SCHOOL OF NURSING

DEAN'S REPORT 2026







SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
EDWARDSVILLE

MESSAGE **FROM THE DEAN**



Greetings, friends and colleagues,

2026 marks the School of Nursing's 60th anniversary of graduating exceptional nurses and our first year in the new Health Sciences Complex.

We were honored to welcome four members of the School of Nursing's inaugural graduating class of 1966, pictured here from left to right with our Chancellor, James T. Minor, PhD, and me: Barbara Wagner, Sharon Grider, Lynn Ward, and Mary Anne Wahrle, to our ribbon-cutting ceremony. Their presence, along with that of many other School of Nursing colleagues, made the occasion especially memorable.

In this issue, you'll find that same pioneering spirit among our outstanding faculty, staff, students, alumni, and generous donors. You'll also get a glimpse inside the beautiful rooms of our high-fidelity simulation center, learn about a global excursion to Costa Rica, and discover the impact of the WE CARE Clinic on student learning.

Please enjoy this issue, and here's to the next 60 years and beyond! Thank you for your continued dedication to the SIUE School of Nursing.

Judy Liesveld, PhD, RN, FAAN
Dean, SIUE School of Nursing

POINTS OF **PRIDE**

Outstanding student support
OVER 900 TUTORING SESSIONS
during the past year

Extraordinary clinical partner support
OVER 60 CLINICAL SITES
are used each semester
for clinical education

Holistic health care
OVER 1,000 PATIENT ENCOUNTERS
provided by
WE CARE Clinic and Mobile Health Unit

Honoring
60 YEARS OF OUTSTANDING NURSING GRADUATES
First graduating class: 1966

A legacy of excellence
OVER 12,000
SCHOOL OF NURSING ALUMNI

Celebrating one year in the new
HEALTH SCIENCES COMPLEX

BOYD'S LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO **MENTAL HEALTH NURSING**



Mary Ann Boyd, PhD, DNS, RN, PMHCNS-BC, professor emerita, joined the SIUE School of Nursing faculty in 1977 and retired in 2009. Even after retirement, Boyd continued teaching mental health clinical groups for many years.

During the 1990s, Boyd was teaching undergraduate psychiatric-mental health nursing and saw that textbooks lacked current evidence-based content. New insights into brain functioning had transformed the understanding of mental illness, yet nursing textbooks remained tied to outdated models. This led her to write her own textbook, "Psychiatric Nursing: Contemporary Practice," which was first published in 1998.

Boyd later partnered with Rebecca Luebbert, PhD, PMHCNS-BC, associate dean and professor in the School of Nursing, as co-author. The textbook, now in its eighth edition, is used globally and emphasizes recovery-oriented care, trauma-informed practice, and reducing stigma surrounding mental illness.

"As an advanced practice nurse, my vision of mental health care evolved as evidence in mental health and nursing advanced," said Boyd. "Nurses took on greater responsibilities, requiring them to adapt through education. With a new understanding of neurobiological changes and a shift toward a recovery-oriented system, mental health care became more inclusive and involved patients in their own recovery journeys."

> **"Every nurse is a mental health nurse and needs communication skills to provide competent care."**
> Mary Ann Boyd,
> PhD, DNS, RN, PMHCNS-BC
> Professor Emerita

Continuing her dedication to nursing education, Boyd established the Mary Ann Boyd Mental Health Nursing Endowment in 2022. The endowment supports innovative curriculum initiatives that help SIUE nursing students develop the therapeutic communication, empathy, and professional skills needed to care for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.

The endowment reflects Boyd's lifelong commitment to strengthening mental health nursing education and empowering students with the knowledge, compassion, and communication skills necessary to transform patient care.

To learn more about the endowment and to give, visit connect.siue.edu/g/mental-health-nursing.

THE CLASS OF 2026:
THE NEXT CHAPTER

SIUE School of Nursing graduates are beginning careers in hospitals and pediatric care, while others are pursuing further education. Here is a look at where a few members of the Class of 2026 are now.

Dana Somerville, BSN

Somerville grew up helping care for elders in her family. This experience inspired her to pursue a career in healthcare, and nursing became the clear path forward. She is working in the neuroscience unit at SSM Health Saint Louis University Hospital.



"I met a lot of unique and cool people in the nursing program. They really supported me throughout my whole time at SIUE."



Perfect Agbai, DNP

Agbai earned an undergraduate degree from SIUE and valued her School of Nursing experience so much that she returned to pursue her doctorate. After graduating, she was preparing for boards and exploring her next steps.

