The ACRTE Chronicle

American College of Respiratory Therapy Education

May 30, 2025, Volume 2 (5)

Spotlight Article

CHI St. Alexius Health/University of Mary

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Overview

The University of Mary/CHI St. Alexius Health Respiratory Therapy Program in Bismarck, North Dakota equips students with the clinical expertise and leadership skills needed to excel as registered respiratory therapists. Graduates are prepared not only to deliver high-quality care but also to serve as consultants in the planning and delivery of respiratory services. We offer multiple degrees in respiratory therapy to meet students wherever they are in their education and career. The on-campus programs are for students new to the field and provide hands-on classroom education, laboratory instruction, and clinical experiences at local hospitals. These entry-level programs are offered at the baccalaureate and master's degrees. Students in the baccalaureate degree entry-level program complete two academic years of pre-professional coursework and one and a half years of professional respiratory therapy courses, including a summer term. Students in the master's degree entry-level program complete two additional full-time semesters of graduate level course work in addition to the baccalaureate degree requirements.

The entry-level programs are sponsored by a hospital/university consortium consisting of CHI St. Alexius Health and the University of Mary. The pre-professional curriculum (freshman and sophomore years) is offered on the University campus, and the professional program (four consecutive semesters) is offered on the CHI St. Alexius campus. Students can complete pre-professional courses at other universities or colleges and transfer to the University of Mary for the professional phase. We also offer a part-time track designed to provide greater flexibility for students balancing other commitments. This part-time track is completed over six semesters rather than the four semesters required to complete the full-time track. The master's degree program builds upon the baccalaureate curriculum and includes two additional semesters (34 credits) featuring advanced techniques and monitoring in critical care, along with electives in education or leadership. While students with a baccalaureate degree are eligible to apply, holding a baccalaureate degree is not a requirement for admission to the master's program.

The University of Mary also offers the Year-Round Campus as a one-of-a-kind college career option that lets students achieve a bachelor's degree in as little as 2.6 years and a master's in four years. By adding a full summer semester to the school year, our innovative Year-Round Campus gives students the opportunity to study throughout the year so they can graduate sooner and get a head start on their lives and careers. There are also study-abroad options available in the fall, spring, or summer semesters.

The University of Mary also cosponsors a radiology technology program with CHI St. Alexius Health. In addition, the University has its own healthcare programs on its campus. Additional undergraduate programs include Biomechanics, Communication Sciences and Disorders, Exercise Science, and Nursing. In addition to Respiratory Therapy, graduate programs include Athletic Training, Occupational Therapy, Physical therapy, Speech Language Pathology, Clinical Exercise Physiology, Kinesiology, Nursing, and Bioethics.

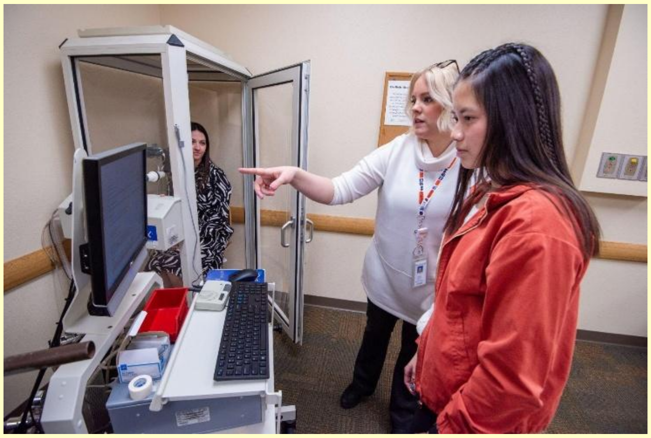
Program History

The respiratory therapy program began in 1971 at St. Alexius Medical Center as a hospital-based program with no formal ties to a college or university; nevertheless, prerequisite college courses in math and the sciences were required for admission to the program. The program was started by a physician husband-and wife team with specialties in anesthesia, pulmonology, and critical care. As a result, a legacy of physician involvement in the education of respiratory therapists was started, which persists today.

