I wonder if Br. James Muldoon, a nurse, biochemistry professor, and dean at La Salle University, realized how his idea for the start of La Salle’s nursing program would grow. What began in the fall of 1980 as the second RN-to-BSN program in the Philadelphia area has, over the course of its brief twenty-seven year history, evolved into its own School that includes three subdivisions and constantly sees increases in enrollment. Founded upon Lasallian principles and innovative in its approach, the program filled a community need at its inception and continues to provide valuable services to La Salle’s neighbors, seeking to provide the nursing field with competent, caring professionals. Despite this current success, the program encountered several problems in its earliest years, some of which continue into the present day. However, strong leadership has continually guided it through these challenges.

This strong leadership is evident in the person of Dr. Gloria Donnelly, the founding director of the program and first dean when it achieved School status. Collegiate nursing was a “relatively new phenomenon” when Dr. Donnelly, whom Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf describes as “a tough lady,” graduated with her BSN from Villanova University in 1963. The majority of

1 Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, Ph.D, R.N., FAAN. Personal interview with Melissa Pompeo. La Salle University, Wister Hall. 23 March 2007. 13:50.
3 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN. Personal interview with Melissa Pompeo. Drexel University, Bellet Buiding. 9 April 2007. 1:02.
4 Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 18:50-20:00.
nursing schools before that time were operated by hospitals and awarded diplomas to their graduates; nursing was not regarded with the same degree of professionalism with which it is currently endowed and the movement to establish freestanding college nursing schools did not begin until about 1940. Dr. Donnelly earned her MSN from the University of Pennsylvania in 1965 and studied for her Ph.D. at Bryn Mawr College. She was offered a position at La Salle by Br. James Muldoon after a disagreement with the administration of the St. Agnes Hospital School of Nursing, during which she demonstrated her outspoken nature and talent for leadership through "picketing and activism". She stated in our interview that she thought of La Salle as "the savior of my [her] career" because she was hired off of a picket line.

Dr. Donnelly initially worked at La Salle during the summer of 1975 researching the possibility of establishing a nursing program at the school, but left to work at Villanova University when the school administration deemed its implementation inappropriate at the time.

Dr. Donnelly fondly recalls how Br. James Muldoon and Br. Patrick Ellis, then the University president, requested that she be the founding director of the nursing program several years after her initial work at La Salle. There was a great need in the Philadelphia area for a curriculum that enabled diploma nurses to earn their bachelor's degrees without having to quit their jobs in order to attend classes. After obtaining positive responses to the proposed program from subsequent feasibility studies and enrolling a large number of students in the first class, those spearheading the program knew that it would be a success. The ability to confidently promise RN-to-BSN students that they could earn their degrees without leaving their work was perhaps the first innovation of the La Salle nursing program. The University offered flexible

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6 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 4:20.
7 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 5:40.
8 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 12:05.
class options to students, accommodating their already busy schedules; La Salle was the only school in the area that could make this guarantee. In addition, the curriculum was designed specifically for the working nurse and ensured that students acquired new skills that built on their already sound clinical knowledge. Dr. Donnelly and the curriculum committee designed a program that was community-based rather than hospital-based, exposing students to a new population of patients though public health courses and stressing health assessment and promotion. La Salle was also one of the few schools to teach stress management and self-care, holistic practices that were not frequently associated with nursing school models of the time, reasoning that in order to look after another one must also care for oneself. Furthermore, the curriculum committee sought to provide clinical experiences outside of hospitals, since they would be more enjoyable and meaningful for students who were required to work in a hospital for a living.

Although the new nursing curriculum was innovative and readily applicable to the lives of students, these qualities also provided a conundrum: the program met the required national standards for nursing education and provided a high-quality educational experience, but accrediting agencies tended to support more traditional, and especially hospital-based, programs of study. According to Dr. Donnelly, La Salle “...had a great curriculum and that people were going to copy it,” but the politics of the National League for Nursing prevented it from receiving accreditation at first. However, the leadership of the program chose to appeal the decision, a choice that both demonstrated their perseverance and served as an example for other schools of nursing; the appeal document used became a model copied by other institutions as

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9 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 19:02-12:50.
10 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 12:44.
12 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 21:50.
they proceeded about their own appeals.  

