years as other BS nursing programs in the greater La Crosse area have been able to increase their enrollments.

- The program offering was created with no new state funding, creating budget pressures.

- In addition, the School of Nursing is revising its curriculum to focus courses more on small group and team projects, which will make it increasingly difficult for the two program offerings to remain parallel. Currently, many lectures are telecast to students in La Crosse.

- The change will temporarily decrease the spaces (by 10) available for applicants for Fall 2012, but the School of Nursing is increasing its class size for Madison-based students as a result of Madison Initiative for Undergraduates funding, restoring the spaces by Fall 2013.

What are your future plans?

- We are excited about the possibilities for the future for the Western Campus.

- We hope to partner to support nurses in the region with associate degrees to advance to a bachelor’s degree, a goal recommended by the Institute of Medicine in order to achieve 80% of nursing workforce at the bachelor’s level by 2020.

- In addition, we hope to collaborate on quality improvement projects involving undergraduate and graduate nursing students, and place Madison-based UW Nursing students at Gundersen Lutheran for clinical rotations.