In 1982, St. Alexius Medical Center formalized a co-sponsorship agreement with its sister institution, the University of Mary. At that time both institutions operated under the auspices of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Annunciation Monastery. Under this agreement, St. Alexius maintained fiscal control of the program and its physical facilities, and the University granted formal academic credit for respiratory therapy courses. Respiratory therapy faculty members remained St. Alexius employees but were granted regular faculty status with rank by the University. The University assumes quality control of the respiratory therapy curriculum through its standard academic review process which aligns with the requirements set forth by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The University also provides student services for respiratory therapy students, including academic counseling and financial aid. This arrangement continues to the present day.

Originally, the University awarded program graduates the associate of science degree. In 1991, the University of Mary approved a Bachelor of Science degree entry-level curriculum, eliminating the A.S. degree. This change reflected the belief of the advisory committee members and the faculty that preparation for registry-level competencies could not be satisfactorily achieved at the A.S. level.

In 2012, the University of Mary approved a Master of Science entry level curriculum designed for individuals with baccalaureate degrees in other fields. Before the master's option was implemented the program could only offer a second BS degree to such applicants. In 2017, the University of Mary approved a Bachelor of Science (RRT to BSRT) curriculum designed for individuals with an associate degree in respiratory therapy. This program serves and assists the respiratory care profession in degree advancement. In 2025, we updated our entry-level curriculum to offer a part-time track designed to provide greater flexibility for students balancing other commitments as they earn their degree in respiratory therapy. As part of our commitment to excellence and innovation, we also updated the MSRT program to include advanced clinical training and leadership development. This will empower graduates with the expertise and versatility to thrive in today's ever-evolving healthcare landscape.



Mission

Inspired by and under the patronage of Saint Gianna Beretta Molla we prepare respiratory therapists who are servant leaders that will transform health care for everyone at each stage of life.

Vision

Our vision is that our graduates will become competent, ethical, compassionate, and caring registered respiratory therapists (RRTs). RRTs who think critically, engage in evidence-based practice, function as expert resources to physicians and other healthcare professionals, assume leadership roles, and respect the dignity of the human person.

Bachelor of Science Curriculum

The BSRT curriculum equips students with the professional competencies required to practice as RRTs upon graduation. Graduates are prepared to deliver expert respiratory care and serve as consultants in its application. The curriculum fosters a comprehensive understanding of both normal and pathological physiology and its relevance to treatment strategies, diagnostic procedures, and disease management. It also emphasizes the interpersonal aspects of patient care, including communication and education. Additional focus areas include healthcare reimbursement, community health promotion, bioethics, research, and evidence-based practice.

Admission Requirements

To qualify for admission to the professional program, students must complete all pre-professional requirements with a minimum grade of "C" in each course and an overall grade point average of 2.5 or higher. Students who successfully complete these requirements must submit a separate application to the Respiratory Therapy Department to be considered for admission to the professional program.

Prerequisite Courses

Before entry into the professional program, students must complete approximately 57 semester hours of prerequisite courses, including anatomy & physiology, microbiology, college algebra or statistics, chemistry, physics, ethics, communication, introduction into respiratory therapy, and other general education courses in the humanities and social sciences. The professional program consists of 70 semester hours, for a total minimum of 125 credits for the BSRT.

The first semester of the professional program (junior year) consists of classroom and laboratory courses as well as a clinical internship; clinical patient care courses begin in the second semester and gradually increase in intensity to the end of the program for a total of approximately 1000 hours. Clinical experience includes medical teaching rounds with pulmonologists, intensivists, and anesthesiologists. Each semester consists of both clinical and classroom components. In the final two semesters (summer and fall), regular classes occur during the first seven weeks, and clinical practicums occupy the remaining eight weeks (40 hours/week). During the final clinical rotation, students develop their own clinical learning contracts, which allow them to focus on several areas of special interest to them; students are responsible for scheduling their own clinical hours and contacting their own clinical instructors and physicians.