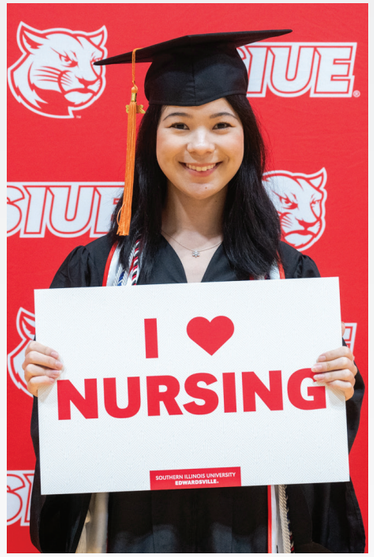
"I decided to come back because the professors are really good and the education is unmatched. It makes me stand out from my colleagues."

Tolulope Adetoba, DNP

Adetoba valued the close support she received from SIUE faculty throughout her program, especially as she completed clinical requirements and projects. Faculty's investment in their students helped affirm her decision to choose SIUE and prepared her for the next step in her nursing career. She is now working at HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital in Breese.

"I chose SIUE because I did my research and found out that you work closely with the faculty, and they are invested in your education. The faculty were really helpful."

"Caitlyn Heller was fantastic. She taught my community health class and is the one who encouraged me to pursue my master's in nurse education."



Paris Kinsley, BSN

Kinsley is returning to SIUE this fall to pursue her master's degree in nursing education. Her favorite memories from SIUE include hands-on experiences in labs and clinicals, and she credits SIUE faculty with encouraging her to continue her education.

Dirk Tecson, BSN

Tecson is working in the intensive care unit at UW Health in Madison, Wis. During his time at SIUE, he had the opportunity to pursue research alongside hands-on nursing experiences, giving him a unique path through the program and helping prepare him for his career.

"My research professor, Dr. Annie Imboden, was my mentor for three years in research and took me on a path that was a little bit different compared to other nursing majors. It was pretty cool getting a different type of approach and experience at SIUE."





Colten McMasters, BSN

McMasters is working at Ranken Jordan Pediatric Bridge Hospital in Maryland Heights, Mo. Looking back on his time at SIUE, he remembers the beauty of the campus and the relationships he built in the nursing program. Those connections became an important part of the experience, offering support through the demands of nursing school.

"My advice for current students is to connect with your peers. You're going to be with them for your entire nursing experience, and making those connections is important."

Madison Mersinger, BSN

Mersinger is beginning her nursing career in the emergency department at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, a Level I trauma center in St. Louis. As she looks ahead, she carries with her the lessons she learned at SIUE and encourages current nursing students to stay focused and believe in what they can accomplish.

"You can do anything you want to do; you just have to put your mind to it."

Craig Spearman, BSN

A veteran of the U.S. Navy, Spearman is working as a nurse on the medical-surgical floor at Fayette County Hospital. He is also working toward his long-term goal of becoming a CRNA and earning a doctorate in nursing anesthesia. When reflecting on his nursing experience at SIUE, he pointed to the community within the School of Nursing as one of the most meaningful parts of his journey.



"The School of Nursing cohort is a community. It is awesome to grow with your cohort and learn alongside other people. We all push each other to be better."

INSIDE THE HEALTH SCIENCES COMPLEX

SIUE celebrated the official opening of the state-of-the-art 176,000-square-foot Health Sciences Complex (HSC), housing both the Schools of Nursing and Pharmacy, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in April 2026.

“With our new building, exceptional programs, and outstanding faculty and staff, our current students will continue to be tomorrow’s trailblazers, providing exceptional nursing care and promoting equitable healthcare for all,” said Judy Liesveld, PhD, RN, PPCNP-BC, CNE, FAAN, dean of the School of Nursing during the ceremony.

The HSC features modern classroom spaces, student huddle areas, and a variety of simulation spaces designed to prepare students for real-world healthcare environments.

Nurses Station

The nurses station serves as the “hub” of the simulated clinical setting, and functions as an extension of the clinical experience. Students are assigned to a patient for whom they receive report, assess conditions, and administer care, and develop clinical judgment through interactive Socratic questioning with an instructor.



Emergency Room

The emergency room trauma space resembles a procedural area that can serve multiple purposes, including a secondary procedural room, ER trauma triage space, or a recovery, post-anesthesia care unit setting. This flexibility supports interprofessional simulations, allowing nursing, pharmacy, and anesthesia students to work together through full patient care scenarios.



