Road to UT Austin Deanshp Started at Creighton

By Emily Rust

Early in her career, Alexa Kramer Stuifbergen, PhD, BSN’77, had a 500-mile round-trip commute to her classes at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Making the long drive from her home in a small New Mexico town to El Paso — where she worked on her master’s degree, while teaching undergraduate nursing students in New Mexico — exemplified Stuifbergen’s commitment and determination. She recognized it was part of a longer professional journey.

In 1982, she lessened her commute, but not her drive.

She moved to Austin, Texas, and started working on her PhD in nursing at the University of Texas at Austin.

Shortly after she began, Stuifbergen was joined by a familiar face. Barbara Braden, PhD, SJN’66, BSN’72 — one of Stuifbergen’s former Creighton professors — was also beginning the nursing doctoral program at UT Austin.

Braden, who has since retired, was a prominent administrator at Creighton and renowned faculty member and researcher in the College of Nursing.

Stuifbergen has followed a similar road.

Since 2010, Stuifbergen has served as the dean of the UT Austin School of Nursing, where she is the James R. Dougherty, Jr. Centennial Professor in Nursing and holds the Laura Lee Blanton Chair in Nursing. She is also internationally recognized for her research in multiple sclerosis, post-polio syndrome and fibromyalgia.

As an undergraduate at Creighton, Stuifbergen says she not only benefited from the University’s solid nursing education, but from the entire Jesuit curriculum, including courses in philosophy and theology.

“It helped my abilities to think logically and write well,” Stuifbergen says. “It’s central to the career path I’ve chosen.”

At UT Austin, Stuifbergen leads with the values of her Jesuit education in mind. She strives for her students to be leaders in practice, research and education.

“As a large public research university, we exist and are funded by the public to serve the greater good, for society,” Stuifbergen says.

The nursing program in the University of Texas system began at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. The Austin campus started its nursing program in the 1970s, with an emphasis on research, scholarship and leadership. Though its program is relatively new, UT Austin has one of the oldest PhD programs in nursing.

Stuifbergen’s personal mission meshes with the mission of her school, which focuses on the importance of education and on creating accessible health care for all. For 11 years, she served as director of the NIH-funded Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Research in Underserved Populations.

“Through our research we strive to identify what people need to maximize their quality of life,” Stuifbergen says.

That mission also speaks to Stuifbergen’s Jesuit education, one that her family marks as important — her husband Robert Stuifbergen, BSPha’77, is also a Creighton graduate and both of her daughters are graduates of Jesuit institutions.

“Jesuit ideals are very much a part of my character,” Stuifbergen says. “I am continually grateful for the great education I received at Creighton.”