

Establishing a South African Honour Society of Nursing under auspices of Sigma Theta Tau International (Inc.)



D van der Wal
Department of Advanced Nursing
Sciences
Unisa

Profile of Sigma Theta Tau International

The information on Sigma Theta Tau International (Inc.) which follows is reproduced from official STTI documentation with permission from the STTI Chapter Manager. This section should thus be read with the United States context in mind as certain words and concepts have different meanings in the US and SA contexts, eg under graduate, graduate, college and the like. In addition, certain words are also spelled differently in American English and standard English.

Mission

Sigma Theta Tau International is committed to fostering excellence, scholarship, and leadership in nursing to improve health care worldwide. The society promotes the use of nursing research in health care delivery and makes its resources available to all people and institutions interested in the latest nursing care knowledge.

Purpose

Sigma Theta Tau International exists to:

- Recognise superior achievement in nursing.
- Encourage leadership development.
- Foster high nursing standards.
- Strengthen the commitment to the ideals of the professional.

Organisation

Modern nursing was barely 20 years old in 1922 when six nurses founded Sigma Theta Tau at the Indiana University Training School for Nurses, now the Indiana University School of Nursing in Indianapolis, Indiana. The founders chose the name from the Greek words *Storge* (Sigma Σ), *Tharos* (Theta Θ), and *Tima* (Tau T) meaning "love", "courage" and "honor". With the full idealism of forging pathways of change, they successfully created a framework to encourage future leaders to deliver excellent health care.

In 1985, the society became incorporated as Sigma Theta Tau International Inc. to meet the objective of supporting a global community of nursing scholars and enhancing health care worldwide.

The society is a non-profit, non-political organization.

Membership

More than 260,000 nurse scholars have been inducted into Sigma Theta Tau International making it the second largest and one of the most prestigious nursing organizations in the world.

The society is comprised of chapter honor societies that are located on more than 400 college and university campuses in the United States, Puerto Rico, Canada, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia. Sixty percent of the members hold master's and/or doctoral degrees. Forty-four percent are clinicians, twenty-six percent are administrators or supervisors, and nineteen percent are educators. The society's members are active in more than 72 countries and territories worldwide. Membership is by invitation, conferred upon students in baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs who demonstrate excellence in scholarship and to community leaders who are qualified college graduates demonstrating exceptional achievement in nursing.

Education and Research initiatives

In 1936, Sigma Theta Tau International

became the first organization in the United States to fund nursing research. Since then, it has provided more than 350 grants instrumental in the development of many of the world's leading nurse scientists.

The society, together with its chapters and grant partners (corporations, associations and foundations), contributes more than \$500,000 each year to nursing research through grants, scholarships, and monetary awards. In addition, more than 300 research-oriented educational programs are sponsored or cosponsored annually and attended by some 15,000 nurse scholars.

Sigma Theta Tau International has sponsored or cosponsored International Research Congresses in Spain, Israel, Scotland, Taiwan, Washington DC, Australia, Canada and The Netherlands.

Center Nursing Press

The publishing arm of Sigma Theta Tau International produces a scholarly journal and numerous other publications designed to fulfill the society's mission by disseminating nursing knowledge.

Begun in 1967, *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship* is the foremost, peer-reviewed scholarly journal in nursing with a circulation of 128,000 - the highest circulation of all scholarly, research-oriented nursing journals.

Peer-reviewed scholarly monographs on significant topics are published each biennium.

Reflections is the society's award-winning quarterly news magazine with a worldwide circulation of 128,000.

Chapter Leader EMPHASIS is a quarterly newsletter sent to nearly 3,000 chapter officers and members.

Envision is mailed twice a year (May and November) to an average of 15,000 newly inducted members.

Electronic Library

In November 1989, Sigma Theta Tau International dedicated its new \$5 million International Center for Nursing Scholarship. In addition to the society's headquarters, the centre houses the

Sigma Theta Tau Leadership Institute, and the state-of-the-art electronic library. The library was dedicated in November 1990 and named the Virginia Henderson International Nursing Library in December 1990. The library's online subscription services are available via the World Wide Web to individuals, organizations, schools of nursing, and health science libraries. The services include:

Online Journal of Knowledge Synthesis for Nursing - a peer-reviewed electronic journal that gives nurses easy access to the latest review of research findings and how these relate to the way nurses provide care.

Registry of Nursing Research - a collection of nursing research data including researchers' demographic information, research studies, projects, findings and abstracts.

Because the most valuable clinical research information may be so current that it has not yet been published, the Virginia Henderson Library - unlike any other nursing library in the world - acquires peer-reviewed, unpublished literature.

In November 1995, the library introduced the Sigma Theta Tau International home page on the World Wide Web. The site offers information on the society, related nursing information, as well as access to the *Sigma Theta Tau International Book Service* - an exciting service offered in collaboration with Doody Publishing, the world's leading independent reviewer of health science books.

