Freshman Direct Admission Program
Discontinuation Backgrounder

This document is designed to give faculty, staff, and campus colleagues information and context for discussing the school’s decision to retire the Freshman Direct Admission Program. If you have questions, please contact Ilsa May (Director of Undergraduate Admissions and Advising Services) at ilsamay@wisc.edu or 608-263-5172.

History of the Program
The Freshman Direct Admission (FDA) pilot program was implemented in 2012 to give UW–Madison first–year applicants pursuing a career in nursing the opportunity to be directly admitted to the School of Nursing. The program was designed to increase enrollment of freshmen with expressed interest/aptitude in nursing, offer financial support for students with freshman status, and increase enrollment of underrepresented and first-generation students, with priority to Wisconsin residents. A small cohort of 20–30 freshmen has been admitted via the FDA option each year since fall 2013, for a total of three cohorts, with a fourth starting in fall 2016. Within the initial approval of this pilot program, faculty stipulated that the program would be reviewed after three years (i.e., no later than fall 2017) to evaluate effectiveness and future viability.

Decision to Retire FDA Pilot Program
A full report on the FDA program was presented to three faculty–governed committees within the School of Nursing in spring 2016. All three committees voted to retire the pilot program. Key deciding factors included:

1. Lackluster Advances on Diversity Goals: Although the number of qualified applicants for the FDA program increased 142% since 2013, there were only small to moderate gains in applications from underrepresented students and moderate losses in Wisconsin resident applications. In the school’s Upper Division Admission (UDA) program, students apply after completing two years of on-campus prerequisites and general education requirements. Data show that a more diverse pool of prospective students and more Wisconsin residents could be reached by re-focusing resources (outreach, recruitment, etc.) to current UW–Madison students rather than prospective high school students. Stated another way, the candidates for Upper Division Admission were more diverse and provided a larger representation of Wisconsin residents than the FDA applicants and/or the FDA students progressing into the Upper Division Program.

2. Low Progression Trends: To successfully progress into the first year of nursing coursework, FDA students must maintain a 3.0 cumulative and prerequisite grade point average after the first academic year and each subsequent semester. With the two years of full progression data available, the overall progression of both fall 2013 and fall 2014 cohorts to date is 65%. Twenty-four percent were dropped for failing to meet academic progression requirements and 11% switched majors.

3. Student Feedback: Diverse student populations in relation to the nursing profession (i.e.; students of color and males) who were interested in nursing as high school seniors were more likely to have decided to attend UW–Madison even if they hadn’t been offered Freshman Direct Admission. Additional programmatic elements that received positive feedback (i.e.; Nursing 100 course, advising support, etc.) can be incorporated into the pre-nursing student experience in the absence of an FDA program to positively influence students to pursue nursing.

The School of Nursing Undergraduate Program Committee is creating a task force to reexamine the original goals of the FDA program and propose evidence–based approaches to support the recruitment, retention, and graduation of a diverse and accomplished student body, as well as support Wisconsin residents in their pursuit of a BS–Nursing degree.

Information for Current Freshman Direct Admits (admitted fall 2016 or earlier)
All stated program components (progression criteria, advising support, scholarship opportunities, etc.) will continue until the fall 2016 cohort progresses into the upper-level nursing courses, thus nothing will change for students already admitted to the FDA program. The decision to discontinue the program means the School of Nursing will no longer be accepting future applicants to this program.

Impact on Admission in Future Years
The School of Nursing will be returning to an exclusively Upper Division Admission program for prospective nursing students, whereby students typically complete two years of prerequisite and general education coursework before applying to enter the two year upper–level nursing program. Students who were admitted to the FDA program for fall 2016 or earlier and meet progression requirements will continue to progress into the upper-level nursing courses until fall 2018 (when the incoming fall 2016 cohort progresses). It is anticipated that the admit rate to the upper division program will increase because progressing FDA students held seats in the 152–student upper division cohort. With those seats now open for all upper division candidates, assuming a similar total applicant pool, the admit rate will go up beginning fall 2019.

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