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100 Years of Servitude

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# 100 Years of Servitude

*Cadet Nurse Corps helped Georgetown University establish a separate nursing school.*

Georgetown University School of Nursing, celebrating its centennial this year, began like many other schools as a hospital training school operated by nuns. During the school's first 40 years the Sisters of St. Francis administered and staffed both the hospital and the school and had almost complete authority over both. As professional accreditation activities intensified, the sisters were challenged by the Jesuits, who owned the university, to make changes that would move the school toward university status.



Lucille Petry, director of the Cadet Nurse Corps, visits Georgetown University School of Nursing and talks with Sister Joanilla and cadet nurses Dorothy Hagen and Gene Bailey.

Funding was a constant problem for all hospital training schools, since they did not have endowments and were not recipients of public funds. Isabel Stewart believed nursing education could not advance until schools were separated from their hospitals. In 1921 she noted that the nursing school “has fed on the crumbs that fell from the hospital table—a very frugal table, as everyone knows. The educational interests of the school have had no chance

This article is adapted from “Nuns and GUNS: Holy Wars at Georgetown, 1903-1947,” an article published in the *Nursing History Review* 11(2003):69-87.

whatsoever against the pressing economic interests of the hospital.” The Goldmark Report, *Nursing and Nursing Education in the United States*, in 1922 also pointed out that the major obstacle to improvement of nursing education was that hospital service demands took priority over instruction.

During World War II, the United States faced a severe shortage of civilian nurses. In 1943 the Bolton Act created the United States Cadet Nurse Corps to encourage enrollment in schools of nursing and to meet the increased need for nurses in the military and on the home front. Under this act the U.S. Public Health Service subsidized the education of nursing students in return for military or essential civilian service for the duration of the war.

Georgetown University School of Nursing is a good example of how the Cadet Nurse Corps effected positive change within the profession. When the school applied for Cadet Nurse Corps funds, the nuns were required to supply information regarding its financial and academic status. When asked whether there was a budget for the school, separate from the nursing service budget, they had to answer “no.” When asked to state how the allocation of expenditures was determined, Sister Joanilla, the school principal, answered, “upon the needs of the school.” Both the director and assistant director were listed as unpaid. This was not acceptable. In order to be eligible for the program, the U.S. Public Health Service required them to itemize the costs of the program, creating a new, separate budget. The school received funds based on a budget, and a new nurses’ home was built.

The Cadet Nurse Corps strengthened the nursing profession by forcing participating hospitals to itemize the costs of their nursing programs and by allowing for a separate budget—a requirement that encouraged eventual financial separation of training schools from sponsoring hospitals. It also moved nurse training programs into the educational system.—Alma S. Woolley, EdD, RN ▼