

Recommendation to Merge the NYU Nursing Program with the College of Dentistry

After a multi-faceted assessment process, driven principally by academic considerations, the recommendation of the University's senior leadership is to combine the Nursing Program (which is now in the Steinhardt School of Education) with the College of Dentistry. This combination will create a new school at New York University called the School of Dentistry and Nursing. Other health programs currently housed in the Steinhardt School of Education will remain within the Steinhardt School.

This document begins with a brief overview, then reviews some of the issues that were considered in the assessment process, and finally presents the specific recommendations, followed by a conclusion.

I. OVERVIEW

The reaction of virtually everyone upon learning of this recommendation for the first time is "why nursing and dentistry?" The initial impression is that this recommendation is an unusual or counter-intuitive move. Yet when the results of such a merger are projected into the future and assessed with academic criteria, along with fiscal and space considerations, the upside gains for Dentistry, Nursing, and the University more broadly are determined to be substantial. First impressions notwithstanding, the predicted gains with the new school more than offset what is viewed by some as a lost academic opportunity for the Steinhardt School of Education.

As will be discussed in more detail below, this merger will not only enhance the performance of the two programs directly involved; it will also lead to greater collaboration with other schools at NYU (including Steinhardt, Wagner, Medicine, Social Work, and Arts and Science) because of the health care focus of the new school. While more will be said about the innovation and synergy of this merger, it is absolutely critical to note at the outset that the individual programs of Dentistry and Nursing will continue to excel in education and scholarship within their own traditional boundaries.

The faculty of the College of Dentistry have unanimously voted in favor of forming the new school, and the vast majority of the Nursing faculty supports this merger. In addition, the two exceptionally strong leaders of the College of Dentistry and the Nursing Program have played an important role in helping to shape these recommendations and will play instrumental roles in their realization. Finally, the recommendations are consistent with one of the principal approaches proposed by the Steinhardt Strategic Assessment Committee.

II. REVIEW OF THE ISSUES

The benefits of the merger are evident in four areas: research, teaching, innovation in clinical practice, and service. Moreover, the pluses and minuses for administration, operational financing, and capital finance do not alter the basic thrust of the recommendation. In fact, this merger will be accomplished with operating budgets which are cost neutral to the University as a whole, and in a manner which holds the Steinhardt School of Education harmless fiscally.

Research: Both Dentistry and Nursing faculty have steep upward trajectories in externally funded research, and the merger will enhance and accelerate those trajectories and create significant synergies across Nursing and Dentistry. Nursing faculty have among the highest external funding per faculty in the University. The Dental faculty, led by a new cadre of active researchers, has quadrupled its federal research support in the last four years. Because of the common health dimensions in the nature of the expected research in the new school, and in the rich funding sources in Dentistry and Nursing, the new school's ability to provide an environment for productive research for both units will be enhanced, including proposal development, facilities, grants and research administration. Taking these benefits together, the potential for increased research funding will be improved significantly. In addition, the potential for collaboration is substantial. Nursing and Dentistry have already collaborated on a catastrophe preparedness grant, and more collaborations are planned in such areas as sleep apnea, pre-term birth, diabetes, pulmonary infection, cardiovascular disease, geriatrics, and smoking cessation – all conditions in which systemic health problems have been linked to oral diseases or problems. In addition, both Dentistry and Nursing have specific research initiatives in areas such as geriatrics, pediatrics, cancer, and health disparities that will benefit from direct collaboration. It is also highly likely that the innovative clinical practices that are discussed below will lead to significant research and evaluation opportunities. Finally, though more subjective, the emphasis on health research and the ability to celebrate and reward excellence in research within the school will be a factor in the improvements within and across the two areas as a result of the merger.

