

Building on a Vision:

SUSTAINING LEADERSHIP WORLDWIDE *by Anita Smith*



Editor's Note: Early in 2006 and continuing into 2007, the faculty of the UAB School of Nursing (SON) carried out an extensive planning process that resulted in a far-reaching strategic plan.

This plan was created to serve as the blueprint for the school's progress and development. An overview of the school's achievements thus far in implementing that plan is detailed here by the school's dean, Doreen C. Harper, PhD, RN, FAAN.

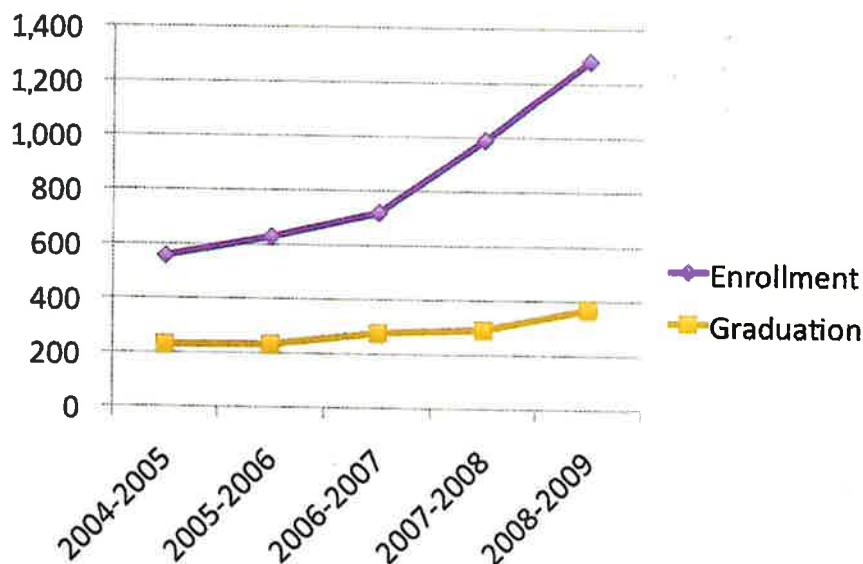
If you were to select one word to describe how well the school is doing overall in carrying out the strategic plan, what word would you use?

Dr. Harper: Phenomenal! In the two and a half years since the strategic plan was completed, we have made such progress that recently we had to go back and revise our plan to keep it current and realistic. As part of the plan in its original form, we had committed to a 10 percent annual increase in our student-body enrollment. In the past five years, we have more than doubled our enrollment—from 557 to 1,282. That obviously is indeed phenomenal and already has been producing graduates of our school who helped fill an overall nurse-vacancy rate in Alabama hospitals that reached an alarming 20 percent. While we are tremendously proud of the growth in our student body and the

good results, it is not realistic in terms of our school's available resources to continue to grow at that rapid pace. Since we went back and revised our strategic plan goals, we no longer are looking toward a 10 percent annual enrollment increase but instead have established these goals as our indicators of success: (1) to maintain exceptionally high quality in the programs that serve our students and (2) to sustain overall enrollment and graduate rates across all programs at the fall 2008 level.

Many of the school's friends and supporters have seen a copy of a strategic-plan brochure published by the school in late 2007, explaining five categories of goals in the strategic plan. What progress do you see in the first category of goals—"creating innovative programs to meet workforce needs"?

Enrollment and Graduation Growth



Dr. Harper: In addressing that question, it is relevant that I give examples not only of our innovative programs but also of some progressive teaching approaches we are utilizing as we deliver these programs to our students.

To begin the implementation of a new Doctor of Nursing Practice program, we have partnered with the UAB School of Health Professions, the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

As we continue to develop specialty practice, the growth of our master's programs is amazing. As examples, we have a new dual master's adult/gerontological nurse practitioner program and also a recently funded new psychiatric nurse practitioner program.

Our undergraduate honors program continues to be a hallmark and to set us apart. Our study-abroad offerings—integrated so well into our overall programs—provide broadening educational experiences to our students and also stand as a tribute to our faculty who know how to

design and oversee these experiences.

We have streamlined and tailored modes of teaching to meet the diverse needs of students through the redesign of the distance-accessible RN to BSN to MSN mobility pathway, distance-accessible PhD program, and the accelerated master's entry pathway for individuals already holding a baccalaureate degree.

