

As published in The Times-Georgian April 25, 2009

“Nursing program receives \$1.4M

**Next step is to hire architect
to design state-of-the-art
building**

By Laura Camper, *The Times-Georgian*



***Kathryn Grams, Dean,
School of Nursing***

The University of West Georgia has been experiencing growing pains all over campus as enrollments increase and one of those feeling the squeeze is the School of Nursing, which has just received \$1.4 million in state funding for design of a new building.

“The space we’re in was designed for 13 faculty and we have 23,” said Dr. Kathryn Grams, the Dean of the School of Nursing. “Our classrooms were designed for between 20 and 30 students and we’re admitting 60 in a group.” It’s not a new issue. Ten years ago when planning was under way for the Coliseum, the newest structure on campus, offices, classrooms and space for community education for the nursing program were included in the building. But inflation did its work and years later, when the school finally received the money for construction, it was not enough to cover the project. The building had to be downsized and the nursing space was cut. “The decision was made that we could tolerate being cut because we had grown so much already, that the space we had anticipated occupying in the Coliseum was already too small,” Grams said. So the classes are spread out in other buildings, but finding unused space is becoming more of a challenge as the school continues to grow.

The school should receive the money late this year and then can hire an architect to design the new building, said Jim Sutherland, Vice President of Business and Finance. “It’ll be about 61,000 square feet,” Sutherland said. The building will be state-of-the-art, containing a virtual hospital, with patient rooms, and more of the SimMan, computerized simulated patients for the nursing students to treat. The simulations will allow the future nurses to practice their skills before they move on to human patients.

It will include more clinical space, classrooms, an auditorium and a center for caring for the nursing program to provide community education. The new building will not only provide for current students, but also allow for expansion and will contain about 44 offices instead of 23 currently needed, she said. “Now there are obviously other variables when you look at increasing enrollment,” Grams said. “That’s just one piece of it, but yes it’s an important piece.”

The School currently has about 350 students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs on all four of its campuses in Carrollton, Newnan, Dalton and Rome. However, it turns away many hopeful students every year because it doesn’t have the resources to accept them all. That is a problem that could affect everyone, since the nation and the state are facing a growing nursing shortage.

In July 2007, the American Hospital Association reported that more than 135,000 nursing vacancies were unfilled and demand continues to grow. The Health Resources and Services Administration released a report two years ago that estimated the nursing shortage would grow to more than 1 million by 2020. Sutherland estimates the new building will cost about \$20.3 million. That money has not been awarded to the university yet. “I’m hoping that we’ll have more dollars in the next fiscal year budget to move the project to the next level,” Grams said.