

Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing
University of California, Irvine

With Humanity in Mind

A Brilliant Future Through Nursing

2024-2029

Introduction

We are nurses. We care for humanity.

We humans are amazing and ingenious. We innovate, collaborate, and communicate together to improve the lives of others. Humans advancing other humans has been our story for hundreds of thousands of years. For as long as there has been a group of people gathered in societies, there have been people in that group who have fulfilled the role of the nurse.

However, vulnerability is also part of that story. To be alive, after all, is to be vulnerable to harm and, ultimately, to death. Since we are human, nursing's remit covers every one of us – including nurses ourselves. In our moment of vulnerability, we are in greatest need of a compassionate, knowledgeable, and skillful professional caregiver and dedicated advocate. Probably before we can remember, and certainly before we die, all of us will have had reason to be grateful for the care of a good nurse. Because humans have – and will – always need nurses, nurses have always been part of the human story.

It must be acknowledged, nonetheless, that some people are more vulnerable than others. Vulnerability increases not only through disease, accident, or age, as any one of us may experience, but also because the societal wrongs that amplify vulnerability do not fall equally on all people. Structural inequities relating to personal characteristics – such as race, ethnicity, and color; sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression; national origin; disability; genetic information – and other categories of social marginalization reduce both access to healthcare and the foundational ability to sustain a healthy life. Daily, nurses witness the sorrows and frustrations of people who struggle against the odds of inequities to achieve even basic health.

It must also be acknowledged that these societal wrongs have been perpetuated within the modern profession of nursing since its beginnings in the mid-19th century. Nurses need to dismantle these wrongs within the profession.

Every nursing program strives to give students the knowledge and skills they need to provide good nursing care. For the Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing, delivering the highest standards of care to meet the needs specifically of minoritized populations has been a core commitment throughout our history – a history whose beginnings stretch back further into our community than the relative youth of our school would suggest. In the pursuit of addressing individual and structural inequities for a healthier and more just society, we seek to broaden our history by understanding, anticipating, and addressing inequities at their source by being a school committed to social and racial justice and to antiracism. This pursuit is key to the Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing's five-year strategy.

Rather than a standard strategic plan, ours is more of a manifesto, a public declaration of our intentions, beliefs and motives for action that will guide us as a nursing community over the next five years.

We came to this declaration through a thoughtful process. The process began with all-day retreats with faculty and staff and the school's advisory board. Then small groups of faculty and staff, students and alumni, and other key stakeholders worked on strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-and-threats analyses. We analyzed the data from the retreats and SWOT analyses using a broad qualitative approach. Included in this approach were data gleaned from foundational documents – such as the school's 10-year academic program review; the National Academy of Medicine's two future

of nursing reports, one published in 2010 and the other in 2021; the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's *The Essentials*; the UCI refreshed strategic plan and the UC Health Affairs strategic plan. After analyzing the data, we drafted a version of the manifesto, and then, after giving faculty, staff, students, alumni, and members of the advisory board time to read it, we conducted focus groups. We refined the language based on feedback. Hence, what you read here is truly our public declaration of the intentions, beliefs and motives for our action as a nursing community.

This manifesto also reflects our commitment to innovate, collaborate, and communicate to improve the lives of others and our own nursing community.

We believe in the power of humanity to do good, and so we declare that everything we do will be done for the sake of humanity.

There are, of course, enormous challenges to be faced. Many of these challenges are shared by schools of nursing across the United States – and the world. For too many people, the vulnerability that nurses seek to lessen is currently deepening – particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its downstream economic challenges – creating poorer health outcomes in large segments of the population. Burnout threatens nursing careers, creating an intractable gap between demand and supply. Simultaneously, investment in nursing is in decline, and even increased expenditure does not always appear to fix the problems that affect nurses most. Global issues such as extreme weather events and the rapid spread of new diseases threaten human health, particularly for minoritized populations. New technologies and techniques hold great promise for researchers and faculty, and for personalizing healthcare at sustainable cost. Yet investment, education, skills development, research, and collaboration are all required to maximize the usefulness of such innovations for the benefit of all people.

