



2-16-2024

Amber Kujath on Illinois Wesleyan's Nursing Program

Charles Schlenker

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/wglc_interviews

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Ames Library, the Andrew W. Mellon Center for Curricular and Faculty Development, the Office of the Provost and the Office of the President. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews for WGLT by The Ames Library faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University with thanks to WGLT. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

WGLT Interview with Amber Kujath on February 16, 2024

Announcer: Illinois Wesleyan University's nursing program has rebounded in a big way. A year ago, the state put the program on probation because the IWU graduate pass rate on the national nursing licensing exam had dropped to 63%. In this interview with WGLT's Charlie Schlenker, new program head Amber Kujath says this year's results are up 20 points to 83%, Kujath says that's also a better trajectory than other programs that had low test scores.

Amber Kujath: Even more exciting is that our 2023 grads who I've had the most impact on, if you will, because I've only been here a year. They're right at the state average of 85%, and I know that that's just the beginning. Now that we've done some intense work with our students, we're expecting bigger and better things.

Charlie Schlenker: What work have you done?

Kujath: We have implemented a program that's across the curriculum, right? So, we take it the sophomores, juniors, and seniors were throughout their career at Illinois Wesleyan, and they take specialty exams, we do practice questions. We're also really focusing on what's called the clinical judgment model, which is what the NCLEX tests, we talk a lot about test taking strategies and how you're going to make your decisions. What evidence do you have for your next choice in nursing?

Schlenker: In K12, the buzzword said with a certain amount of disdain is teaching to the test. How is what you're doing different from that?

Kujath: Well, we're really focused on how nurses make decisions. We know that the test measures how nurses make decisions, but most importantly, we want our graduates to make the right decision. Right? So, we're not saying you only want to practice this type of question, we want to talk about what evidence do you need to make your next decision? Is this question asking you for an assessment? Is this question asking you for an intervention? Or is this question asking you to evaluate something that's already happened, which is exactly what practice is like. So really, we're teaching to practice of the practice of nursing, but also, we know that that's heavily judged or weighted on our NCLEX exams. So, we can never decide, we never know if it's going to be about pneumonia or a woman in labor. We just know that it's based on those clinical decisions.

Schlenker: Where does this put Illinois Wesleyan in terms of improvement compared to your peers and bachelor programs?

Kujath: Overall, we did see a trend an upward trend in the past rates nationally and statewide, but we know that of those programs that improved we improved about seven to 10%, more than everyone else, and so we are writing that same wave of improvement, but we're really doing it a little higher rate.

Schlenker: Why the national rising arc?

Kujath: There's a couple of things, you know, we're emerging from the pandemic, of course, and everyone's tired of hearing that, but it really changed our social scene and our educational scene. We know that our students are much more anxious right now. We have a higher rate of depression and now we're improving mental health on campus and such, so that we understand those issues and trends. That's one reason why and then we also had a different test form. This year, we had what's called the next generation test form and that really focused on clinical judgment, we were all very nervous, we thought and perhaps historically, we have had a dip when we have a new test form, but this test we feel nationally and, in our profession, has done a better job at really getting to that clinical judgment.

Schlenker: Not every program that had lowered test scores got into a dangerous zone where certification became something at risk.

Kujath: Uh huh

Schlenker: So, what happened?

Kujath: Yeah, I think there's a number of issues again, Illinois Wesleyan is a high touch program, we pride ourselves on being in person with our students, our class sizes are small, our physical classroom size is small, and so we have those little high touch points, and if you think about moving to larger lecture halls, wearing masks it not being able to meet with students in our in our offices, that has an impact. It's just not really our personality and our culture, and so while I wasn't at Illinois Wesleyan, I have to believe that that switch to online and distance was just not, not in our core.

Schlenker: You're heading towards average and have reached average for late breaking cohort. What are you going to continue to do to shift those numbers?

Kujath: Yeah, so what we've really done is in the classroom, again, talked more about clinical judgment, but also really framing this in an area of our student's success. There's a lot weighing on these numbers, and we understand that but we really don't want to pass that on to our students, and what I've tried to tell our students is this is your path forward, and with the program that we've implemented, each student gets a remediation plan after they've taken those benchmarks, and so we have given them course credit to complete those. We've encouraged them to come and talk to us about those areas where they may be confused but really, I've told them this is their path to success, and we all know when our students are successful, it reflects wonderfully on, on the community where they have come from, and so I've really made this about them because this is about their career, and I want them to be the absolute best nurses. I want them to start on their career as soon as possible. I've encouraged them all, to take the test as soon as possible. We know that that's one of the highest ways to succeed on the NCLEX is to take it while all that knowledge is fresh, and so recently, when I met with our graduating seniors, I said, if we all take, if you all take it by July and everybody passes, we're gonna have a huge celebration. We're just really invested in it for them and not about it's not about us.

Schlenker: Amber's Kujath is head of Illinois Wesleyan University's nursing science program. She says her personal goal is to eventually have a 100% pass rate on the nursing license exam, something that is rare in any given year in Illinois. Kujath spoke with WGLT's Charlie Schlenker.