Scenario-Based High-Fidelity Simulation

Scenario-based simulation allows students to encounter complex and challenging situations before entering the field. Students respond to real-world cues while practicing decision-making skills in a controlled environment. A variety of scenarios can be staged, and a viewing area allows faculty observation and guidance.



Nursing students began coursework in THE NEW HEALTH SCIENCES COMPLEX CLASSROOMS AND SIMULATION CENTER IN OCTOBER 2025

Virtual Reality Room

Designed for full immersion, this dedicated virtual reality space strips away visual distraction so students can step inside AI-driven patient scenarios that respond in real time to their decisions and communication. Undergraduate and graduate students alike use the space to build clinical judgment in a way that bridges the simulation environment and real-world practice.



1,240 SIMULATIONS OCCUR in our simulation center each year

Operating Room

The operating room reflects the environments used by clinical partners, creating a highly realistic setting for students. Nurse anesthesia students can practice the full scope of perioperative anesthesia care, from pre-induction assessment and airway management through intraoperative monitoring and emergencies. At the same time, the space also supports interprofessional simulations involving multiple healthcare professionals and surgical care scenarios.



LEARNING TOGETHER TO **STRENGTHEN PATIENT CARE**

SIUE's WE CARE Clinic provides quality primary patient care to the Metro East community, while creating a hands-on learning environment where students from nursing, pharmacy, nutrition, and public health collaborate in real clinical settings. This interprofessional approach helps prepare students for real-world success by giving them early experience working as part of a coordinated healthcare team.

> **"Working in an interprofessional environment has given me a clearer understanding of how healthcare professionals from different fields collaborate to address complex health conditions."**
> Samuel Kwaku Adutwum Benchie, MPH '26

Each morning before patients are seen, the Clinic's interdisciplinary team gathers to review and discuss patient needs. During these meetings, students contribute insights from their respective disciplines, building a more complete understanding of each patient's care.

"This process allows students to learn from one another, better understand the value of team-based care, and become familiar with interdisciplinary structures that will be essential in their future careers," said Myjal Garner, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, director of the Clinic. "Throughout the clinic experience, students continue collaborating to address patient needs in a more comprehensive and coordinated way."

Spring graduates Brittney Harper, BSN, DNP-FNP '26, and Samuel Kwaku Adutwum Benchie, MPH '26, both gained firsthand experience working in the WE CARE Clinic during their education. "I have seen firsthand how involving the interdisciplinary team improves patient care and the student experience," said Harper. "I learned so much during the morning meetings. It gives students an idea of what they will see in practice and provides a low-stakes place to put what they learn in the classroom into practice."

"Collaborating with students and professionals from other disciplines has helped me appreciate how each field contributes their unique perspective to patient care," Benchie added. "This experience has had a very positive impact on how I view my future career in public health. It has helped me appreciate the role each profession plays in supporting patient care and improving health outcomes."





> **"I wouldn't be where I am without my years as a Cougar."**
> Breanna Hetland, PhD, RN '10, CCRN

FROM BEDSIDE TO BREAKTHROUGH: **ALUMNA HETLAND RETURNS TO INSPIRE FUTURE NURSE INNOVATORS**

The School of Nursing proudly welcomed back 2010 graduate Breanna Hetland, PhD, RN '10, CCRN, to campus in April 2026. Hetland is an associate professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Nursing, a nurse scientist at Nebraska Medicine, and CEO and co-founder of Familyroom.health, a nurse-led digital health platform designed to transform how ICU families are engaged as active members of the care team.

She returned to campus for an evening to share her journey, from graduating from SIUE, to bedside nursing, to earning her PhD and completing postdoctoral training, and ultimately to co-founding a health tech startup company.

"Being back on campus after 15 years was a genuinely juxtaposing experience," said Hetland. "Everything felt familiar — comforting, even. There's something humbling and quietly powerful about standing in a place that shaped you and recognizing how far you've grown, personally and professionally, in ways you never could have imagined back then. It felt full circle in the best way."

Hetland presented "From Bedside Idea to Market Impact" to current students and faculty, walking them through how a personal experience with a family member's ICU admission sparked a research focus that eventually grew into a funded startup and active clinical trials. She also reflected on how her time at SIUE provided a strong clinical foundation, confidence after graduation, and hands-on experience that ultimately led to the creation of her company.