Respiratory Therapy Professional Phase		
Junior Year		**Credits**
Fall Semester	RTH 305 Basic Procedures	3
	RTH 307 Basic Procedures Lab	1
	RTH 328 Respiratory Pharmacology	1
	RTH 335 Pulmonary Anatomy & Physiology	4
	RTH 350 Introduction to Research	1
	RTH 360 Clinical Internship	1
	RTH 422 Basic Pulmonary Assessment	3
	RTH 426 Pulmonary Diseases	3
	Total Credits	**17**
Spring Semester	RTH 320 Clinical Practicum I	1
	RTH 416 Pediatric & Neonatal Respiratory Therapy	3
	RTH 432 Advanced Cardiopulmonary Assessment	3
	RTH 436 Mechanical Ventilation I	3
	RTH 438 Advanced Procedures Lab	1
	RTH 464 Research & Evidence Based Practice	1
	RTH 474 Critical Care Pharmacology	1
	RTH 478 Cardiac & Renal Anatomy & Physiology	4
	Total Credits	**17**
Summer Semester	RTH 410 Seminar I	3
	RTH 415 Legal & Ethical Issues	2
	RTH 418 Leadership & Management	3
	RTH 430 Clinical Practicum II	8
	RTH 434 Research & Scientific Writing	1
	Total Credits	**17**
Senior Fall Semester	RTH 411 Seminar II	3
	RTH 420 Professional Seminar	1
	RTH 441 Clinical Practicum III	8
	RTH 450 Research Capstone	1
	RTH 484 Mechanical Ventilation II	3
	IPE 401	1
	Total Credits	**17**
	BSRT Degree	**125**

Master of Science Curriculum

The MSRT program is an entry-level program; that is, like the BSRT curriculum its completion confers eligibility to the graduate to sit for the NBRC credentialing exams. The master's degree program builds upon the BSRT curriculum and includes two additional semesters (34 credits) focused on advanced techniques and monitoring in critical care, along with electives in education or leadership. While students with a non-respiratory therapy baccalaureate degree are eligible to apply, a baccalaureate degree is not required for admission. Students enrolled in the BSRT curriculum may also choose to continue into the MSRT program, with the decision typically made during the summer semester.

There is a great demand for RRTs with master's degrees in respiratory care to serve as faculty members, program directors, and directors of clinical education respiratory therapy programs located throughout the United States. Additional opportunities such as leadership and research are available for graduates of the master's in respiratory therapy programs.

Admission Policy

Baccalaureate degree (non-respiratory therapy) from any regionally accredited college or university in the United States, or completion of the first two semesters of the BSRT program. Cumulative GPA of 3.00.

Prerequisite Courses

Introduction to Respiratory Therapy (2 credits)
Chemistry (4 credits)
Physics (3 credits)
Microbiology (3 credits)
College Algebra (3 credits)
Anatomy and Physiology (6 credits)
Ethics (3 credits)
*Grade of "C" or higher for all math/science courses

Admitted graduate students enroll in all professional courses with their undergraduate counterparts; 500 and 600-level courses are dual-numbered for undergraduate/graduate credit.

Respiratory Therapy Professional Phase		
Junior Year		**Credits**
Fall Semester	RTH 305 Basic Procedures	3
	RTH 307 Basic Procedures Lab	1
	RTH 328 Respiratory Pharmacology	1
	RTH 335 Pulmonary Anatomy & Physiology	4
	RTH 350 Introduction to Research	1
	RTH 360 Clinical Internship	1
	RTH 422 Basic Pulmonary Assessment	3
	RTH 426 Pulmonary Diseases	3
	Total Credits	**17**
Spring Semester	RTH 320 Clinical Practicum I	1
	RTH 416 Pediatric & Neonatal Respiratory Therapy	3
	RTH 432 Advanced Cardiopulmonary Assessment	3
	RTH 436 Mechanical Ventilation I	3
	RTH 438 Advanced Procedures Lab	1
	RTH 464 Research & Evidence Based Practice	1
	RTH 474 Critical Care Pharmacology	1
	RTH 478 Cardiac & Renal Anatomy & Physiology	4
	Total Credits	**17**
Summer Semester	RTH 410 Seminar I	3
	RTH 415/530 Legal & Ethical Issues	2
	RTH 418 Leadership & Management	3
	RTH 430 Clinical Practicum II	8
	RTH 434 Research & Scientific Writing	1
	Total Credits	**17**
Senior Fall Semester	RTH 411 Seminar II	3
	RTH 420 Professional Seminar	1
	RTH 441 Clinical Practicum III	8
	RTH 6xx Research & Statistics	2
	RTH 580 Mechanical Ventilation II	3
	IPE 40100000	1
	Total Credits	**18**