To encourage students to obtain multiple degrees from our school, it has been

a strategic-plan goal to make it easier for our students to move more seamlessly across our programs. As evidence we are doing well in this area, we see dramatic increases in the number of students who come into one of our programs and move forward into another of our programs—including more students who progress in our school from the baccalaureate level all the way through our doctoral program.

Another teaching approach that has made monumental strides since our strategic plan was completed has been the expanded use of technology, including our clinical simulation laboratories. These labs allow students to integrate their knowledge and clinical skills in rehearsed simulated scenarios prior to having such experiences with live patients. We have expanded the equipment in these laboratories and have expanded the hours the labs are open to students. This is an investment in heightening the clinical-skills expertise of students and also an investment in patient safety.

The ongoing high priority we place on distance learning is another example of our harnessing of technology to reach more students. As we continue to upgrade our online capacity, we expand our abilities to take educational programs to nurses in locations where they live and work.

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60 years
OF INNOVATION



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This means that nurses can continue to advance in their careers and continue to meet crucial health-care workforce needs while at the same time earning degrees in our school.

What progress are you seeing in the number-two category of strategic-plan goals—"promoting an attractive, stimulating learning environment"?

Dr. Harper: We are fortunate to have an aesthetically appealing SON building that is located on a strategic, convenient site on the UAB campus. At the same time, our building was first occupied in 1971 and has been in great need of renovation and updating. After creating a new front-door entrance a few years ago, it seemed that it became a symbolic door-

way to a series of additional successful construction projects. Over the last three years, we have completed the renovation and refurbishing of our third, fourth, and fifth floors, which house the school's core departments. We have updated some classrooms to make them more technologically adept and also more comfortable for students—something we feel is a must given the amount of time students spend in class. Currently we are finishing, are in the midst of, or are about to launch renovation and refurbishing in various areas of our first and second floors—including the home of our Office of Development and Alumni Relations, our Board of Visitors Room, the student lounge, and the actively used meeting and reception area in our Center for Nursing Research.

What progress are you seeing in the number-three category of strategic-plan goals—"expanding partnerships and collaborations"?

Dr. Harper: We are committed to partnering and collaborating and are making many valuable connections in this area. These are just a couple of examples:

We have partnered with schools of nursing over the state to recruit PhD students into our doctoral program.

We continue to work closely and programmatically with our partners on campus, expanding funded initiatives with the UAB Health System, Children's Hospital, and the Birmingham Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC). Among the areas of expansion are faculty exchanges with the clinical partners, mentoring for preceptors and clinical instructors, and the development of the clinical nurse leader role with selected partners.

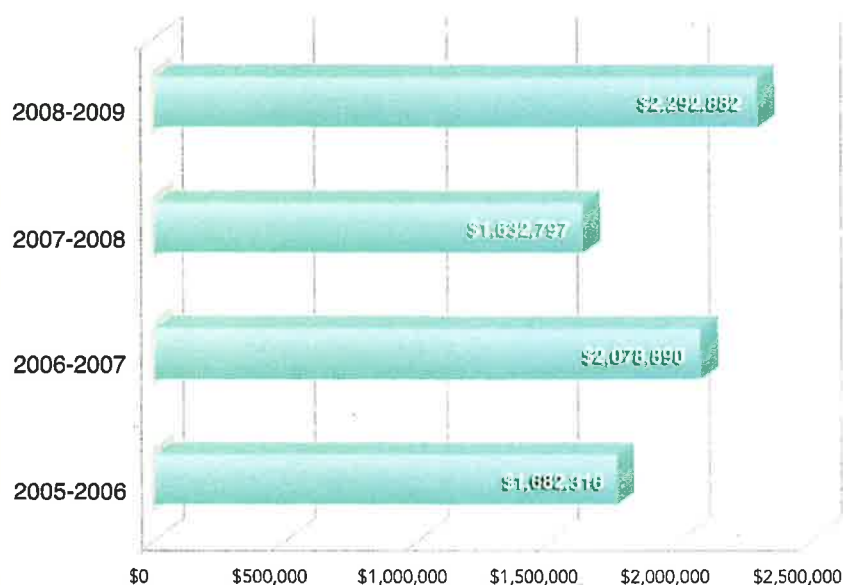
What progress are you seeing in the fourth category of strategic-plan goals—"increasing resources and revenues"?

