

## The Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative Assists Empire State College in Determining Shape of Market for Proposed Program

### Challenge:

Empire State College was planning the launch of a new bachelor of science in nursing (B.S.N.) degree program but was looking for input to determine the shape of this market and its needs and interest. In addition it wanted to examine the possibility of a future launch of a master of science in nursing (M.S.N.) degree program.

### Solution:

The Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative (OHE-LC) research team conducted a survey sent to 5,000 practicing nurses. Among the topics addressed in the survey were:

- Demographics of the potential B.S.N. and M.S.N. degree markets
- Motivations for pursuing a B.S.N. or M.S.N. among the target markets
- Preferred components of a B.S.N. or M.S.N. degree
- Preferred delivery mode for both programs

### Results:

The survey results gave Empire State the confidence that the B.S.N. program structure and components would appeal to potential students and also that sufficient demand existed for an M.S.N. program as well.

### About Empire State College:

*Location:* Saratoga Springs, NY

*Carnegie Classification:* Masters

*Ownership:* Public Institution

*Size:* 16,825 Undergraduate Students (2007)

### About the Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative:

(OHE-LC) undertakes market and operational research to help universities and colleges grow their online enrollments, develop strategies for online higher education, and reduce costs through increased operational efficiencies.

### Understanding the Market for a New Program

In 2005, the state of New York faced a serious challenge. If current trends held, the state would be short 17,000 nurses by 2010, and 44,000 by 2020, and the nurses that were in the state would not necessarily have the appropriate skills needed. To reverse these trends, The New York State Education Department wanted to increase nurse training and enrollment capacity in the state, and was looking to Empire State College for assistance.

As the largest online education provider in the state with extensive experience serving adult students, Empire State was well positioned to help and soon began planning the launch of a new bachelor of science in nursing (B.S.N.) degree program. Lacking experience offering nursing programs, Empire State was looking for input to determine the shape of this market and its needs and interests.

To help them in this effort, they turned to Eduventures Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative for assistance.

### Examining Demographics, Preferences and Motivations of Potential Students

Empire State College was looking for data and analysis to guide some near-term decisions – the shape of the market for R.N. to B.S.N. degrees, as well as the demographics, preferences, and motivations of prospective students. They were also looking for help with long-term decision-making – the feasibility of a future R.N. to master of science in nursing (M.S.N.) degree program.

A Custom Research Report was commissioned to address both needs. Based on the results of a survey sent to 5,000 practicing nurses located mostly in New York State, the report addressed the following key questions:

- What are the demographics of current working nurses interested in pursuing a B.S.N. or M.S.N.?

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Jeff Handler  
Acting Vice President for Enrollment  
Management  
Empire State College

- What are the key motivations that drive working nurses to pursue a B.S.N or M.S.N.?
- What are the key components that attract prospective students to particular B.S.N. or M.S.N. degree programs?

### **Data and Insight to Inform Decision-Making**

The results of the survey indicated a strong demand for additional education in the nursing field regardless of the years of professional experience of the candidate – encouraging news for the development of both R.N. to B.S.N. and R.N. to

M.S.N. programs. In addition, the study discovered key drivers in the choice of degree programs included course scheduling flexibility and convenience, with a strong demand for hybrid online/on-campus programming. Additionally, more than 80% of survey respondents rated internships and preceptorships as a *valuable* or *very valuable* component of a B.S.N. degree program.

### **Getting It Right from the Beginning**

Equipped with the findings and recommendations of the report, Empire State was able to ensure the program structure and delivery mode would appeal to prospective students by using insight drawn from the study. “The research gave us the confidence that we were heading in the right direction,” said Jeff Handler, the Acting Vice President for Enrollment Management at Empire State College. “It provided ideas not only in how to market the program, but insight we used to structure the program so we got it right from the beginning.” Empire State College began offering the bachelor of science in nursing degree in fall 2008 with 42 enrolled students, and according to Handler, plans are being finalized for an M.S.N. program using insight generated by the report.