

Chapter 4.25

Using an Information Literacy Program to Prepare Nursing Students to Practice in a Virtual Workplace

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ABSTRACT

The chapter presents healthcare examples of the current virtual working environment and introduces nursing skills necessary for evidence-based practice in a virtual workplace. The authors discuss how the Nursing Information Literacy Program was designed and implemented at Three Rivers Community College to assist nursing students in developing skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving, technological literacy, information literacy, and collaborative and cooperative learning. The authors hope that this example will serve as a model for creating other information literacy programs that prepare students for working in a virtual workplace.

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INTRODUCTION

The nurse of the 21st century will work in modified virtual environments, such as those that include tele-healthcare. They will access and contribute client data to large healthcare electronic networks and advocate for client access to information through a variety of platforms, thereby ensuring greater health literacy. Workforce training that includes virtual patient simulations will be more efficient. These are givens. What nursing programs now need to do is to develop and implement curricula that give nurses a foundation for functioning in a virtual workforce. In order to function in such a workforce, nurses need curricula that help them develop information literacy and familiarize them with forms of technology similar to those used in the virtual workplace. This chapter describes

just such a curriculum: the Nursing Information Literacy Program (NILP) developed at Three Rivers Community College (TRCC).

Three Rivers Community College, with a student population of approximately 4,000, is located in a rural area of southeastern Connecticut with limited access to educational and research institutions and resources. The associate degree in nursing program prepares students to enter the profession as registered nurses. The nursing students are age eighteen to sixty-two, the average being 29. Students with multiple life responsibilities, who might not have been in school for a number of years, have contact with information technology for the first time and need to be reoriented to academia.

The nursing program is a two-year program. Before being admitted into the program, students have the option of taking Nursing 108, an exploratory course in which twenty to twenty-five students are enrolled each semester. Eighty students are enrolled each semester in each of the core courses of the Nursing Department: Nursing 115 and Nursing 116, lower-level courses, and Nursing 226, Nursing 227, and Nursing 228, upper-level courses. Addressing the TRCC student population's specific characteristics and information needs, the NILP spans the core curriculum to help students develop information literacy that will be essential to their future work.

The growth of the virtual workplace necessitates programs like the Nursing Information Literacy Program. It also addresses the foundations of fostering information literacy within a curriculum and presents in detail the example of the NILP, detailing its three components: information literacy competencies, information literacy activities, and the Nursing Information Gateway Web site.

After completing this chapter, the reader will be able to: (1) define information literacy, (2) discuss critical elements in developing and implementing a plan like the one described below, and (3) reflect

on the potential to develop their own information literacy program in any discipline.

BACKGROUND

Numerous studies (Robertson, 2000; Stough, Eom, & Buckenmyer, 2000; Akkirman & Harris, 2005; Allan & Lewis, 2006; Quinlan & Hegarty, 2006), professionals, advisory councils, and teachers in 21st century education and workforce development call for changes in preparation of tomorrow's personnel. *The Partnership for 21st Century Skills* identified the following as abilities necessary to succeed as effective citizens, workers, and leaders in the 21st century: "information and communication skills, thinking and problem-solving ability, interpersonal and self-direction skills, global awareness, financial, economic and business knowledge, and civic literacy" (Downey, 2006). Rapid changes in a global community call for new paradigms at all levels. As Barnes notes, "education and training is a cradle to grave process" (2005, p. 7). This holds true for the profession of nursing.

Canton (2004) predicts that some of the top healthcare trends for the 21st century will include many characteristics of virtual environments that will make healthcare more safe and efficient. For instance, healthcare professionals will be part of one large information network. Barriers to healthcare access, like distance from hospitals, will be removed as tele-health and electronic platform information libraries become available, and new technology will help professionals diagnose and treat patients, even from a distance. Furthermore, virtual reality simulations will be used to train professionals.

Virtual Work Environments Are Growing

Visionaries of future healthcare foresee the development of virtual environments. Crandall

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