Dr. Harper: There obviously is welcomed and constructive overlap among goals in our strategic plan. For example, there is tremendous overlap between the goal of increased resources and revenues and the goal of expanding partnerships and collaborations. Through the expansion of partnerships and collaborations, we realize more resources and revenues, and, through a well-planned sharing and cooperation with our partners and collaborators, we make wiser and more efficient use of resources and revenues. One outstanding example is our school's recent selection as one of 15 nursing schools around the nation to be designated as a Veterans Affairs Nursing Academy. The funding that accompanies this designation will enable us to train nurses to meet



Dean Doreen Harper speaks to a group of students in the accelerated master's in nursing pathway.

Annual Revenue: NIH and HRSA Awards



some crucial health-care needs of veterans and of men and women currently serving in the armed forces. At the same time, these funds will enable our school to hire five additional faculty members and to admit 20 baccalaureate students per year to enter the VA Nurse Scholars program. We submitted this Veterans Affairs Nursing Academy application in conjunction with, and will work closely with, our partner the Birmingham VAMC.

There is no way for me to discuss revenues and resources without proudly pointing to the achievements of our faculty. In a time of very competitive grantsmanship, our faculty have been able to sustain and grow grant revenue for our school every year for the past three years. This year our school submitted applications for more than \$14 million in grants. If you want to get grants, you have to increase the number of applications you are submitting. A key reason for our increased productivity in grant application is that our Center for Nursing Research is growing rapidly. On an overall basis, our faculty are doing an outstanding

job of identifying, generating, and managing resources and revenues to enable us to attain the goals set in our strategic plan. Over the past years, we have increased our full-time faculty from 64 to 94. In addition, as our faculty looked at how to support

additional part-time faculty, we increased our budget for part-time faculty.

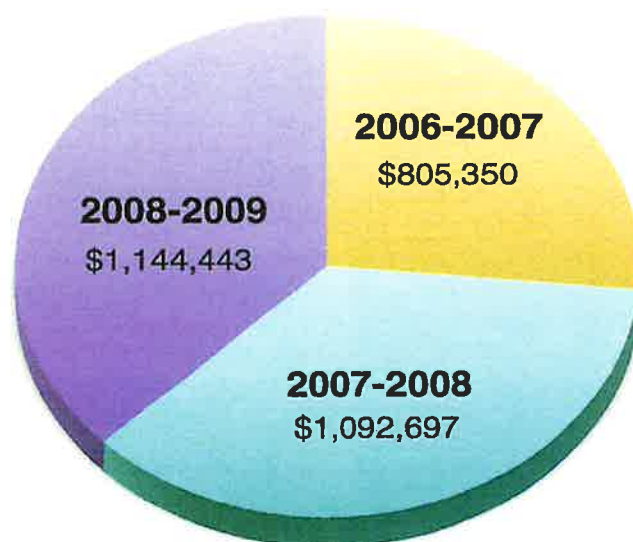
Resources and revenues also continue to increase as our community support continues to grow. Leading the way in fueling community support is our Board of Visitors, a board that I feel represents a model virtually unparalleled for a school of nursing. This dedicated board added four new members this past year and continues to expand its reach not only in financially supporting our school's programs and students but also in raising community awareness about the school and its programs.

What progress are you seeing in the fifth category of strategic-plan goals—that of continuing to increase the school's "recognition as a nursing leader"?

Dr. Harper: Our school has under way various initiatives as a state, national, and international leader that are allowing us to succeed in a mission that has virtually become a motto for us—"sustaining leadership worldwide." These are some glimpses

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Faculty Practice and Partnership Contract Revenue



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into why I am so proud of this school as a leader that is reaching out to the world:

The school continues to partner with nurses in Zambia to address major health problems in that country. In doing so, we are working with other components of UAB that have forged major initiatives in Zambia. We interact extensively with UAB's Sparkman Center for Global Health and with the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia, a partnership between UAB and the Zambian Ministry of Health.