Teaching: Traditionally, nursing, dentistry and virtually all other healthcare disciplines have little overlap; and, therein resides the opportunity. Many healthcare planners believe that for too long the health professions have been educated in independent 'silos' selecting not to interact in meaningful ways during training, which not only increases the cost of education, but fosters problematic isolationism in clinical practice. The integration of the education of healthcare professionals is critical to promote better teaching and research programs, and may help to create more cost-effective health care overall. A more specific analysis of synergy between the curricula of the NYU Dental and Nursing programs uncovered a surprisingly high 30 percent overlap in subject matter taught in the two programs. This overlap provides some of the underlying basis for the academic synergy and the economic efficiency in moving the programs together. For example, although it would be unrealistic to expect that more than one-third to one half of this overlap can be captured in the short run in joint programming, conjoint competencies

in such areas as ethics, pain control, and medical histories are a natural. Beyond the specific substance of the courses, the two health care units have the potential to engage in significant innovation in teaching, using synergistic approaches that draw on simulation, technology and telecommunications.

Innovations in Clinical Practice: A particularly creative aspect of this merger is the potential to build entirely new models of preventive and proactive healthcare delivery. At a time when members of the massive ‘baby boomer’ generation are about to enter their healthcare intensive years, new models of healthcare delivery are desperately needed both because of costs and soaring demand. For example, nurse practitioners, as reported in the *Wall Street Journal* of October 11th, are a highly effective resource in increasing access to healthcare. However, it is often difficult for nurse practitioners to succeed in small private independent settings because of overhead considerations. Deployment of nurse practitioners in dental offices, which have different geographical distribution patterns, visitation patterns and patient pools than physicians, can be very cost effective. Nurse practitioners in dental offices, working in concert with collaborating physicians, could improve the prospects for early diagnosis and treatment of conditions such as hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and diabetes. Moreover, more people would have access to knowledgeable health care professionals who can assist in managing the two greatest threats to the health of the public: obesity and smoking. The NYU School of Dentistry and Nursing will be uniquely qualified to conduct the research to assess these innovative opportunities.

The merger of Dentistry and Nursing can also facilitate the development of entirely new types of hybrid healthcare professionals including hygienist/nurses, nurse/dietitians and a new category of nurse practitioners matched to and partnered with specific dental specialties. For example, a pediatric nurse practitioner could be invaluable in a pediatric dentistry office.

Service: Both the Nursing and Dental faculties are now involved in a range of service initiatives, and there are synergies between the two sets of activities. For example, it is expected that the community clinics and mobile health service programs, now run independently by Dentistry and Nursing, will be combined in collaboration with the outreach of the Steinhardt School of Education to better support children in the city’s, and in collaboration with the School of Medicine to better support the elderly in community centers and nursing homes. Other on-going programs, such as the cancer programs in Dentistry and the geriatric programs in Nursing will likely lead to new and expanded service projects that also provide important interdisciplinary educational opportunities for students.

Administration and Finance: Analysis has shown that the creation of the new School of Dentistry and Nursing need not add or save significant resources operationally in the new recommended school or the Steinhardt School of Education, and thus university-wide. In fact, cost neutrality is a requirement of this recommendation. This neutrality may not have been the case in the past when the Nursing Program likely ran a fully-costed deficit within the Steinhardt School of Education. Given the most recent

enrollments levels, the operational costs (and activities) moved to the new school will roughly equal the costs saved for Steinhardt, with the same level of overhead moving to the new school. There are some unknown opportunities for savings in the establishment of the administrative infrastructure of the new school, and there may be some inability to lower Steinhardt costs when Nursing departs; nonetheless, these amounts are likely to be minor. Finally, the School of Dentistry and Nursing will have the size and critical mass to absorb the cyclical pattern of nursing enrollment, a national phenomenon.