Leadership development

In keeping with its mission to foster scholarship, leadership, and excellence, and in support of its goal to address health and social issues worldwide, the Sigma Theta Tau International Leadership Institute was initiated in 1991. The ultimate purpose of the institute is to position nurses as leaders and partners in creating a vision and agenda for global health.

The Leadership Institute has embraced numerous activities, including the Leadership Extern Program and the ARISTA think-tank series, designed to bring the vision and logic of nursing to bear on health problems of international significance.

Eligibility criteria

The following eligibility criteria are stipulated by Sigma Theta Tau International:

Candidates for membership at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels must be enrolled in the college or university where the honour society is located to be considered for membership in that honour society.

Undergraduate

- Must have completed one half of the nursing curriculum (subjects with a

nursing prefix).

- Cumulative grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0. scale or its equivalent

AND

- Students must also fall in the upper 35% of their graduating class in scholarship. (Rare exceptions are allowed for students under the 35% ranking but with a GPA of 3.0.)

- Students be considered eligible up to one year after graduation.

Alumni

- Eligible for membership if they would have met the criteria had there been a honour society when they were students (At least a 3.0 on a 4.0 GPA and ranked in the upper 35% of the graduating class.)

- The chartering ceremony is the last ceremony where alumni may be inducted. After the chartering ceremony they must meet the community leader criteria to be considered for membership.

Master's students

- Required to achieve a 3.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale.

- Has completed one-fourth of the program of study

- May be considered on these criteria up to one year following graduation provided they have a 3.5 out of 4.0.

Doctoral students

- With previous degrees in nursing and 3.75 on a 4.0 grade point average

- May be enrolled in a nursing program or related field

- Have completed one-fourth of their study/research project.

Community member

Criteria not strictly on academic achievement.

- Nurses with a minimum of a baccalaureate degree (in whatever field). Allow about 5 years after graduation to develop as community leaders.

- Having demonstrated marked achievement in education, practice, research, administration or publication.

Examples:

Educators: Faculty in any nursing school Administrators (e.g., "matrons.")

Clinicians

Researchers

Authors

Others, e.g., consultants, entrepreneurs

Unisa Honor Society of Nursing

The Unisa Honor Society of Nursing was inaugurated in 1995. During the first induction ceremony Dr Vernice Ferguson, a past President of Sigma Theta Tau International, acted as guest speaker.

During this ceremony, the late Prof Margie Beukes, on behalf of the original steering committee (Dr. Marthie Bezuidenhout, Dr. Eugene Potgieter, Mrs. Helga Kirstein, Mrs. Trinette Swanepoel and Mr. Dirk van

der Wal) in her capacity as the President of the Unisa Honor Society of Nursing, illuminated the aims, goals and nature of the Unisa Honor Society which were the same as those listed for Sigma Theta Tau International.

Eligibility criteria of the UHSN

The initial eligibility criteria for membership of the Unisa Honor Society of Nursing were:

- *Faculty members of the Department of Nursing Science at Unisa:* who may all become voluntary members of the Society

- *Students:* which included all students registered for the first time at Unisa for the degree MA (Cur) in Nursing Science and the degree D Litt et Phil in Nursing Science.

- *Alumni:* which referred to all candidates in possession of a MA (Cur) degree or a D Litt et Phil degree in Nursing Science conferred by the University of South Africa (Unisa).

- *Community Leaders:* which at that stage included all Heads of Departments of Nursing Science at South African universities.

At the time of the establishment of the UHSN it was envisioned that these eligibility criteria could, in future be amended to include undergraduate students; according to the American system, this would include individuals in possession of a Bachelors or Honours degree conferred by Unisa and who showed academic excellence during the course of their studies.

Accomplishments of the Unisa Honor Society of Nursing at the time of its inception and proposed future Chartering

At the time of the first induction ceremony the newly established Unisa Honor Society of Nursing attracted 70 members. Future accomplishments of the Society would greatly depend on the participation of the members of the society in its quest to establish a chapter, that is becoming a fully fledged chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International, at the Department of Nursing Science at Unisa.

To attain this goal, the society would have had to have:

- existed for at least two years (Application for Chartering, should reach STTI Headquarters no later than April of the year with uneven numbers. It was thus envisioned that the Unisa Honor Society of Nursing would become a Chapter of STTI no later than 1997. However these goals could not be reached.)

- maintained an annual membership growth of at least 15 members

(Members will be added to the ranks of the Unisa Honor Society of Nursing after nomination by existing members of the Society. Nominations are presented to the nominating committee and the voting committee who will then invite eligible candidates to join the Unisa Honor Society of Nursing.)

• maintained academic excellence by running at least two scholarly programmes per year. (These can take on several different forms such as, work sessions, symposia, expert readings and the like.)

