Working locally, selling globally

Many contributors to the region’s economy are from far outside Southwest Virginia
Preparing medical professionals

Jefferson College of Health Sciences trains students to work in teams so they will be prepared for the real world.

In the 10 years from 2004 to 2014, Jefferson College of Health Sciences in downtown Roanoke underwent a major transformation.

At the start of that period, most students came from within a 50-mile radius, says Mark Lambert, the school’s senior consultant for communications and college relations. The school’s offerings consisted of associate degrees, earned by 72 percent of its students, and bachelor’s degrees, earned by 28 percent. It offered no graduate degrees.

Last year, students traveled from across the country to attend the private health-care college. Members of the student body came from 30 states and 80 locations across Virginia. The degrees offered had this breakdown: 14 percent associate, 64 percent bachelor’s and 22 percent graduate degrees.

“It’s a major shift,” Lambert says. School leaders realized there was a lot of competition locally for students seeking associate degrees. “We said, you know, instead of competing like that, why don’t we work with these other institutions?” So, the management team developed articulation agreements that allow students who earned their associate degrees at other colleges to enroll at Jefferson College to work toward a bachelor’s degree.

The change boosted enrollment. Attaining a bachelor’s degree better prepares graduates for jobs, helps...
higher education

them earn a better starting salary and increases their chances of moving up within an organization, says Lambert. “We have really made a lot of strides in expanding what we offer people and how we offer it, and because of that our reputation is really growing,” he says.

The college has moved. Housed since 1982 in the Reid Center building off Jefferson Street, Jefferson College moved into Carilion Roanoke Community Hospital in 2010, and the Reid Center was demolished.

Carilion owns the school, something Lambert says sets it apart from other colleges and is a huge advantage for students. “That allows our students to really have a lot of great opportunities when it comes to clinical placements,” Lambert says. “Kind of a crucial part of students’ learning in health care is being able to actually practice with patients, so they get that experience before they go out the door and start their careers. With our affiliation with Carilion, there are lots of opportunities for our folks to learn with the best in the area in terms of whatever profession that they’re going into. And we’re located a mile up the street from Roanoke Memorial Hospital, which is the flagship hospital in the area. There are tons and tons of opportunities for our students to go there and learn.”

The hospital is the only level one trauma unit in the area and the only one in the valleys with a medical school and research center attached to it. U.S. News & World Report named Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital the fourth best hospital in Virginia last year, the highest ranking Virginia hospital west of Richmond.

Over the years, Lambert says, Carilion has helped Jefferson College determine what programs it should offer, based on the healthcare positions most in demand. In turn, Jefferson College helps create well-trained employees for Carilion.

But Jefferson College isn’t just a feeder school for Carilion. “We do have a huge number of students who go to work for Carilion, but we have students from all across the United States,” says Lambert. As an example, he points to the school’s physician assistant program. Last year, about 800 people from all 50 states applied for the program, which accepts only 45 students a year. “That and many of our other programs are really starting to get a national reputation,” he says.

“The good thing about the hospital for our region is that it produces health-care professionals that would otherwise be in short supply,” says Roanoke attorney Frank Flippin, who served on the school’s board for 17 years, including as its chair. “Other areas in the country from time to time have a real difficulty finding particularly nurses who are qualified.”

With Jefferson College, the Roanoke Valley is producing its own supply. “Most of them stay in the region, and they benefit everybody here,” Flippin says.

Amy Keith, a registered respiratory therapist who lives in Roanoke, says she chose Jefferson College because of its “excellent reputation, small classes and affiliation with Carilion Clinic.” She was a Jefferson College student from 2008 to 2010 and now is employed by the Salem VA Medical Center. “I absolutely love my job and had an amazing experience at Jefferson,” she says.

Keith says class sizes were small, and professors motivated her to be successful. “The opportunities for hands-on learning and my clinical experience is what I enjoyed most about JCHS,” Keith says. “In the respiratory therapy program, the clinical experience includes time in the OR, pediatric/neonatal transport team and sleep lab. The diverse experience really allows you to find out where your strengths are and where you would want to work,” she says.

The school began using the name Jefferson College of Health Sciences in 2003, but got its start in
the early 1900s. The Jefferson Hospital School of Nursing was founded in 1914 to help avoid a shortage of trained nurses at the 40-bed Jefferson Hospital, founded seven years earlier. Its first class of six students completed 33 months of training. The nursing school would eventually join with the Lewis-Gale School of Nursing, founded in 1911, to create the Community Hospital of the Roanoke Valley School of Nursing, later called the Community Hospital of the Roanoke Valley College of Health Sciences.

“The change in the name was to try to make it better represent what it was” and to recognize its roots as Jefferson Hospital, Flippin says.

Lambert says the interprofessional education program that Jefferson College started a few years ago is helping students when they enter the workforce. At most colleges, he says, students tend to learn alongside only those students who are working toward the same degree. But then, he says, “you get turned out into the workplace, you have to work with a bunch of different people: respiratory therapists, physicians, what have you. And then you have to learn the ropes, trial by fire, as you’re going through it.”

To give students an advantage, Jefferson College teams up students from different programs to familiarize them with different jobs, helping them learn what to expect in the workplace. “It makes much more effective teams,” benefiting the students and their patients, Lambert says.

To further train health-care students, Jefferson College hosts an annual scenario — usually a simulated major disaster such as a bombing or a plane crash — for Jefferson students, medical students at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute, students from some other colleges and organizations and various people from Carilion. “The students have to deal with people who act as patients. They have to hear their symptoms and diagnose them, and they have to do it as a team rather than individually,” Lambert says. “It’s a big deal and it’s become huge,” he says, drawing more than 200 people last year. “We really get our students immersed in the real world clinical atmosphere,” Lambert says, “so that when they go out for their careers, they are fully, fully prepared.”

Jefferson College of Health Sciences

- As the Community Hospital of Roanoke Valley College of Health Sciences, it was the first hospital-based college in Virginia.
- Offers 24 programs from certificate level to master’s degree.
- Student body consists of 876 undergraduate students and 255 graduate students.
- Has grown from about 200 students in 1988 to more than 1,100 in 2015.
- Name changed from Community Hospital of the Roanoke Valley College of Health Sciences to Jefferson College of Health Sciences in 2003 in honor of its founding as the Jefferson Hospital School of Nursing.
- Began housing resident students at the Patrick Henry building in 2011.
- Jefferson College, Radford University and Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine entered into a public/private partnership this year to create the Virginia Intercollegiate Anatomy Lab (VIAL), housed on the eighth floor of Jefferson College.

Source: Mark Lambert, www.jhcva.edu

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