These challenges are daunting in scale. However, we are confident that, by making strategic use of our considerable strengths and being guided by our belief in the goodness of humanity, we will continue to have an impact disproportionate to our size as a school. Here is how:

- Our school grew from a nursing program that was founded to improve the standard of nursing care for those in most need, and to create a professional and educational infrastructure for nursing in Orange County. Since that day, our intention has never been solely to make up the recruitment deficit in local nursing: we educate nurse leaders, specialists, and advocates who raise standards for patients and communities; for pharmacists, physicians, and public health workers; and for the benefit of generations of the wider workforce.
- We do not expect to reverse, in five years, the experience of centuries of racism: however, we can and do make the effects of that experience visible through our education, research, and practice; we strive to make our school a place of belonging that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve; and we place equity, inclusion, belonging, and respect at the heart of our practice; we strive to be antiracist in our own school community.
- Social justice, and its relationship to health, involves complex issues of social, cultural, and economic disadvantage: in education, practice, and research, our faculty, students, and alumni share evidence-based data and information; practice where need is greatest; and carry out research that helps tease out the individual strands of socially compounded vulnerability.
- The nursing profession does not always see environmental justice as central: at

our school, we will develop awareness of the direct relationship between climate change and our vulnerability as humans, and we will collaborate with our campus and health center partners to reduce our own negative impact on the health of our world.

- We are not law or policy makers and do not have powers to make local, state, or national policy more equitable: yet we can and do leverage our contact with policy makers, and we advocate for policy change by providing evidence of the impacts of health inequity and suggesting workable changes to healthcare practice.

This manifesto expresses what we believe – what is important to us as a nursing community. The discussions involved in its development have reaffirmed that the faculty, staff, students, alumni, partners, and friends of the school are unified in their deep sense of purpose in seeking to reduce the vulnerability that is inherent in the human condition but, because of structural racism and social and environmental injustices, is worse for some.

We can be confident that through nursing leadership, advocacy, education, collaboration, innovation, and research, our school has the power and determination to amplify the impact of nursing on health – especially for those who experience inequities.



Mark Lazenby, PhD, RN, FAAN
Dean and Professor

The Origins of Our School

The Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing is known as a young, research-intensive institution, small in scale but set within a larger healthcare and academic context through its links with the University of California, Irvine, UCI Health Affairs and indeed, the broader University of California system. Recent decades have seen UCI grow into highly successful institutions: a world-renowned university and a teaching and research institution that includes a Magnet-designated hospital. The Magnet designation, developed and awarded by the American Nursing Credentialing Center (ANCC), means that UCI Medical Center performs at a standard by which patients can expect to benchmark quality of nursing care. The story and achievements of our school are inextricably part of the history and success of these related institutions – and our roots run deep within Orange County.

Almost 40 years ago, UCI's founding chancellor, Daniel Aldrich, recruited Ellen Lewis as Director of Nursing and Senior Associate Director of UCI Medical Center, which had previously been a county hospital. Lewis was, among other things, the first director of nursing at UCI Medical Center, and part of the effort to convert the county hospital – seen locally at the time as a care center of last resort – into a university-level facility.

Lewis saw almost at once that, despite including some excellent nurses, the level of nursing qualification in the hospital workforce was extremely low when benchmarked against other areas in the US – such as Milwaukee, the site of her previous job – and even compared with Northern California. She soon discovered the reason: local opportunities for nursing education were limited almost entirely to a handful of community colleges offering only basic training. Any nurse wishing to learn more, or go further,

would have to leave the area and possibly the state. The year was 1984, and there was little awareness at the time in the hospital, campus, or local government of the impact of nurse qualification on patient care, still less of the impact of academic nursing research on nursing expertise throughout the wider profession and on health and wellbeing.

Thus began Lewis's long campaign to establish not just a program, but an entire infrastructure for nursing education, training, and research that would make advanced care available to all citizens of Orange County, regardless of status, and provide a career path and opportunities that would help the county attract and retain the best of the profession.

Despite the immediate requirement to cut costs at the hospital, including nurse layoffs, one of Lewis's first objectives was to demonstrate locally what nurse specialists with graduate training could do for standards of care. She sought to establish such standards for the patients of UCI Medical Center by recruiting a master's trained clinical nurse specialist to every hospital department to role-model professional nursing. With this eventually achieved, her campaign for nursing education attracted the support of the physicians in every specialty: the difference in patient care was immediately appreciable.

There is always further to go: indeed, the next five years of the journey are the subject of this framework. But given our origins, it should be clear why the driving motivation for our school has been and will always be to create – through education, practice, and research – excellent nurses whose core concern is extending compassionate care to all people.