The Establishment of a South African Honor Society of Nursing

The *Unisa Honor Society of Nursing* (UHSN) established in 1995 with the intent of becoming a full chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI) within two years could not attain this goal. A special open meeting was held on April 6, 1997 to discuss, and to decide on the future of the Unisa Honor Society of Nursing. The following issues were discussed during this meeting:

The name of the society:

Some members of the Unisa Honor Society of Nursing (UHSN) and members of other universities felt that the name of the society referred too pertinently to a specific institution. Naturally, this restricted membership to students who were either registered with the Department of Advanced Nursing Sciences at Unisa, or those individuals who graduated from this university in Nursing Sciences, and who met the eligibility criteria set forth by STTI.

• Suggestion:

The name of the society be changed to: *The South African Honor Society of Nursing*

• Motivation:

To provide for membership for all nurses in South Africa who meet the eligibility criteria. This would contribute to professional cohesion, and would also increase the membership number of the society.

Dwindling membership numbers

The Unisa Honor Society of Nursing experienced a decline in membership numbers since its first induction ceremony in August 1995. Presently, to meet the criteria set for chartering, the society should consist of at least 125 paid up members. The fact that the Department of Advanced Nursing Sciences has the largest number of students for university departments of nursing in the country makes the decline in membership numbers and the resulting inability to apply for chartering especially

disconcerting.

• Suggestion:

That all university departments of nursing in South Africa be approached to form an honour society of nursing "at large."

• Motivation:

It is hardly conceivable that any one university department of nursing in this country will be able to recruit and maintain the required membership number for chartering stipulated by STTI.

Lack of interest:

In addition to the dwindling membership numbers, a general lack of interest in societies and associations such as the UHSN is experienced. Many reasons can be offered for this phenomenon including problems on the part of the present Board of Directors to maintain membership interest through educational programs and newsletters. However, there was also no response to numerous calls on members for contributions to the newsletter. In addition, the symposium held on *Caring* at Unisa in August 1996, which was open to all to attend, was attended by only 70 people.

• Suggestion:

That all university departments of nursing in South Africa be approached to form an honour society of nursing "at large."

• Motivation:

This would open more sources, both in number and in scope, to maintain a lively newsletter publication. In addition, if each university department of nursing who becomes a member of the proposed South African Honor Society of Nursing, runs its own two compulsory educational programs per year, these programs will be dispersed throughout South Africa. Members of the society in the region of the university, who gained membership to the society through another university could attend the activities of the nursing department closest to them. In this way membership involvement will be enhanced. Likewise, the newsletter will also contain contributions from all over South Africa.

Eligibility criteria

The Unisa Honor Society of Nursing also experienced problems regarding the eligibility criteria adapted and adopted by the society. These were to some degree not acceptable to STTI Headquarters.

A major problem is that Unisa (and we suspect some other universities too) does not use the GPA system. It is apparent that if the GPA suggested by STTI is converted into a percentage, and this is taken as a criteria, hardly any Master's and definitely no Doctoral candidates will be granted membership of the honour society. Besides, at Unisa at least, the examination of a doctoral thesis does not result in the awarding of marks. The thesis is either accepted or rejected.

Another major concern, pertaining to Unisa undergraduate students (in the South African context), is whether students who have not completed their studies, should be invited to the membership ranks of the proposed SAHSN. The question is also whether these members should be accommodated indefinitely or, should some additional academic or time criterion be set for continued membership.

• Suggestion:

The following eligibility criteria is suggested for the proposed South African Honor Society of Nursing.

All candidates shall have demonstrated superior scholarly achievement, academic integrity, professional leadership, potential and/or marked achievement in the field of nursing.

The criteria have now been formulated to include the following candidates:

1. All faculty members of the universities who form part of the SAHSN may become voluntary members of the society
2. Third year pre-graduate students with a distinction in both their major subjects;
3. Graduates who have completed a Bachelor's degree in Nursing, with a distinction in both their major subjects;
4. Students who completed the Honours degree with a distinction in at least one subject;
5. All nurses with Masters and Doctoral degrees;
6. Alumni: nurses who would have met the above criteria had these been in place during their graduation; and
7. Community members: nurses who are graduated (any degree, not necessarily, a nursing degree) and who have distinguished themselves in their nursing leadership role in the community.

Their application should be accompanied by a short description of their inputs towards community development and upliftment.

• Motivation:

At Unisa, and other universities, with large numbers of under graduate students in nursing sciences, it will be an impossible task to check all students' academic records annually to determine who, during the past year, moved into the bracket for invitation to join the SAHSN. In the case of a research master's degree, it is also very difficult, if not impossible, to determine the portion of work the student has completed and on which an invitation to the ranks of the SAHSN could be determined.