Also on the international front, one of my proudest moments since I arrived at the UAB School of Nursing in 2007 occurred when I was informed of our school's redesignation as a Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for International Nursing. Our school's distinguished track record with this collaborating center, beginning during Dean Rachel Booth's tenure, continues to have

far-reaching global impact. Our leadership as a collaborating center translates into our assisting developing nations with their nursing programs, our learning from these nations and their learning from us, and creating life-changing international experiences for our school's faculty and students. The strategic plan contains a goal of increasing our faculty participation in the collaborating center to 30 percent, and we already see positive results from this increased participation—results touching both our faculty and our students. The interaction that takes place through the collaborating center is very much a two-way street. For example, there are initiatives in which we go to Honduras, and there are initiatives in which Honduras comes to us. Also, we have a new collaboration with the Catholic University in Santiago, Chile, in which annual meetings will alternate between Santiago and our school in Birmingham. I cannot stress enough how

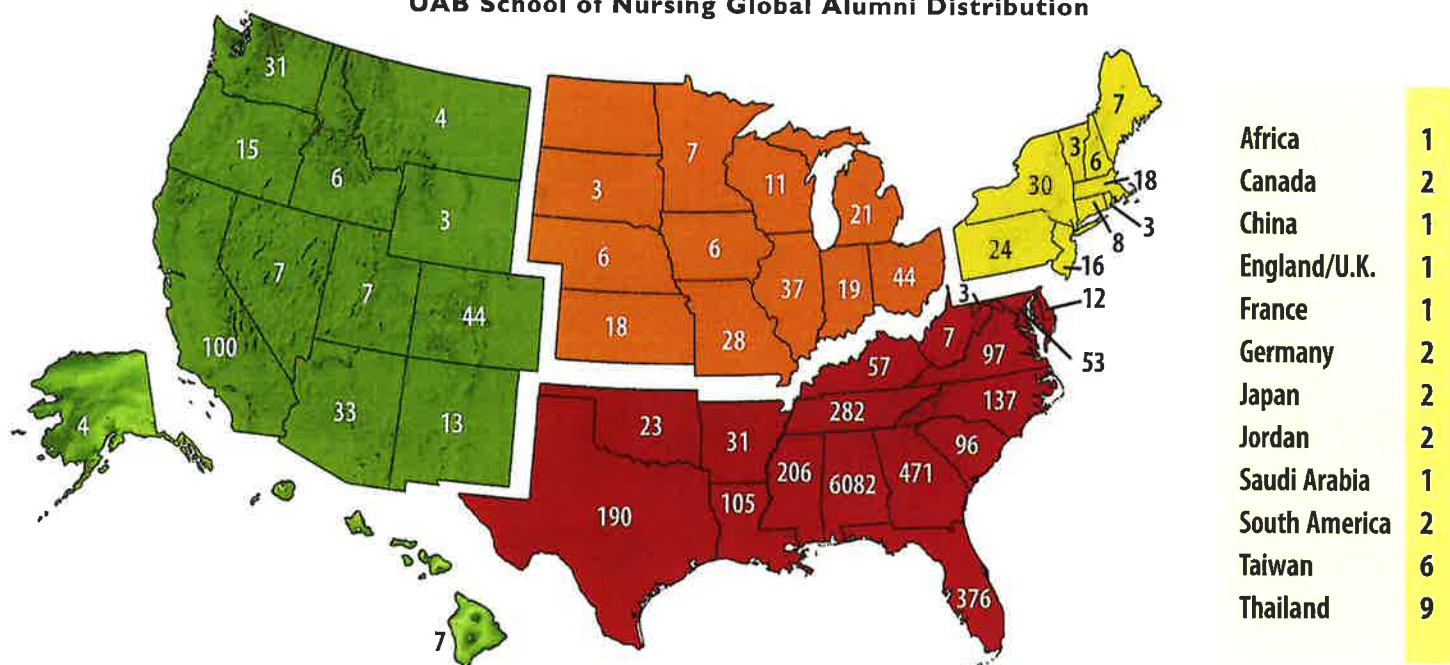
much these interactions are elevating the UAB School of Nursing's profile as an international leader in nursing.

How are the school's individual students and its overall student-body makeup being impacted by the successful implementation of the strategic plan?

