

Nursing school is challenging. Sometimes, students don't finish.



Nursing school during a pandemic is even more challenging.

But a group of Black Hawk College nursing students didn't let coronavirus derail them and their plans.

All 27 Associate Degree Nursing students who started their final semester in January 2020 finished the semester and graduated in May 2020.

"These students worked very hard to complete their degree," said Charlotte Powell, associate professor of nursing.

"Classroom education turned to online education. Not only were the students flexible with that change, but clinical education had to be completed online, which added a higher degree of difficulty," she said.

The BHC Class of 2020 didn't just finish, they finished on top. The percentage of students in the class who passed a national end-of-program nursing exam was well above average.

"This group of students scored higher on the HESI (Health Education Systems Inc. national exam) than other cohorts of students in the past," Powell said.

The average pass score - 875 - is usually attained by 40-50% of students on their first attempt, she said. In the BHC Class of 2020, 67% of the students scored 875 or higher on their first attempt.

The students and their instructors celebrated their accomplishments at a nursing pinning ceremony.

“The nursing pinning ceremony is a time-honored nursing school tradition that’s often more meaningful to nursing school graduates than the actual graduation ceremony,” said nursing professor Karin Barrett.

Typically, graduates gather for a formal ceremony and receive a black and gold Black Hawk College nursing pin from their instructors.

But this year, the students were pinned by their family members in their kitchens and living rooms during a virtual ceremony conducted over Zoom.



Nursing student Samantha Ferreyra of Moline celebrates with her fiancé, Joshua Loete, and their daughter, Ella.

“You’ve had to endure in your final semester this crazy environment that we’re living in today,” said Dr. Richard Bush, dean of career programs. “And you’ve done so with dignity and you’ve done so with quite a bit of calm and quite a bit of compassion.”

The ceremony concluded with the traditional candle lighting - but with battery-powered candles - and the students reciting the nurse’s Florence Nightingale Pledge.

“Nursing school has been quite the experience, especially here at the end where we have once again been shown that health care is an ever-changing world,” said student Sydney Fetters of East Moline.

“I am so incredibly proud of all of us in this class for surviving online pandemic nursing school,” she said.

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