

# A Pipeline for Health Care Simulation

## New Program Graduates First Student

In October, Katie Cushman began her career as a simulation operation specialist at Carolinas Simulation Center.

She is the simulation center's very first hire from the new health care simulation program at Carolinas College of Health Sciences. The program – offered as part of a bachelor's degree or as a 20-hour post-baccalaureate certificate track – is preparing students of all ages for careers in health care simulation and advancing Atrium Health's long-term commitment to leading the way in this field.

In her first several days on the job, Katie ran simulated scenarios for nursing students with a high-tech manikin that actually gives birth. She set up and supported procedural courses that are designed to teach specific skills like intubation or central line placement. During the training, she collaborated with the simulation facilitator, ensured the technology and equipment was used correctly and replaced any needed supplies.

It was only her first week on the job and a welcome departure from her original plans for a bedside clinical career in health care.

“If you like computers, you could do my job or you can program the software for the manikins,” says **Katie, who graduated in August 2023 with a Bachelor of Science degree in health sciences**. “Or, if you're really good at building things, you can go build the manikins in the workshop.”

The [highly accredited simulation center](#) serves to promote quality and patient safety, enhance education and develop research through excellence in simulation-based training and assessment.

This is the only program like it in the world where students can earn a bachelor's degree and learn a curriculum that melds education, technology, research, assessment and administration.

“We wanted to make it very unique and prepare people for any role that they would want in simulation or advance in the profession,” says **Dawn Swiderski, MSN, RN, CHSE, FSSH, assistant vice president of simulation services**.

Along with providing a career pathway for students, the new program is also filling a need at the simulation center itself – helping find qualified candidates who arrive already trained with the skills to do the job. Establishing that pipeline for training and introducing it to young students was at the forefront of the plan.

“We have an alliance of simulation centers in the region, and we all were finding it hard to hire people qualified for these positions,”



says **Crystal Bencken, MSN, CEN, CPEN, CHSE, simulation education manager at Carolinas Simulation Center**, who helped to build the program alongside fellow **education manager, Jennifer Noble, MSN, AGCNS-BC, CHSE**.

“Knowing that there is going to be a lot of growth in technology in the near future with The Pearl and IRCAD, we thought it was a great time to build our own simulation education program.”

All of which attracted Katie Cushman to enroll.

Katie originally had aspirations to go into nursing – a dream she had since childhood. But after taking pre-nursing courses and a semester of clinicals, she wanted to go in another direction. She found it through the Healthcare Simulation concentration and enrolled as a member of the first cohort in 2021.

She immediately began sharing ideas with other students in her cohort, a diverse group that ranged from 20-year-olds like her to professionals 15 years into their careers looking to add skills or change careers. She never looked back and is thrilled to now launch her newfound career.

“This is business and management and sciences and health care, and then there's also some creative aspects to it all, so you can't beat that sandwich of everything that I want in my job,” says Katie. “For me, I know that the sky's the limit at this point.”

Learn more about the [health care simulation program](#).