Our Mission

At the UCI Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing, we dedicate ourselves to the education of nursing professionals who will improve patient care and promote population health, locally and globally. We strive to produce leaders in research, education, and clinical practice who will champion collaborative, compassionate, and interdisciplinary evidence-based practice.



Our Framework

Our school's strategic framework is based on our manifesto – our statement of belief. From this statement, we derived four pillars that frame ten intentions. These intentions stand as guides for our actions as a nursing school. These intentions logically lead to 10 strategic priorities. When we look back over the five years, the ultimate measure of achieving these priorities will not be whether we checked boxes saying that we accomplished each priority. Rather, it will be whether we lived our intentions. The ultimate measure of achieving our strategic priorities will be whether we did what we did *with humanity in mind*.

Lessening Human Vulnerability

- WE CREATE NURSING LEADERS
- WE STRIVE FOR INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE AND ANTIRACISM

Making The Invisible Visible

- WE ADVOCATE FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES
- WE PROMOTE OUR PROFESSION
- WE LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY

Advancing the World's Health as Human Health

- WE SEEK OUT KNOWLEDGE
- WE CARE FOR OUR WORLD
- WE EMBRACE A WORLD COMMUNITY

Increasing Our Capacity

- WE ALIGN OUR RESOURCES WITH OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
- WE ATTRACT INCREASED INVESTMENT

1 Lessening Human Vulnerability

To lessen human vulnerability is an ambitious aim. It is all the more ambitious because we recognize the degree to which social and racial injustices and individual and structural racism create and compound vulnerability – over multiple generations – in our world today. Injustices create injuries. Both words – *injustice* and *injury* – share the same stem. That stem, in its Latin origins, means right. Injustices are wrongs that create injuries. As nurses, we address injuries, and thus, we address wrongs. There are many ways to address wrongs, but we have chosen to address them, and the injuries they result in, through the lens of social and racial justice.

We are not new to this aim: our work has long begun. As the Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing enters the second half of our first decade, we build on well-established strengths and a history of overcoming many obstacles to raise nursing standards for the sake of setting things right – for the sake of humanity.

WE CREATE NURSING LEADERS

In all its programs, the Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing emphasizes the opportunities and necessity for nurses to pursue leadership careers focused on creating a healthier and more just society.

Nurses at all levels will always be needed to care for people in their most vulnerable times. However, nurse leaders with advanced qualifications raise standards and provide opportunities in the workplace even for those who do not choose to go beyond an entry-level qualification. We aim to educate and inspire nurses to lead on matters of justice. Our graduates, moreover, can be confident in leading

within the profession, and of advocating for the conditions in which nurses do their vital work of care. For us to ensure our graduates can lead and thrive as leaders, we are committed to deepening our efforts in student success and the student experience.

WE STRIVE FOR INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE AND ANTIRACISM

We will create a new post for inclusive excellence and antiracism. This portfolio will be responsible for raising awareness and providing evidence-based training around bias and ensuring that every aspect of our education, practice, and research is such that we are both inclusive and representative of the full range of communities we serve – and indeed, of the country we live in – and antiracist in our practices. In addition, we will regularly evaluate and adjust our curricula and the work of our clinical and academic researchers to ensure that racial and social justice concerns are always made visible.

Nursing should reflect the communities we serve. We are a profession that cares for all members of society. Patients need to feel heard and understood; never more so than when those patients have experienced racism and other forms of discrimination, quite probably throughout their entire lives. It is therefore a significant priority for the school to recruit and retain a diversity of staff, faculty, and students, and to ensure that people feel a sense of belonging in their place of work, study or in any other interaction with us, regardless of their personal characteristics.

2

Making The Invisible Visible

WE ADVOCATE FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Our school has a reputation for compassionate care and advocacy that is older than the school itself. Our graduates, colleagues, and faculty work with some of society's most ignored and invisible people: people who find themselves excluded from systems of housing, employment, healthcare, food security, or social services because of their personal characteristics, physical location, the language that they speak, or some other factor. Nurses see these people every day, and we seek to shine a light on their lives and their experience.

The way we do this is, first, because we see each other, human to human – we are there for each other; second, because we advocate for others, as individuals, to get the care and assistance that they need; third, because in our clinical practice and research we identify, examine, and challenge the experiences that others face.

Our research enables us to amass evidence that supports the case for social and racial justice, reflected in the health of our patients, at local, state, and national levels. Over the next five years, in our research and practice, we will provide solutions, interventions, and new approaches focused on achieving health equity.

