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## Georgia Highlands to offer bachelors in nursing

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by Mark Andrews

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Georgia Highlands College President Randy Pierce announced Tuesday the college's board of regents approved a mission change making GHC a state college. The first immediate change will be the addition of a bachelor's degree program in nursing.

"The incoming class of nurses in the fall of 2011 will be the first eligible BSN [Bachelor's of Science in nursing]

students," Pierce said during a press conference at the college's health sciences building in Rome. "So we have, in fact, embarked on bachelor degree programs at Georgia Highlands College."

Pierce refrained from taking questions from the press during the press conference.

According to a press release, students in the 2011-2012 class will be able to earn a Bachelor's of Science in nursing by spring 2014.

"The nursing program at GHC has always been very competitive," Pierce said. "Only one of every three qualified applicants is accepted into the program. That won't change. But the convenience of being able to complete a baccalaureate-level degree at an institution with our reputation for excellence is a real bonus both for students and our community."

The release states when students are accepted into the GHC program, they already have completed their core courses required for a four-year degree as well as prerequisites such as anatomy, chemistry and microbiology. The release says students would "essentially" enter the program as sophomores.

"An additional three years at Georgia Highlands will allow [students] to complete their bachelor's degree, adding only one more year than their associates degree required."

Officials at the college conducted a feasibility study to determine the interest and need for the program. The study included student focus groups, interviews with local businesses as well as educational and community leaders.

According to the release, the Workforce Information and Analysis Division of the Georgia Department of labor identified nursing, education and business as the

fastest growing occupational categories over the next decade.

According to the press release, "In terms of students, cost factors were repeatedly cited as barriers to education. While Floyd County has two private colleges, they have tuition rates of \$17,500 and \$25,890 respectively, making the \$2,000 tuition rate at Georgia Highlands extremely attractive."

The release says the college will not be charging state college tuition rates for "the first year or two."

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