In the case of doctoral candidates, the same problem as that with master's candidates presents itself. In addition, the examination of a doctoral theses does not result in the awarding of marks or

symbols. Either the thesis is accepted or rejected. The general argument is that in South Africa both a master's and a doctoral degree implies academic excellence and these individuals should be invited to join the ranks of the proposed SAHSN.

Guidelines For Chapter At-large Development

The only solution to the present problems seems to be to start anew. It is suggested that an **honor society at large** be established.

Overview

In certain circumstances, two or more schools may wish to cooperate in the formation of a chapter. This arrangement may assist schools with a small enrollment or schools which are in close proximity to each other.

There are two types of models for developing a chapter at-large:

1. Two (2) or more schools without a chapter establish an honor society under the Society's guidelines. Each school must meet all of the criteria for establishment of a chapter. The honor society at-large applies to be a chapter at-large.
2. One or more schools meeting the criteria for establishment of a chapter form an honor society under the Society's guidelines. The honor society collaborates with an established chapter and applies to amend the established chapter's charter to include the school(s) comprising the honor society.

[Note: if your school is interested in pursuing a charter amendment with an established chapter, please call the chapter services department at headquarters and request the *Guidelines for Amending a Charter*.]

Guidelines for

Developing an Honor Society At-Large

Preliminary Requirements

1. Each school in the honor society at-large must have achieved NLN (National League for Nursing) accreditation. Each school is required to have held NLN accreditation at least two years at the time of submitting the Application of Charter.
2. There should be a cooperative working relationship and mutual respect between all schools involved. All schools should have common goals and a shared vision for the honor society at-large.
3. Written administrative approval must be provided from the administration of each school involved in the honor society at-large. This approval should be kept in the honor society's records.

Developing an At-Large Honor Society Steering Committee

An at-large honor society steering committee is organized between cooperating schools to explore common goals and exchange information. The steering committee membership should include faculty, students and alumni from each school and community individuals supportive of the honor society at-large. All members of the steering committee must meet the requirements for membership in their appropriate category. This group coordinates overall honor society at-large development.

The at-large honor society steering committee carries out the same duties as the single school honor society steering committee.

Special Consideration for an Honor Society At-Large

1. Newsletters and other forms of communication should be used to keep members and schools connected.
2. Activities should be scheduled to involve maximum number of honor society members, especially for annual meetings. Activities should be scheduled in coordination with each school's calendar and other professional activities.
3. Members are selected independently from each school. Each school applies Sigma Theta Tau International (or accepted and adapted) eligibility requirements to its student body. An eligibility committee for each school will include a faculty counsellor and honor society members.
4. The induction ceremony is held jointly. Each school independently applies the student criteria for membership to its study body.
5. A vice president and faculty counsellor should be elected from each school participating in the honor society at-large.

Application for Chapter At-Large

1. The Application for Charter must be completed. Sections I, II and VII are completed for each school in the honor society at-large. A school catalogue for each school in the honor society at-large should accompany the application.

Chartering Procedures for the Chapter At-Large

1. Charters: Duplicate charters are prepared for each school of the chapter at-large.
2. Coat-of-Arms: A coat-of-arms is provided for each school in the chapter at-large.

Benefits

The following benefits of a South African Honor Society of Nursing are envisioned

in addition to those specified by STTI:

- International liaison and networking will be established
- An honour society of nursing under auspices of STTI will bring us on a par with several other professions and disciplines who have already formed internationally recognised chapters in other academic fields. This may even improve the image of nursing science within the academic environment and could give further recognition and status to the profession of nursing in this country
- Student motivation, to perform better academically (to achieve membership eligibility) may be enhanced
- The formation of a national honour society of nursing will openly state the concern of academics within the profession for excellence in their field, and, by implication, their concern with nursing as a discipline over and above nursing being a profession
- Recognition will also be given to a rather small number of professionals, who's expertise and achievements are otherwise ignored and seldom recognised by their more practice oriented colleagues
- Unity, networking and collaboration among nurse academics in this country could be improved through such a society of nursing
- The recognition of the academic excellence of South African nurses internationally might also lead to a more positive orientation of university authorities towards nursing as an academic discipline.

Present State of Affairs

Up to the present the following university departments of nursing have joint the venture of a SAHSN working towards chapter status in the year 2000.

University of South Africa
Rand Afrikaans University
University of Natal
MEDUNSA
University of Potchefstroom
University of Pretoria

Contact Person

Should you as an individual or as a department of nursing sciences at a South African university would require more information please contact Mr. D van der Wal at the following addresses:
Mr D van der Wal
Department of Advanced Nursing Sciences
University of South Africa
PO Box 392
PRETORIA
0003
Tel: (012) 429-6097
Fax: (012) 429-6688
E-mail: vdwaldm@alpha.unisa.ac.za