At the same time, we will develop our institutional skills of communication and connection to ensure that our results are seen by the relevant administrators and policy makers, as well as other educators, clinicians, and researchers, at the highest level appropriate. We do not accept that things are as they should be: we advocate for change, and to do so, we show evidence of what nurses have long been doing in the shadows.

WE PROMOTE OUR PROFESSION

All too often, the work of nurses goes unnoticed. It was only the extraordinary devastation wreaked by the recent COVID-19 pandemic that brought shortfalls in nurse recruitment and high rates of burnout to the national headlines. In truth, these challenges have been with us for many years. Some of the issues differ little from the days when our founder, Ellen Lewis, fought to bring professional nursing to Orange County almost 40 years ago: nurses still need access to role models and mentors for guidance in meeting their commitment to patients, often in extremely difficult circumstances. They need to work in conditions in which good patient care is possible. They need educational opportunities and a professional development infrastructure to progress, and to feel fulfilled by, their careers. They need, also, to be recognized by their colleagues in healthcare – especially medicine and administration – in academia, and in government for the difference that they make. As an institution, we raise and will continue to raise these issues through every available forum.

Some of the current issues facing nurses, however, are new, as the circumstances of this most recent pandemic have shown. To help staunch the flow of qualified nurses from the profession, we seek to investigate the difference between a burnout situation and one in which, however difficult, nurses feel able to continue. As providers of professional development, we are well-placed to join forces with our medical, pharmacy, public health, integrative health, health system and management colleagues, among others, to help improve nurses' workplace satisfaction and their ability to do the work they have been trained to do. It is as important for our colleagues to collaborate with us as it is for us to work with them. Fostering close mutually collaborative relationships between nurses and other healthcare providers

and researchers is an important aim of our school.

Additionally, we will continue to campaign for the legislative and policy changes that empower nurses to practice most effectively, and to the full extent of their licenses. California lags behind many other states in the constraints it places on the independent practice of nurse practitioners – and this is just one example. We consider the next five years to be an important period of profile raising and communicating the value of nurses' work.

3

Advancing the World's Health as Human Health

WE LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY

The Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing recognizes the rich potential of informatics and artificial intelligence for nursing research. We intend to build on our existing capacity in this area by recruiting additional expertise to our school and ramping up collaboration with other schools within the Susan and Henry Samueli College of Health Sciences, UCI Sustainability, and UCI's Institute for Precision Health, from other campuses, and from the public and private sector, as appropriate.

The rise of informatics and data technology gives nurse researchers the opportunity to analyze and represent care and wellbeing in quantitative terms – a powerful tool. Much nursing research has historically relied on qualitative reporting and analysis to provide eloquent evidence on a case-by-case basis. At the other end of the scale, informatics gives access to massive datasets in which, for the first time, the effects of care (and lack of care) are made numerically visible without the need to rely on randomized control trials, which are rarely practical or ethical as a means of investigating health equity.

Nurses must be involved in such research to ensure that the right questions are being asked of the data, the right models designed. The associated fields of AI and wearable technology are opening new avenues for responsive, personalized treatment and for safeguarding and promoting health. Such technology does not require the daily presence of a health professional, holding out the promise of care that is both sophisticated and sustainable. As the potential of these developments grows, the

importance of inclusion is amplified as never before, especially for nursing practice.

WE SEEK OUT KNOWLEDGE

To be a nurse is to help other humans. This promise draws people to the profession – between 60-80% of nursing students (depending on the source) state the desire to help others as their primary motivation for choosing nursing as a career. Yet we live at a time in which all human health is inextricably involved in another crisis: the crisis of planetary health that has already begun. Because environmental catastrophe affects minoritized populations first and most severely, concern for the world's health is doubly within the remit of the Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing.

In the next five years, we will continue our work on the impact of environmental catastrophe, looking at nursing's role in ameliorating these impacts. We will accelerate our efforts to educate ourselves as to what form environmental threats to health may take, whether through disease or disaster, or through the long-term erosion of health caused by pollution and a degraded environment.

WE CARE FOR OUR WORLD

In matters of environmental health, we are determined to learn, and we are prepared to lead. Behavior change can be inconvenient, and small efforts can feel futile when problems are global and policies lag behind the necessary practice. Yet as nurses, we know there are plenty of circumstances in which individual acts make an important difference: washing hands really does save lives.