Senior Spring Semester	RTH 6xx Research & Applied Statistics	2
	RTH 628 Specialty Clinical	3
	RTH 635 Advanced Techniques in Critical Care	3
	HIS 515 History of Science in Medicine	3
	Elective	3
	Total Credits	**14**
	RTH 6xx Advanced Monitoring	3
	RTH 698 Respiratory Therapy Capstone	3
	RTH 652 Health Promotion	3
	Elective	3
	Total Credits	**12**
	MSRT	**+34**

RRT- BSRT Curriculum

The RRT to BSRT Completion Program is designed for individuals who have graduated from a CoARC accredited institution with an associate degree in Respiratory Therapy and have passed the NBRC Registered Respiratory Therapy (RRT) examination. Because the student is required to be a Registered Respiratory Therapist to graduate from this program, up to 45 semester hours of block credit will be granted for the RRT credential that will go toward the BSRT degree. All students must meet the University of Mary upper division requirement of completing 44 hours of 300-400 level course work for the B.S.R.T. degree.

Admission Policy

To gain admission in the RRT to BSRT respiratory therapy program, a student must hold an Associate of Science (or equivalent) in Respiratory Therapy from a CoARC accredited institution of higher education. Students must have a cumulative GPA of 2.50 or higher, with a GPA of 2.75 or higher in the respiratory therapy courses transferred in. Students who can provide proof of their RRT credential issued by the National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC) must do so upon applying to the RRT to BSRT program. Students obtaining their RRT credential must prove that it has been acquired by the end of their first semester in the program. Students will not be allowed to continue their second semester of the program without proper documentation of their RRT credential.

Student Activities

At the University of Mary/CHI St. Alexius Health Respiratory Therapy Program in Bismarck, North Dakota, entry-level students engage in far more than traditional classroom, laboratory, and clinical experiences. The program emphasizes leadership, service, and community engagement as essential components of professional development.

As part of their Leadership and Management course, students identify real-world needs and respond with meaningful initiatives. One such project involved planning and delivering continuing education sessions for respiratory therapists working in the home care setting. Practicing therapists from across North Dakota attended the student-led event to earn CEUs and gain insights into current best practices.

In their Health Promotion course, students also take their knowledge into the community. They recently developed and presented an educational session on the dangers of vaping to a local middle school, helping to raise awareness among youth about the risks of nicotine use. Additionally, students frequently represent the profession at local high schools and community events, such as the Girl Scouts' BIG Event, where they introduce young audiences to the field of respiratory care.

Presenting continuing education for Home Care Respiratory Therapists

Interprofessional education is another cornerstone of the curriculum, supported by the St. Gianna School of Health Sciences. Students participate in collaborative learning and simulation activities alongside peers from the Master of Athletic Training and Doctor of Physical Therapy programs. These experiences foster teamwork and communication across discipline skills essential for modern healthcare environments.

Students are also encouraged to engage with the broader professional community. They've been invited to attend the North Dakota Nicotine Dependence Conference, the North Dakota Society for Respiratory Care State Conference, and the prestigious Top RT Event at the Mayo Clinic—opportunities that expand their professional networks and deepen their understanding of the field.

Presenting to eighth grade students about risks of vaping.

Presenting the respiratory therapy profession with the Mayor at the Girls Scout's BIG Event.

Students and Faculty of the Respiratory Therapy Program and Master of Athletic Training Program after a collaborative simulation

Respiratory therapy and physical therapy students collaborating during a simulation.

Program Achievements & Accomplishments

The CHI St. Alexius Health/University of Mary Respiratory Therapy Program in Bismarck, North Dakota continues to set the standard for excellence in respiratory care education. Nationally recognized for its commitment to student success and professional advancement, the program has earned multiple prestigious honors from leading accrediting and professional organizations.

Most recently, the program received the President’s Award for Excellence in Credentialing Success from the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC). This distinguished award reflects the program’s outstanding performance in preparing students to achieve the Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT) credential—recognized as the gold standard in the profession. The award underscores the program’s dedication to inspiring students to reach their highest academic and professional goals.