According to Dr. Donnelly, the La Salle nursing program "...helped a lot of people by stepping up to the plate whet her was an injustice done."  

Despite these initial problems with nursing at La Salle, innovative nature of the new program was one of its fundamentally Lasallian elements. The sole mission of the Christian Brothers is the provision of high-quality education, and La Salle’s dedication "...to excellence in teaching..." is one of the primary elements of its mission statement. Also included in the mission statement is the desire to provide education "...in both traditional and non-traditional settings." Not only was the structure of the program designed to provide high-quality, practical nursing education, but the alternative clinical settings in which students were placed also fell outside the scope of traditional education in the field. Therefore, an examination of the La Salle mission statement reveals that the nursing program drew its inspiration and innovation from its institution’s basic mission. To this day, the mission statement of the School of Nursing and Health Sciences expresses its commitment to operating according to a system that is "Consistent with Lasallian values..." Dr. Donnelly expressed her admiration at the fact that La Salle has consistently been a "teaching", as opposed to "research", university.  

The nursing program also encountered problems after its initial difficulties in earning accreditation. First, La Salle had only recently become a coeducational institution, and it was difficult for much of the campus community to accept the presence of a female-dominated major at the school. This was exacerbated by the prejudices that existed against nurses at the time, as nursing was not regarded with great esteem and many still do not realize its significant role in the  

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13 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 27:05.  
14 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 27:28.  
16 "La Salle University Mission and Goals." www.lasalle.edu.  
17 La Salle University School of Nursing. “Self-Study Report Submitted to the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education.” Spring 2004. From the Office of Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN.  
18 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 53:30-55:00.  
19 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 13:42-14:27.
healthcare industry, a situation which Dr. Wolf, the current dean of the School of Nursing and Health Sciences and the first full-time faculty member hired by Dr. Donnelly for the nursing program, sees as an allegory for “...nursing’s history in academia.” Also, nursing faculty was forced to seek locations for offices, classrooms, and storage in any available space, including the campus bookstore in Wister Hall. The fight for space is also a problem for the School of Nursing today, as the major sees increases in enrollment each year and constantly needs new locations for facilities. The availability of physical facilities improved somewhat when the nursing program, with a gift from the Connelly Foundation in 1993, became its own School within the university. Dr. Donnelly found the shift from her position as a program chair to her new position as dean of the School of Nursing to be an interesting one that allowed the major to secure more financial resources from the university.

Dr. Donnelly left La Salle after having served as dean for three years, a decision that she attributes to her thirst for novel experiences. Dr. Wolf applied for the deanship of the School in 1997 after an interim dean served for one year and has held the position ever since. She worked to expand the School of Nursing both as a dean and as a faculty member, spearheading the development in 1985 of a master’s degree program that was opened in 1987. The program now has six tracks (Family Nurse Practitioner, Nurse Anesthesia, Adult Nurse Practitioner, Nursing Administration, Public Health Nursing, and Adult Health and Illness/Clinical Nurse Specialist). In addition, the School of Nursing offers several post-baccalaureate certificate programs (Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nursing, Nursing Education, Nursing Informatics, and School...

20 “Nursing at La Salle University, 1980-2001.” 5.
22 Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 45:43, 47:20.
25 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 48:00-53:30.
26 “Zane Robinson Wolf Appointed Dean of School of Nursing.” La Salle Magazine. Summer 1997: 26. Provided from the La Salle University Archive by Br. Joe Grabenstein, FSC.
Nursing). Dr. Wolf also added a Speech-Language-Hearing Science major to the School of Nursing in 1998 and a Nutrition program in 1999. The former appealed to her because of the solid science involved in the discipline and the latter has been expanded to a five-year course of study that awards a master’s degree. The growth of the School of Nursing led her to change its name to The School of Nursing and Health Sciences in January of 2006.