"I hope the students left knowing that nursing ideas are worth pursuing, even the ones that feel too big or too unconventional," Hetland continued. "The path from bedside observation to funded innovation isn't linear, and it isn't easy, but it is possible. If even one person in that room walked away thinking differently about what nurses can build and lead, the evening was worth it."

Learn more about Hetland and her company at familyroom.health.

“There are not a lot of options that I could find to study abroad in nursing, so to have an opportunity to learn about a different healthcare system and grow my skills was very exciting. I feel like the knowledge I gained from going on the trip will help me in my future practice as a nurse.”
Nathan Burrell
Senior BSN Student



NURSING CARE **ACROSS CULTURES**

A group of 15 nursing students traveled to San José, Costa Rica, over spring break in March 2026 to gain firsthand experience in global healthcare, focusing on wellness, diversity, and compassionate care for underserved individuals.

“We focused on the concepts of cultural humility, and the impact of how these experiences translate to student learning and their current or future professional nursing practice,” said Sheri Compton-McBride, DNP, RN, assistant professor and department chair of primary care and health systems nursing.

“I learned how healthcare can vary greatly depending on resources, culture, and access. I saw how nurses adapt to limited supplies while still providing compassionate, effective care. It was incredibly rewarding to feel like I was making a small but meaningful impact while also learning so much in return.”
Elise Fabish
Senior BSN Student

Students provided care for 115 children at a private school in an impoverished area of the city and served 220 clinic participants ranging from infants to adults. The group also visited a variety of service locations, engaging with individuals who had experienced trafficking and abuse, as well as participants at a day camp foundation for individuals with special abilities.

For many students, the experience offered a rare opportunity to study abroad in nursing while applying classroom learning in real-world healthcare settings.



“Having the opportunity to study abroad in the field of nursing was unlike any other. You get firsthand real-world experience in situations where resources are limited. You are forced to think outside the box, and as a team, you come up with a solution. I can confidently say that I have grown as an individual, and I feel more equipped as a future healthcare professional.”
Jerrimiah Flores
Senior BSN Student



“Studying abroad in my field was an incredibly rewarding and eye-opening experience. It allowed me to step outside of the traditional U.S. healthcare system and see how care is delivered in a different environment. It challenged me to think critically, be flexible, and collaborate with an interdisciplinary team in new ways. It also reinforced my passion for nursing and global health.”
Melanie Spung
Doctor of Nursing Practice Candidate

MOVING NURSING FORWARD

The SIUE School of Nursing continues to build exciting momentum as we prepare the next generation of nurses to serve our communities. With a new home in the Health Sciences Complex, growing enrollment, expanding clinical partnerships, and more than 12,000 alumni, there are many opportunities to strengthen the future of nursing at SIUE.

We are especially grateful for the alumni, healthcare partners, and friends who contribute their time, expertise, advocacy, and resources to support our students and faculty. Whether through mentorship, clinical partnerships, professional engagement, or philanthropy, your involvement plays an important role in advancing the School's mission.

There are many ways to make a difference. Support can help provide scholarships for deserving students, expand experiential and clinical learning opportunities, enhance simulation and other educational resources, recruit and retain outstanding faculty, and strengthen programs that prepare students to meet the evolving needs of the healthcare workforce.

We also invite you to become more connected with the School through the SIUE Nursing Alumni Network and Nursing Advisory Board. These opportunities bring alumni, students, faculty, healthcare leaders, and friends together to build meaningful relationships and help shape the future of nursing education at SIUE.

As you read this Dean's Report, we hope you take pride in the accomplishments of our students, faculty, alumni, and partners. We invite you to be part of what comes next. Your engagement and support can help ensure that SIUE Nursing continues to provide an exceptional education and prepare nurses who make a lasting difference in the lives of others.

For more information about ways to support or become involved with the SIUE School of Nursing, please contact:

Connie Collins
Vice Chancellor for University Advancement
618-650-2345
siuefoundation@siue.edu





Outstanding Contribution to Community Service Award Recipient



Smithson Scholarship Award Recipients



Student Leadership Award Recipient

SCHOOL OF NURSING **HONORS STUDENTS AND SCHOLARSHIP SPONSORS**

The School of Nursing honored students, donors, faculty, staff, and friends during its 19th Annual Scholarship and Awards Luncheon in April. The event celebrated the achievements of nursing students and recognized the scholarship sponsors whose generosity supports their education. This year, the School awarded nearly 60 annual and endowed scholarships totaling $60,000.

Key highlights of the ceremony included the introduction of the T. Michael Smithson Memorial Scholarship in Nursing, established by Marian Smithson in memory of her late husband. The scholarship supports a deserving nursing student with a strong academic record and demonstrated financial need.