The capital/space issues are more complex than the operating issues. Nursing now occupies roughly 30,000 square feet of newly renovated space in Kimball Hall (18 Waverly Place) at Washington Square. From both academic and administrative points of view, it would be preferable for Nursing to move to a location near the Dental College on 25th St. and 1st Ave. In addition, such a move would free up scarce, desirable, and much needed space at Washington Square. However, the likelihood and timing of such a move are unknown at this time. While many of the advantages of the new School of Dentistry and Nursing are greatly enhanced by the physical move, the University may not be in a position to fund such a move in the near-term. In the course of deciding whether Nursing will move to the area of the Dental College, the following issues would need to be addressed: (1) How would the initial capital of the new space be financed, recognizing that the overall amount of debt for the University is constrained? (2) If debt is used for the new space near the Dental College, will the new School of Dentistry and Nursing be able to meet its budget targets and fund the debt service? (3) What financial transfers are appropriate considering the recent investments in the space that Nursing now occupies? While there is uncertainty surrounding the capital/space issues, the benefits of the potential new School of Dentistry and Nursing are sufficiently high to establish the new school even under the most pessimistic assumption of Nursing remaining in its current space in the near term. Moreover, the College of Dentistry has always funded its own capital needs, and is expected that the innovative aspects of the new school will be very attractive to key donors. Therefore, the financial risk of this project is very low.

III. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The principal recommendation is to create a new School of Dentistry and Nursing at New York University, with the goal of opening on September 1, 2005. In the ensuing 10 months, the planning for this new school will take place by moving through the appropriate processes, internal and external, at the University.
- It is recommended that the Provost and Senior Vice President for Health lead a process, with significant input from Dentistry and Nursing, to determine the structure of the new School of Dentistry and Nursing. It is further recommended to include the following option: a structure with a dean of the new School of Dentistry and Nursing, two divisions (Dentistry and Nursing), and a divisional dean for each division.
- It is recommended that the Provost and Senior Vice President for Health establish appropriate mechanisms which will ensure that genuine interactions between the

School of Dentistry and Nursing and the Steinhardt School of Education continue and are enhanced -- thus contributing to the “health pillar” in the vision and mission of the Steinhardt School. In addition, these interactions should extend to include other schools at NYU such as Wagner, Social Work, Arts and Science, and Medicine.

- It is recommended that the Provost and Senior Vice President for Health determine an expedited process to recommend to the President the appointment of the first Dean of the School of Dentistry and Nursing.
- It is recommended that the Provost and the Senior Vice President for Health work with the leadership in Dentistry, Nursing, and Steinhardt to determine an appropriate, orderly, and fair transition plan for the movement of Nursing from Steinhardt to the new School of Dentistry and Nursing. Issues to consider include the school in which new and continuing students are enrolled and graduate; the school home for continuing and new research; and faculty appointments.
- It is recommended that the Executive Vice President, Provost, and Senior Vice President for Health lead a process to (1) further refine the projected operating budget of the new School of Dentistry and Nursing, insuring cost neutrality for the University; and (2) further develop space and financing options for the co-location of Nursing in an area near the Dental College.

IV. CONCLUSION

A merger of the Nursing Program of the Steinhardt School of Education with the College of Dentistry to become the NYU School of Dentistry and Nursing offers many advantages in research and teaching, as well as potential innovations in clinical practice and service. While the first impression of this merger is one of surprise, the more one examines the potential benefits, the more exciting the opportunity becomes. The potential benefits accrue to the two individual programs, Nursing and Dentistry, and to the entire University. The formation of this new school will prove one more reason why NYU will be the leadership University of the 21st century. The new School of Dentistry and Nursing will be in a strong position to partner with other schools at NYU -- including the Steinhardt School of Education with which it will assist in the creation of one of the requisite pillars – healthcare - to achieve success in primary and secondary education; the Wagner School with which it will achieve a better understanding of the complex policy issues in health care, and, of course, the Medical School where both Nursing and Dentistry already have numerous interactions and joint appointments. It is also important to emphasize our firm expectation that the new School of Dentistry and Nursing will be a very strong and synergetic partner with the faculty and educational programs of the Steinhardt School of Education. Finally, it is important to note that the College of Dentistry is very receptive to this merger; that, in a faculty meeting, the Dentistry faculty voted unanimously in favor of the merger; and that the vast majority of the nursing faculty supports this merger.

This assessment process, and this recommendation to form a new School of Dentistry and Nursing which has emerged from it, underscore NYU's willingness to assess itself, and to make dramatic changes to achieve academic excellence. Moreover, NYU's culture of review and its spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation – together with the rapid changes in health care -- certainly combine to suggest that additional assessments and changes will continually be needed in the future.