



## For Polk State College’s New Dean of Nursing Timing Was Everything.

**The search:** Dean, School of Nursing

**The organization:** Polk State College, Winter Haven, Florida

**Primary organization contact:** Michael Bleich, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Interim Dean

**Senior HSP consultant:** Ivan Bartolome, HSP President and CEO

**Selected candidate:** Deleise Wilson, MA-ED, Ph.D., RN, CSSGB

### Challenge

Academic institutions, like healthcare organizations, are experiencing rapid growth and change. Polk State College based in Winter Haven, Florida, has seen an interest in nursing increase while its enrollment is growing post-COVID, and demand for its graduates expands. That’s increased the pressure to retain and recruit faculty and create a degree program that meets the needs of nursing students, today and tomorrow. In 2022, the College’s Nursing Department was at a crossroads with a need for a visionary academic clinician with a steady hand to steer its Nursing program. At the suggestion of AdventHealth, Polk State College reached out to HealthSearch Partners to lead a search for its first Dean of Nursing.

### Solution

Realizing the need to set the stage for the next phase of nursing department growth amidst the rapidly changing healthcare scene in Polk County, Dr. Angela Falconetti, president of the College, asked HSP for recommendations about a leader to help in an interim Dean position until HSP could identify and recruit a permanent Dean. Ivan Bartolome connected them with Dr. Michael Bleich, RN, PHD, FAAN, a career nursing executive with extensive experience in nursing higher education.

“I knew Ivan from my time as President and Dean of Barnes Jewish College of Nursing in St. Louis when I sought him and HSP out to do a search,” Michael explains. “I appreciated Ivan’s approach to searches. I was looking for someone to conduct the search that provided a more boutique experience, a more personalized experience, than the other well-known firms that I had worked with in the past.”

Michael says that most Polk State searches were successful at the local and regional level, but that in the highly competitive Dean pool, a search of this institutional significance would benefit from the expertise of a national search firm and this is where HSP came in. “I enjoyed partnering with President Falconetti and Provost Martha Santiago, as we reviewed candidate qualifications, developed interview questions, and conducted interviews. I was able to see the process through from beginning to end, including on-campus interviews and finally to reach the choice of a candidate.”

As final candidates visited campus, one candidate stood out from the rest, Deleise Wilson, RN, PHD, MA-ED, CSSGB.

*Polk State College, established in 1964, is a multi-campus institution serving more than 20,000 students in Polk County, Florida, and beyond with many associate degree programs including an Associate in Science in Nursing and five Bachelor degree programs including a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In addition, Polk State offers a wide range of certificate and workforce training options. The College also operates three charter high schools.*

## Results

Dr. Deleise Wilson first met Ivan in 2015 when he conducted a search for a Director of Nursing for Kettering College in Ohio. She was selected for the position and remained there until 2020, then she moved to the University of South Florida to be the Senior Associate Dean of Faculty Affairs and an associate professor.

“When Ivan reached out to me in 2022 about the Dean position at Polk State, I wasn’t even considering another opportunity since I had only been at the University of South Florida about a year,” says Dr. Wilson. “In early 2023, he contacted me again and suggested I speak with Dr. Bleich. He told me I was an excellent fit for Polk State since he knew about my leadership accomplishments at Kettering. So, I felt like he was coaching me to advance to the next level of nursing leadership. I appreciated his persistence because it’s as if he knew the perfect time to contact me. I didn’t feel pressured, rather I felt supported in my career trajectory. He was interested in my success and the timing of my success.”

A 30-minute conversation with Dr. Bleich turned into a 90-minute discussion. For Dr. Wilson, the fit was ideal for many aspects of the job -- culture, values, skills and expertise, leadership style. “Clearly, I’m mission-driven and so is Polk State. For me, the search experience was smooth because Ivan approached it from a collegial and coaching perspective. I really appreciated that.”

Dr. Bleich says Polk State is extremely satisfied with the search and its successful outcome of naming Dr. Wilson the new AdventHealth Dean. “The quality of the search firm and who, as a client, you select as a search firm says as much about you as you say about yourself,” explains Dr. Bleich. “I had a candidate tell me once that she might not have considered the opportunity if it hadn’t been for how she was treated by HealthSearch and Ivan. She said she thought if this institution was using this kind of search firm that provided a more personalized approach, maybe that’s somewhere she should consider.”

“HealthSearch Partner’s impact on our college continues to change lives,” says Angela Falconetti, PhD, CFRE, President of Polk State College.

Dr. Wilson says diversity had been an important aspect of both searches in which she was involved with HealthSearch. “I was the first minority director of nursing at Kettering College and I will be the first named dean for Polk State – the AdventHealth Dean for Nursing.”

“Sometimes, when search firms contact candidates, the candidates are not ready to move,” says Dr. Wilson. “But Ivan approached me again and it was the right time for me and my career. Being softly tenacious and having the insight and comfort level to approach me again about the Dean position made a difference. If he hadn’t approached me, I might not have considered it. It’s a win for me and I hope the College thinks it’s a win for the institution and its students.”



Dr. Deleise Wilson, MA-ED, Ph.D., RN, CSSBG

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