Keiser University in Melbourne gears up for rollout of new bachelor’s degrees, including program in Dietetics and Nutrition; new 30,000-square-foot facility

By Ken Datzman

Keiser University, which serves more than 20,000 students at campuses around the state, plans to increase its portfolio of bachelor’s degree programs and is targeting a number of fields where job growth is accelerating across the nation.

Karen Runk, the dean of academic affairs at Keiser University in Melbourne, says the expansion of the school’s four-year degree offerings “is a key focus right now. We’ve always had a rock-solid foundation in the career-oriented associate-degree programs. Now, we’re taking that next step toward growing our bachelor’s degree population at this physical campus.”

Roughly 1,100 students are enrolled at Keiser University on South Babcock Street in Melbourne. The enrollment includes some 800 students who attend classes at the campus, while the other 300 students study online. The Melbourne campus offers 45 different degree programs at various levels, in the classroom and online.

In order to be able to expand its programs in Melbourne, Keiser University is building a new 30,000-square-foot structure next to its main facility. The new facility, currently being called the science building, is expected to be completed in September, said Kimberly Dale, regional director of media and public relations for Keiser University.

The building will contain about 25 classrooms, an auditorium designed to accommodate up to 90 people, science laboratories, and computer laboratories. In addition, it will feature gymnasium space for the planned Sports Medicine and Fitness Technology program, a bachelor’s offering, and Physical Therapy Assistant program, a two-year degree.

Keiser University plans to introduce the new programs at the Melbourne campus in phases. A bachelor’s degree in Dietetics and Nutrition will be available in the months ahead. “We’re in the final planning stages of that program,” said Runk. “We’re hoping to have our first cohort enter the core classes by January. We are in the process of working with ACEND, the accrediting body.”

The Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics is the accrediting agency for education programs preparing students for careers as registered dietitian nutritionists, or registered dietetic technicians. The ACEND team makes site visits to the colleges to ensure that the institution has the proper laboratories and training facilities, said Runk.

Employment of dietitians and nutritionists is projected to grow 21 percent now through 2022, faster than the average for all occupations, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The role of food in preventing and treating illnesses, such as diabetes, is now well known. More dietitians and nutritionists will be needed to provide care for patients with various medical conditions and to advise people who want to improve their overall health.

Currently, half of all Americans age 65 or older have prediabetes and are at risk for developing type 2 diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association. In addition, an estimated 10.9 million Americans over age 65 have been diagnosed with diabetes, a figure that will continue to increase “if we do not act to prevent diabetes in this population,” says the ADA.

The ADA says diabetes is not only a physical burden, but also a financial burden to this country. The annual cost of diagnosed and undiagnosed diabetes, gestational diabetes, and prediabetes skyrocketed to $322 billion in 2012, a 48 percent increase in just five years. One out of three Medicare dollars is now being spent on someone with diabetes.

Runk, whose education is in nursing, says the “fitness and wellness component is a big area of growth in this particular community.” She cited the growth of such facilities as LA Fitness, which now has locations in Palm Bay, Melbourne, and Viera, and the success of the longstanding Pro-Health & Fitness system in the county, part of Health First Inc.

“As the baby-boom generation grows older and looks for ways to stay healthy, there will be more demand for dietetic services. An aging population will also increase the need for dietitians and nutritionists in nursing and residential-care facilities and in home health-care settings.”

Another four-year degree program set for Keiser University in Melbourne is Sports Medicine and Fitness Technology, which “is recognized by the American Medical...
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Association as an allied-health career,” said Runk. That program will prepare students to conduct advanced health and fitness assessments, monitor individuals with exercise prescriptions, and make lifestyle modifications for clients. Students will learn about health-risk factors, exercise leadership, prevention and treatment of injuries, the biomechanics of movement, and physiological adaptations to exercise.

Of these planned programs, Physical Therapy Assistant seems to meet the greatest demand for graduates in the marketplace. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says employment in this sector is expected to grow 41 percent now through 2022. Demand for physical therapy services will be driven in response to the health needs of an aging population, particularly the large baby-boom generation. Older people are particularly vulnerable to a number of chronic and debilitating conditions that require therapeutic services. These patients often need additional help in their treatment, making the roles of physical therapy assistants vital.

Keiser University’s newest undergraduate degree program in Melbourne is Imaging Sciences. Runk says it is a “completion degree” for graduates of associate of science programs in a number of areas, including Radiology Technology, Nuclear Medicine Technology, and Radiation Therapy.

“When they come in with their associate degree, the students take the upper-level core courses. It takes them a step further into their career and prepares them for additional certifications in their field,” Runk said. The bachelor’s degree in Imaging Sciences is designed to expand the student’s technological, administrative, and clinical knowledge, as well as provide the educational foundation for advanced certifications and career advancement.

Students choose from concentrations in either imaging management or an advanced modality concentration. The concentrations include radiology, nuclear medicine, diagnostic vascular sonography, or clinical imaging, depending upon the student’s area of interest and career pathway.

On the master’s level, Keiser University in Melbourne has just launched its new Family Nurse Practitioner degree program. “Family nurse practitioners play a huge role in promoting health and wellness,” she said. “We just recently rolled out this program here.” The curriculum focuses on health promotion, injury and illness prevention, and the management of acute and chronic illnesses. The program is aligned with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing guidelines. A recent “CNNMoney/PayScale.com” ranking of 100 careers had nurse practitioner in its top 10, singling it out in the areas of “big growth, good pay, and satisfying work.” It has fared well in other such surveys, too. “We’re excited about all of these new programs. They target job prospects in growth markets,” said Runk.

Attorney, Reservist Rolando Rodriguez earns prestigious Rear Adm. Howell Award
Area attorney Rolando Rodriguez was presented with the Rear Adm. Hugh H. Howell Jr. Award of Excellence at the annual Military Law Training Symposium April 24 for “superior performance of duties from March 2014 to April 2015 while supporting Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Fourteen. Rodriguez is a Naval Reservist currently serving with the Regional Legal Services Office Southeast.
Navy Reserve Force Master Chief C.J. Mitchell and Command Master Chief Julie Tessmer, on behalf of Deputy Judge Advocate General Donovan, made the presentation.
Howell was the first director of the Naval Reserve Law Program. This is highest award available to reserve judge advocates, legalmen, and units demonstrating outstanding support of the Navy and Naval Reserve at a “significant level of responsibility.”
Rodriguez is an attorney with the Law Offices of Cantwell & Goldman, P.A. He practices primarily in the area of business immigration law and provides pro-bono assistance to veterans in the local community.
Cantwell & Goldman, P.A. is a full-service Cocoa law firm. The office’s phone number is 639–1320, extension 100.