The program’s excellence extends to the graduate level as well. In 2024, the Master of Science in Respiratory Therapy (MSRT) program was honored with the APEX Award by the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC). This national award celebrates programs that demonstrate exceptional quality, safety, and effectiveness in respiratory care education and service delivery.

Faculty achievements further reflect the program's leadership in the field. Highlights include:

- Presentations at the North Dakota Society for Respiratory Care's Annual Conference
- A poster presentation at the AARC International Congress
- Numerous guest lectures and professional contributions

Interprofessional collaboration is a hallmark of the program. A joint project with the University of Mary's Athletic Training Program earned the People's Choice Poster Presentation Award at the North Dakota Nurses Association Conference, themed "The *Power of United Minds: Advancing Healthcare Through Interprofessional Education and Practice."*

Additionally, an ongoing partnership with the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program has led to:

- A virtual poster presentation
- An honorable mention from the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC)
- An upcoming publication in *Respiratory Care*, one of the field's leading journals

These accomplishments reflect a program that not only prepares students for clinical excellence but also fosters leadership, scholarship, and innovation in respiratory care.

Program Highlights

- We offer three entry-level pathways to begin a career in respiratory therapy: full-time BSRT, part-time BSRT and MSRT.
- Our students gain valuable respiratory therapy experience through classroom, laboratory, and clinical practicum courses.
- Our students receive approximately 1,000 hours of supervised experience in direct patient interaction.
- Our students may opt to take the respiratory therapy pre-med track, which allows completion of all courses required for admission to most medical schools while completing requirements for the Bachelor of Science degree in respiratory therapy.

- Our students develop professional leadership skills in a collaborative learning environment grounded in Christian, Catholic, and Benedictine values.
- Our faculty collaborate with each student to develop a personalized plan of study that supports their individual goals and learning needs.
- We offer small class sizes led by supportive, dedicated faculty who are committed to guiding students every step of the way.

Faculty

Chris Sperle, PhD, RRT, AE-C Program Director is an associate professor, program director, and chair of the Respiratory Therapy Department at the University of Mary School of Health Sciences. She has been a respiratory therapy educator for 23 years. She received her Bachelor of Science in respiratory therapy and Master of Education in college teaching from the University of Mary and her PhD in higher education from the University of North Dakota. Dr. Sperle co-authored a chapter on fetal and neonatal cardiopulmonary physiology in *Respiratory Care Anatomy and Physiology; Foundations for Clinical Practice* published by Elsevier-Mosby, St. Louis, soon to be in its sixth edition. She also co-authored a companion workbook for the physiology textbook in 2013. She is active in the North Dakota Society for Respiratory Care, having served as a member of its board of directors as treasurer, director at large, and delegate. She also serves as an editor for the Respiratory Care Education Annual.

Jessica J. Arndt, PhD., RRT, RRT-ACCS is an assistant professor and director of clinical education. She has been a respiratory therapy faculty member for 12 years and a practicing therapist for 17 years. She received her Bachelor of Science in respiratory therapy and Master of Education in college teaching from the University of Mary and her PhD in higher education from the University of North Dakota. Dr. Arndt provided Clinical Focus revisions for the 5th edition of *Respiratory Care Anatomy and Physiology; Foundations for Clinical Practice* published by Elsevier-Mosby, St. Louis. She is an active member of the North Dakota Society for Respiratory Care having served as director at large and chair of the Membership Committee. Dr. Arndt is currently serving her first term as a North Dakota delegate to the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC).

Erin Haustveit, M.Ed., RRT, RRT-NPS is an instructor in the classroom and clinical setting. She also serves as the program recruitment coordinator. Erin has been a respiratory therapy faculty member for 3 years and a respiratory therapist for 15 years. She received her Bachelor of Science in respiratory therapy and Master of Education in college teaching from the University of Mary. Erin has worked in numerous hospital settings including rural and urban areas. She has enjoyed serving patients in emergency rooms, birthing centers, pulmonary function, and patient education as well as in durable medical equipment and home respiratory therapy services as a therapist, manager, and business strategy advisor. She is also an active member of the North Dakota Society for Respiratory Care currently serving as chair of the publications committee.

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