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School of Nursing Receives National Award for Study Abroad Program

Nov. 7, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois Wesleyan University's School of Nursing has received an Innovations in Professional Nursing Education Award from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) for its unique study abroad program.

The award recognizes outstanding work of AACN member schools to re-envision traditional models for nursing education and lead programmatic changes. Illinois Wesleyan is the Small School Winner for its study abroad program facilitating cultural immersion and advancing cultural competency for student spending the entire spring semester in Barcelona, Spain.

Semester-long study abroad programs are rare in nursing, according to Vickie Folse, director of the School of Nursing, because Illinois state law requires nursing students be supervised in clinical settings by a master's-prepared registered nurse licensed in Illinois. Nursing faculty deliberately selected study abroad to occur in the sophomore year, when clinical coursework requires far fewer hours than those of juniors and seniors.

Through the IWU Spain Program, nursing students take language and general education courses offered at Barcelona International College. Core course content is delivered synchronously to nursing students in Bloomington and Barcelona via video-conferencing technology. While in Barcelona, nursing students also have the opportunity to

observe clinical settings within the Spanish healthcare system. The Barcelona nursing students complete their required direct patient care requirements when they return to campus for May Term.

"We are honored to accept this Innovations Award on behalf of faculty, staff and students who have worked to make our study abroad program so successful," said Folse.

Illinois Wesleyan will send its third group of nursing majors to Barcelona in spring 2014. Folse said nursing faculty were interested in teaming with the IWU Spain Program in response to the increased need for Spanish-speaking and culturally competent nurses. U.S. Census Bureau demographers report the number of Spanish speakers is projected to increase through 2020 to anywhere between 39 million and 43 million.

Representing more than 740 member schools of nursing at public and private institutions nationwide. AACN works to establish quality standards for bachelor's- and graduate-degree nursing education and influence the nursing profession to improve health care.

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