So, too, with planetary health. We are individuals; teams; a school; a medical center; a campus; a university. Individually and together, we can make an impact, and show our students that we care about their future. Over the next

five years, we commit to learning how to improve our practice in collaboration with our colleagues, and in consultation with experts. Most of all, we are committed, through our actions, to sending a positive message that change is not only necessary, but achievable.

WE EMBRACE A WORLD COMMUNITY

Our school originated in response to overwhelming local need for professional nursing care and, to this day, the needs of the marginalized groups of people in Orange County and surrounding areas remain a central priority. However, the health inequities caused and compounded by social and racial injustice are (unfortunately) by no means confined to our county, state, or country. We are a rigorous academic organization within a world-class university, and as such we will continue to increase our national and international participation.

Under the strategy implemented by our founding dean, Adey Nyamathi, the school's first five years are characterized by impressive growth in the quantity and scope of its research. With this expansion comes greatly increased potential for global partnerships, collaboration, and exchange.

Currently, Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing faculty are involved with projects in Botswana, Guyana, India, and Korea, to name a few. This is an aspect of our work that we will continue to build. We will also further develop relationships with international institutions, and welcome to our campus colleagues, researchers, and students from around the globe. After all, in the same way that the planet's health is human health, the health of all humans around the globe is the health of every single one of us.

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Increasing Our Capacity

WE ALIGN OUR RESOURCES WITH OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To ensure that the school's achievements keep pace with our ambition, we need to find ways to increase capacity while retaining the rigor, intimacy, and the personalized experience that are currently hallmarks of our school. We are confident that our goals can be met through targeted and strategic expansion.

Excellence and focus draw funds: by pinpointing our specialties and by increasing the numbers of nurse leaders we educate and train, we will similarly increase the scope of sources from which we attract funding to our school.

WE ATTRACT INCREASED INVESTMENT

The work of the Sue & Bill Gross School of nursing is only just beginning to be recognized. In the course of pursuing our core beliefs, we will promote the profession tirelessly promote the profession of nursing and the importance of nursing research and education to human health in Orange County, in California, and to the country and society in which we all live. Increasing numbers of alumni and faculty alike are also our advocates and proof of excellence. We will further identify and consolidate relationships with advocates and champions locally and nationally in pursuit of funds to support and expand our essential work.

Our Strategic Priorities

PRIORITY 1: To create nursing leaders for a healthier and more just society by deepening our efforts in student success and experience.

PRIORITY 2: To ensure that every aspect of our education, practice, research, and school community is diverse, equitable and inclusive, and fosters a culture of belonging.

PRIORITY 3: To translate our work into empirically based practice solutions aimed at achieving health equity.

PRIORITY 4: To invest in our institutional skills of communication and connection to ensure that our translational and empirical research results are seen by the relevant administrators and policy makers.

PRIORITY 5: To enhance and leverage our expertise in informatics and data technology to address health equity.

PRIORITY 6: To advocate for the legislative and policy changes that empower nurses to practice most effectively.

PRIORITY 7: To promote nursing research in areas of environmental relevance, and to prioritize our school's participation in UCI Sustainability, driving sustainable practice as a school and throughout the school.

PRIORITY 8: To develop relationships with institutions worldwide, and attract to our campus colleagues, researchers, and students from around the globe.

PRIORITY 9: To target the expansion of the school's reach and impact in ways that will further our impact on the region, state, nation and the world.

PRIORITY 10: To intensify and diversify our fundraising efforts by seeking new and creative opportunities and collaborations, by consistently raising the profile of our work and by making a successful case for the urgency and necessity of what we do.

Conclusion

The process of developing this strategic framework for the Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing has clearly demonstrated that, from the furthest reaches of our history to the priorities of our newest students, we know our purpose. We exist to lessen vulnerability, to promote social, racial, and environmental justice, and to deliver compassionate nursing care of the highest standard in the most equitable and accessible way possible – and always with humanity in mind.

We do this through our education, our research, and our practice; through our advocacy, our collaboration – and through cherishing our profession.

This is the motivation that has brought us this far, and the theme that will shape the next five years of our existence. Our curricula emphasize the priority issue of health equity. We will build centers of research excellence and translate evidence into practice. We will continue to raise the profile of our school and what it stands for: for the sake of our profession, current and future, and most of all, for the sake of humanity.