> **"Together, sponsors and recipients have formed a meaningful partnership that will shape the future of nursing in our region, state, and world in the years to come."**
> Sheri Compton-McBride, DNP-RN
> Assistant Professor and Department Chair of Primary Care and Health Systems Nursing

The student speaker, Jaila Hillmer, senior BSN student, reflected on the future of healthcare and the role today's nursing students already play as advocates, leaders, and compassionate caregivers. The program also recognized Dirk Tecson, BSN '26, with the Outstanding Contribution to Community Service Award and Brittney Harper, BSN, DNP-FNP '26, with the Student Leadership in Health Equity Award.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: **SHANNON BROWN**



Since joining the School of Nursing in August 2016, Shannon Brown has played a vital behind-the-scenes role in supporting faculty and contributing to the success of students. Brown, an office support specialist, ensures that faculty have what they need to focus on teaching, mentoring, and advancing the School's mission.

Sheri Compton-McBride, DNP, RN, chair of the Department of Primary Care and Health Systems Nursing, who works closely with Brown, said her collaborative approach strengthens the School of Nursing community.

> **"Shannon's kindness and daily support for our faculty and students is deeply appreciated."**
> Judy Liesveld, PhD, RN, PPCNP-BC, CNE, FAAN
> Dean of the School of Nursing

"Shannon models and operationalizes the quote, 'We are better and stronger when we work as a team,' by fostering a welcoming, collaborative environment where every interaction reflects respect and a shared commitment to the success and well-being of our students, faculty, staff, and community," Compton-McBride said.

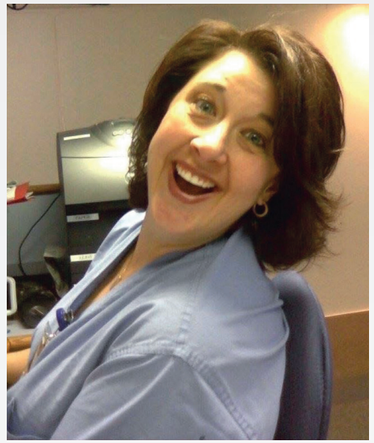
Brown said that one of the most rewarding aspects of her role is engaging with students through the School of Nursing's poverty simulations. Each semester, Brown participates alongside community health students and faculty, helping create an immersive experience that deepens students' understanding of how poverty impacts health and access to care.

"It is so rewarding to see the students gain understanding of the challenging circumstances of poverty and how that has an impact on healthcare," said Brown. "I enjoy seeing our students so excited to learn and grow to become nurses."

Brown values the dedication of SIUE nursing students and finds inspiration in their enthusiasm and commitment as they prepare to enter the profession. Her steady support keeps the many day-to-day functions of the School running smoothly.

A LEGACY OF **LOVE**





SIUE mourned the loss of School of Nursing instructor Carma LeAnn Love in January 2026. Carma served as a postpartum nurse at Anderson Hospital for 31 years. She was dedicated to her calling as a nurse, and her life was marked by service, generosity, and joy.

Her family remarked that Love was not just her last name, but how she lived. She felt called to serve and love others, and her patience and empathy stemmed from her own life experiences.

In 2006, Carma experienced her first episode of atrial fibrillation, which ultimately led to the implantation of her first pacemaker. That began years of struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety caused by recurring A-fib episodes, loss of normal heart rhythm, and moments when her heart would stop.

"She came to deeply understand how fragile life can be and how precious time truly is," remarked Carma's family. "That understanding shaped the way she cared for others with patience, empathy, and intentionality both as a nurse and as an educator. Her hope was always that the love and care she poured into others would continue through the lives of the students, patients, and colleagues she taught and loved."

In her final act of selflessness, Carma gave the gift of life through organ donation, a reflection of the generosity and compassion that defined her life and career. Her legacy lives not only in the many lives she touched, taught, and cared for, but also in those she helped through the extraordinary gift of life.

> **"It is often said that nurses provide compassionate, patient-centered care. Carma embodied those qualities in a way that left a truly lasting impact."**
> The Family of Carma LeAnn Love

To honor Carma's legacy, her family, in partnership with the School of Nursing, created an endowed scholarship fund. The fund will support future nursing students who, like Carma, exude the qualities of integrity, kindness, perseverance, and a servant's heart. To contribute to the endowment in her memory, please visit connect.siue.edu/g/carma-love-memorial.



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