

Jim Doyle  
Governor

Celia M. Jackson  
Secretary

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF  
REGULATION & LICENSING



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August 2, 2007

Senator Mark Miller  
State Senator  
16<sup>th</sup> Senate District

Representative Joseph Parisi  
State Representative  
48<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

Wisconsin Legislature  
P.O. Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Re: Marquette Direct Entry Master of Science Nursing Program

Dear Senator Miller and Representative Parisi:

This is in response to an inquiry from your offices to Secretary Celia M. Jackson regarding your constituent, Michael Bertrand and his daughter, Lydia Bertrand, who was a former student of the Marquette University's Direct Entry Master of Science Nursing (MSN) Program. In your letter you have asked whether *"the Department of Regulation and Licensing will recognize the decision made by Wayne Austin in his February 1, 1999 letter to Madeline Wake at Marquette University, in which Mr. Austin confirmed the approval of the program by the Wisconsin Board of Nursing."* Prior to specifically addressing your question, I would like to share with you some background information regarding the claims made by the Bertrands and the Department's responses to date.

Over the past several months, both Ms. Bertrand and Mr. Bertrand have individually contacted the members of the Wisconsin Board of Nursing (BON) and Secretary Jackson, as well as members of the state legislature and the Governor's Office, challenging the validity of the Marquette Direct Entry MSN Program. The Department has been responsive to the Bertrands's inquiries by providing copies of all relevant documentation available on the program as well as a letter outlining the Department's position. (Attachment 1) The BON also provided Ms. Bertrand an opportunity for a personal appearance at its July 26<sup>th</sup> meeting. During her appearance before the Board, Ms. Bertrand requested that: (1) the Board dissolve the Marquette Direct Entry MSN Program and (2) the Department cease issuing nursing licenses to students who have completed the basic nursing curriculum of the Program. In the alternative, Ms. Bertrand asked the Board to require that Marquette University either place a graduation date on her official transcript or grant her a diploma of graduation. The Board has yet to make a formal decision on Ms. Bertrand's requests; instead it has indicated an interest in receiving additional information from Marquette University and UW-Milwaukee regarding their respective direct entry graduate nursing programs. The representatives from these nursing schools will likely appear at the Board's next regularly scheduled meeting in August.

Upon initial review of your inquiry, the Department determined that it needed to conduct additional research and analysis in order to fully understand the basis for the Program's approval. (Attachment 2) The Department also consulted with the Attorney General's Office regarding the legality of issuing registered nursing licenses to students who have completed the basic nursing curriculum portion of the direct entry nursing program, but who have not received a diploma of graduation. In conducting its independent analysis, the Department has again concluded that it will continue to recognize the conclusions reached by Mr. Austin in his 1999 letter. Most specifically, the Department has determined that the Certificate of Completion awarded to students upon completion of the basic training phase of the Direct Entry MSN Program by Marquette University is, in fact, a "diploma of graduation" within the meaning of §441.04. Wis. Stats., and that, as such, the Program does not violate the law. The Attorney's General's Office concurs in this position.

The following is a brief summary of additional background information of record relevant to your inquiry.

#### Direct Entry Graduate Nursing Program

The Direct Entry MSN Program at Marquette University was submitted to the BON for approval in 1998. The Program was created to prepare those with non-nursing baccalaureate degrees for advanced nursing roles. Under the Program, students would complete 59 credits of basic nursing curriculum in an accelerated 15 months phase, to be followed by two years of graduate level coursework. Upon completion of the basic nursing pre-MSN phase, and in order to progress into the graduate phase, the student was required to take the licensing examination for registered nurses, known as the NCLEX. Upon passage of the NCLEX, the student would receive a registered nurse (RN) license in Wisconsin to enable him/her to complete his/her graduate clinical courses.

Students admitted to the Marquette University Direct Entry MSN Program are informed that the purpose of the Program is to obtain an advanced degree in nursing -- a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN).<sup>1</sup> Students are also informed that they will not receive another Bachelor's Degree. Upon completion of the basic nursing curriculum, students are given a "Certification of Completion of Pre-MSN Basic Nursing Preparation." (Attachment 3) The Certificate indicates that the student has satisfactorily completed the nursing course requirements and has met the minimum standards of the Wisconsin Administrative Code for professional nursing thereby making the student eligible to take the NCLEX.<sup>2</sup>

This is precisely what occurred in Lydia Bertrand's situation; she completed the pre-MSN basic nursing curriculum, she received a Certificate of Completion and was allowed to take the NCLEX. When she passed the licensing examination, she was granted a registered nurse license in Wisconsin.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, there are two Direct Entry Graduate Nursing Programs in Wisconsin. The Marquette Program was the first to be approved by the Board of Nursing in 1999. In the fall of 2005, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee was approved by the BON to offer a direct entry graduate nursing program.

<sup>2</sup> The document used to verify completion of the pre-MSN phase is DRL form #259, a standard internal administrative form used to process all nursing student applications.

After Ms. Bertrand received her Wisconsin license, she moved to the state of Mississippi. She neither completed the master's level coursework nor was awarded a degree or a diploma. Ms. Bertrand has complained that she has been unable to obtain a nursing license in Mississippi. However, as she acknowledged at the time of her appearance before the BON on July 26, 2007, she was never told by Marquette University that she would be awarded either a second baccalaureate degree at the conclusion of the basic nursing curriculum or that she would qualify for licensure in any state other than Wisconsin upon completion of the pre-MSN courses alone. Each state has its own criteria for licensure.

The Marquette Direct Entry MSN Program does not violate the state's laws for nurse licensure. Rather, this innovative program offers a tremendous opportunity for persons, such as Lydia Bertrand, with non-nursing undergraduate degrees to acquire an advanced nursing degree in significantly less time than first completing a traditional baccalaureate degree in nursing. (Attachment 4) The program is academically rigorous and in high demand as shown by the number of students who have applied for admission.<sup>3</sup> Ms. Bertrand was indeed fortunate to have received a registered nurse license in Wisconsin based upon her completion of the pre-MSN phase of the Marquette Direct Entry MSN Program despite the fact that she voluntarily chose not to finish the graduate nursing program.

I trust that this information is helpful in giving you a better understanding of both the Program and the Department's position. If you have further questions, or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,



Debra J. Kraft  
Interim General Counsel  
Department of Regulation and Licensing

Cc: Secretary Celia Jackson, (DRL)  
Larry Martin, Executive Assistant (DRL)  
Kimberly Nania, Division Administrator (DRL)  
Marilyn Kaufmann, Chair, Wisconsin Board of Nursing  
Colleen Baird, Legal Counsel, Board of Nursing  
Thomas J. Balistreri, Assistant Attorney General, Department of Justice  
Jeffrey Kipfmueeller, Associate General Counsel, Marquette University  
Richard Sweet, Senior Staff Attorney, Wisconsin Legislative Council

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<sup>3</sup> In the current class of 2007-08, only 48 students were admitted from an applicant pool of 886, with no students leaving the program. In the class of 2006-07, only 35 were admitted from an applicant pool of 852, with only one student leaving the program.