

Jefferson to offer bachelor's in emergency services

The Roanoke health sciences school is melding two associate degree programs.

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As Jefferson College of Health Sciences continues to transform its offerings away from associate degrees and toward more traditional bachelor's degrees, the school has announced plans to offer an emergency services bachelor's degree starting next fall.

Jefferson College garnered approval last week to offer a four-year Bachelor of Science in emergency services beginning in fall 2009. The new program was approved by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which is the regional accrediting agency for degrees in higher education.

The shift to a bachelor's program follows a trend that commission president Belle Wheelan said has been occurring in many occupational degree fields.

"We even have institutions who have been community colleges for years, now offering baccalaureate degrees and they have largely been in response to community need," she said.

The Jefferson College emergency services degree will take what has been two, two-year associate degree programs and meld them into the new bachelor's curriculum, offering students a training that is multidisciplinary and better prepares students for the changing EMS field, said Glen Mayhew, director

of the new emergency services program at Jefferson College.

"What you're seeing since 9/11 is the climate of EMS and first responders has really changed," Mayhew said. "Not only the demand but also the level of expectations has increased from the public and from the EMS [community]."

The associate degree programs for paramedics and in fire EMS technology will be phased out by 2010.

In the new program, students will specialize in either firefighter paramedic emergency management or critical care paramedic emergency management.

The move is to respond to what the school has identified as a community need for more highly trained EMS personnel, Mayhew said.

Of EMS directors in the mid-Atlantic region, 92 percent said a graduate with a bachelor's degree would be very valuable, according to a Jefferson College survey of 52 respondents.

"Traditionally it had been somewhat of a good ol' boy system," Mayhew said. "Now there is more accountability and education is critical."

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