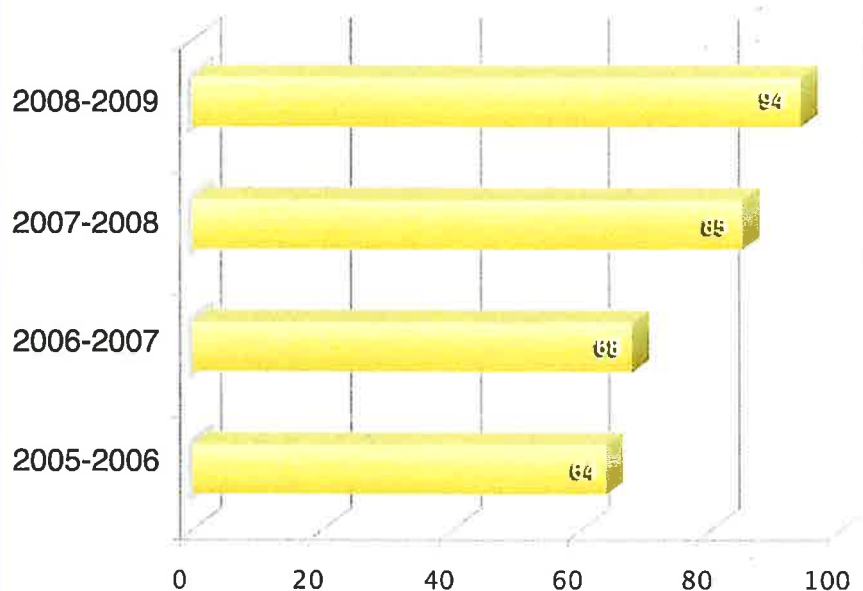
Dr. Harper: Our students are clearly some of the brightest, most committed individuals I have ever met. We have demanding curricula in our school, and our students are meeting the standards set by those curricula. The level of our students' achievements is reflected in their performance on state board exams, where our students' scores increased in 2008–2009 by an average of 5 percent.

The caliber of students we have in our school is resulting in our graduating what we view as truly the nurses of the future. Our definition of the "nurse of the future" is a graduate of our school who is prepared to enter an increasingly complex and

UAB School of Nursing Global Alumni Distribution



Annual Growth of Faculty Positions



dynamic health-care system and able to (1) work within that system to make a difference, (2) function as an accomplished team member and leader with knowledge of systems and organization, (3) think critically and lead change, and (4) deliver the highest quality of compassionate, competent patient care.

I would be remiss not to mention exemplary characteristics we increasingly see in the makeup of our student body—characteristics that I feel are a credit to the quality of our strategic plan and to the faculty's success in carrying out the plan. As a result of our faculty's charting and meeting of strategic-plan goals, we have a student body that includes increasing diversity, that has the presence of more nurse scholars who have graduated from high school with high test scores and high grade-point averages, and that is receiving a rising number of students who are being recruited into our programs from the pool of UAB applicants.

Finally, and very important, through their wise, careful, and creative strategic planning, the faculty have identified

more effective ways to recruit students into our much-sought-after seats who are highly likely to graduate. This is crucial! Retaining students, like retaining nurses, saves money and uses resources effectively and efficiently. We have made substantial progress in improving retention and increasing graduations from our programs.

What is your perspective on the journey that has been taken by the school's faculty in designing and implementing the strategic plan?

Dr. Harper: Members of our faculty were the architects of the vision in our strategic plan. They have embraced the vision and have followed through to implement the plan. To facilitate this, the faculty themselves have expanded the resources necessary to implement the plan—through their generation of research grants, training grants, clinical revenue, and partnerships. I am so, so incredibly proud of our faculty. Also, I give credit to our staff. Without the dedicated support of the staff, the faculty could not do what they do.

It is important to note that our faculty were so progressive in designing our strategic plan that they accomplished more than the daunting task of charting a path for our school to follow. Through their planning process, the faculty also created the teams that are implementing this plan—the teams that teach our students and continue to move our school into the future.

You have been an educator for a long time and thus are accustomed to evaluating. How would you evaluate the progress made thus far in implementing the school's strategic plan?

Dr. Harper: We continue to raise the benchmarks here at the SON. As we approach the 60th anniversary of UAB's School of Nursing, our phenomenal progress toward our five-year strategic plan is a tribute to the faculty, students, alumni, and community. We have reason to celebrate these accomplishments, yet our work has just begun!