The School of Nursing and Health Sciences is very much connected to its Lasallian roots. Both Dr. Donnelly and Dr. Wolf note that the most strikingly Lasallian aspect of the School is its commitment to justice and to aiding the underserved and vulnerable, a prominent feature at both its inception and at present. Nursing is, by nature, an occupation of service. There is an inherent “greater-good orientation” within the nursing profession, as nurses are called upon to not only be caregivers but also advocates and educators. Also, the La Salle nursing curriculum always included education in serving vulnerable populations, equipping nurses with coursework in public health and cultural competency. Students are required to attend clinical rotations at inner-city hospitals and the La Salle Neighborhood Nursing Center, a facility located at the intersection of Chew Street and Wister Street that serves the largely economically disadvantaged community surrounding the university. In so doing, they learn to care for the unique problems that arise when caring for the poor. Dr. Wolf emphasizes, however, that vulnerable individuals can be found everywhere, and stresses the importance of recognizing them among all socioeconomic strata.

27 “Nursing at La Salle University, 1980-2001.” 17.
28 Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 16:15-17:08.
30 Dr. Gloria Donnelly, 33:27-35:00, Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 27:16-31:27.
31 Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 27:16-31:27.
33 Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 27; 16-31:27.
Also, the dedication to teaching expressed in the university mission statement is evidenced in the faculty of the School, in whom Dr. Wolf takes a great deal of pride. She believes that they are excellent professional models for students, as they are actively engaged in their respective disciplines through research and publication. Dr. Wolf is herself an active researcher who has compiled an extensive body of work that fills a forty-two page curriculum vitae. Her work includes extensive research into medication errors and nursing rituals in various cultures, as well as the development of instruments to measure perceived nurse caring. One such instrument is used in hospitals around the country.\textsuperscript{34}

However, despite all its accomplishments, the School of Nursing and Health Sciences continues to face problems. One of Dr. Wolf's constant concerns is funding for the School, an issue that not only relates to its daily operations and the programs it offers but also to the progress of students who experience economic disadvantage. Fiscal issues are a constant worry to her for these reasons,\textsuperscript{35} and grant-writing is an important aspect of her duties as dean. Also, the School's RN-to-BSN program, though its original program, has seen a gradual decrease in enrollment. Although the School is still very much attentive to the needs of adult learners and modifies its teaching strategy to accommodate their knowledge and experience, it has difficulty maintaining adult enrollment due to the emergence of easier programs and coursework offered over the internet.\textsuperscript{36} Finally, nursing at La Salle is still relatively new. Traditionally a liberal arts institution, La Salle struggles with the integration of health professions into the general university community, and the determination of the place of nursing at a liberal arts university is always a challenge for both the School of Nursing and Health Sciences and La Salle as a whole. Dr. Wolf notes that many on campus know little about the programs offered by the School or

\textsuperscript{34} Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 10:35, 33:57, 35:34.  
\textsuperscript{35} Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 32:23, 57:22.  
\textsuperscript{36} Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 53:30.
about the role of nursing in healthcare at large, and, although the nursing faculty shares quality relationships with their colleagues in other disciplines, it is difficult for other La Salle faculty and administrators to “...figure us [nursing] out.”

The School of Nursing and Health Sciences has undergone many changes and overcome many challenges throughout the course of its development to the present. However, it has never lacked the tenacity of determined, intelligent leaders who have worked to make the education it provides innovative, practical, and high-quality. Although it is true that nursing traditionally has difficulty jibing with a liberal arts institution such as La Salle, it is undeniable that the mission and goals of the nursing profession are in complete accord with the spirit of a Christian Brothers education. In speaking of the relationship between the university and the School of Nursing and Health Sciences, Dr. Wolf stated that “...they know we [the nursing department] have a lot of energy.” Perhaps this is the best possible description of the program. The energy and passion of its leadership has traditionally seen the School through its past challenges, and, although it may see changes in the future, such energy will always be its defining characteristic.

37 Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 47:28.
38 Dr. Zane Robinson Wolf, 49:39.
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