

## Weighing health careers? Follow this path

**H**ow long does it take seven deans, half a dozen department chairs, a provost, a president, a Board of Trustees, a Board of Governors and a successful CEO in Atlanta to bless an ambitious new program? In the case of FSU's new Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences Program, hardly any time at all. Though discussions began in earnest just last year, the program's first students are already in class.

The idea originated in the restless brain of Senior Associate Dean Myra Hurt.

Her vision was to create a broad, clearly defined path for all incoming undergraduates considering a health profession — not just medical school but nursing, pharmacy, social work, health policy, technology and all the rest. The new curriculum gives them the necessary sciences but also requires them to explore career options and spend time with medical practitioners of all kinds. And if they change their mind along the way, they needn't take the radical step of changing majors. They just detour to a parallel path.

There's no other program like it in the country, Hurt said. Hopes are high for its future.

"Even during the lowest part of the recent recession, health care was still a dependable career," Dean John P. Fogarty said. "With this program, we can make sure that FSU students get a great education while meeting the health-care needs of our state and nation."

Seven colleges are participating: Arts and Sciences (departments of biology, chemistry, physics and psychology); Communication and Information; Human Sciences; Medicine; Nursing; Social Sciences and Public Policy; and Social Work. In addition, students from the College of Business are conducting case studies to determine the best way to recruit the right students as well as employers. They're taught by Dan Cowan, the CEO mentioned above.

"I was amazed at how quickly he grasped what we're doing and had a different perspective on it," Hurt said. "It's been a really fulfilling experience to have all this energy from all these different places coming together."

The program resides in the College of Medicine and is directed by Hurt and Associate Dean Helen Livingston, who previously partnered to flesh out PIMS (FSU's Program in Medical Sciences), the Bridge Program and the medical school itself.

Here's a sampling of what IMS offers students:

- **Choice of three majors.** The pathway has three branches: Pre-Professionals, including physicians, nurses, physician assistants and pharmacists; Patient Care in the Community, including social workers, patient navigators and health advocates; and Health Policy and Technology, including social scientists and health informaticists.
- **Core sciences for everyone.** During the first two years, every IMS student takes the core sciences. "When you finish this you have a fundamental basis for any field in health care, wherever you go," Livingston said.
- **Real-world experiences.** Every student will have regular contact with health professionals in the community, through shadowing and seminars. They get answers to key career questions: "What professions are available?" "Could I see myself doing this job?" "Hours? Income? Training required?" "What are the social and psychological components of being in health professions?"
- **Flexibility.** In the past, students sometimes chose a narrowly defined major without all the information they needed — then wasted time and money changing their major. Sometimes they ended up with a degree but no profession. The interdisciplinary approach provides new opportunities to take electives and explore options. "For example,

there are a number of College of Human Sciences courses, like child development, that someone interested in pediatrics could take," Hurt said. "That really wasn't an option before."

- **Continual advising.** Students don't come to college equally prepared. Some get poor advising along the way. Some don't cope well with life's surprises. "So we hope to provide lots of guidance," Livingston said. "Not just in an academic sense, but in terms of how they're growing personally and professionally and helping them determine a career path."
- **Team-based approach.** These future health professionals work side by side, mirroring the real world's increasing demand for collaboration.

"It's an exciting moment for Florida State," said Provost Sally McRorie. "We will vigorously pursue this innovative approach to preparing students and helping them find jobs in medical fields. I predict we will become *the* destination for students from Florida who want access to the full range of health professions."

Livingston is constantly amazed by Hurt's big ideas.

"Myra is a visionary," she said. "She has this ability to look at the landscape and almost immediately see what's missing, what works, what doesn't work — to see how we might be able to shape the future."



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