



General Education Evaluation in a Baccalaureate Nursing Program

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OVERVIEW

General education courses instill the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values that are basic for education in the professions (Sepinwall, 2002). Historically, general education courses have been a major defining characteristic of baccalaureate education in nursing. The goal of requiring general education courses is to produce nursing scholars who communicate well; display strong human values and ethical behavior; are capable of solving problems, thinking critically, and analyzing systems; are aware of the physiological, psychological, sociocultural, developmental, and spiritual needs of diverse populations; are lifelong learners; and are able to apply knowledge gained from a variety of research perspectives to problems and dilemmas. The goals of this project were to examine the general education philosophy related to the baccalaureate curriculum of a small, private college of nursing; to align the integration of general education knowledge, skills and attitudes/values with program objectives; and to derive methods to evaluate students' abilities to meet general education objectives.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

The focus of this program is on the evaluation of the general education portion of a professional nursing curriculum. General education was defined by the faculty as "a purposeful, comprehensive set of educational requirements that infuse the student with an attitude of inquiry, a set of problem solving skills, the values necessary to function successfully as a professional and a citizen, and the knowledge base necessary to study nursing and to develop into productive citizens and lifelong learners".

The duration of this program has been approximately one year, but it will be an ongoing project, re-evaluated yearly. General education evaluation is an ongoing process evolving from an accreditation self-study.

The discipline of this program is nursing education. However, general education evaluation can be applied to any professional discipline.

The context of this program is that of a small, private college offering the opportunity to earn a baccalaureate nursing degree. Though applied in this project to the discipline of nursing, general education evaluation should be part of the evaluation program of other disciplines purporting to educate well-rounded scholars.

The learners are upper-division students who enter the college with 58 credit hours from a community college in the physical and life sciences, the social and behavioral sciences, communication, mathematics, business and economics, and the humanities and fine arts. They take their remaining courses in the discipline of nursing.

Description of the case

While writing the self-study for initial candidacy of the Higher Learning Commission, North Central Association, the faculty and administration discovered that its general education philosophy and evaluation of the curriculum focused entirely on the incorporation of foundational content from each general education course into each nursing course, ignoring the important contributions of the skills, attitudes, and values gleaned from general education courses to the development of a thinking, developing graduate nurse scholar. They rewrote the general education philosophy for the college in the summer and fall of



2006, developed nine general education objectives for the curriculum, aligned the general education objectives with the program outcomes for the nursing curriculum, and developed a methodology for evaluation.

GENERAL EDUCATION EVALUATION

Two methods were developed to evaluate general education integration into the nursing curriculum: (1) questions on the end-of-semester student satisfaction survey and (2) faculty comparison of typical general education syllabi with the content, bibliographies, and teaching methods described in nursing syllabi and course instructions.

End-of-Semester survey questions addressed the importance of each general education objective to the student, as well as the student's satisfaction with how well those objectives were met. The importance items have been helpful in identifying whether the faculty's goals for general education are valued by students, a measure of the extent to which students are integrating the attitudes of scholarliness, ethical thinking, critical thinking, and so on. The satisfaction items were a reflection of the meaningfulness of the faculty's integration of general education into nursing courses. The students rated most of the importance and satisfaction with general education objectives as 3.6 or above on a scale of 1 to 4. The least important objective was related to the development of systems thinking, which indicated a need to investigate the integration of systems theory into the curriculum.

General education evaluation methods were identified by the faculty as part of a "General Education Day," when faculty members applied a matrix to identify the general education knowledge, skills, and attitudes/values applied in the curriculum in relationship to our mission, "to provide education, scholarship, and service in the discipline of nursing for a diverse student body."

Comparison of general education syllabi with nursing syllabi established a clear link between general education and nursing courses. This comparison was particularly interesting with respect to the definition of general education. While faculty members had previously identified the general education course content or knowledge related to their courses, they had not considered the importance of general education skills and attitudes/values. After rewriting the general education philosophy in relationship to the mission, faculty members were able to identify the content (facts and theories), skills (writing, problem-solving, critical thinking), and attitudes and values (love of learning, interest in discovery) in general education courses as they relate to the nursing curriculum. Faculty members then identified the assignments and grading methodologies that demonstrated their integration and measurement of general education objectives. With the success of the general education workshop, the faculty will revisit the course matrix yearly.

RATIONALE IN TERMS OF EDUCATIONAL IDEAS

The rationale for evaluating general education outcomes through this methodology came from the definition of general education at our college: "A purposeful, comprehensive set of educational requirements that infuse the student with an attitude of inquiry, a set of problem solving skills, the values necessary to function successfully as a professional and a citizen, and the knowledge base necessary to study nursing and to develop into productive citizens and lifelong learners." General education also supports our mission, "to provide education, scholarship, and service in the discipline of nursing for a diverse student body."

Furthermore, the evaluation of the extent to which students accomplish general education objectives is based on the notion that students in the professional disciplines need to respect the ideas and methodologies of other disciplines to be well-rounded, accountable practitioners (Arlton, Ernst, & Sunderwirth, 1990; Sepinwall, 2002). Our goals are to produce graduate nurses who participate in their own educations, are responsible citizens, and who are lifelong learners. Therefore, general education integration should be part of the overall program evaluation plan.



Evaluation

The result of our evaluation of general education processes are summarized in the table on the following page. The evaluation demonstrated that faculty members are using both qualitative and quantitative methods and formative and summative methods to evaluate general education integration. A yearly re-evaluation is planned to assure that general education integration is revisited periodically.

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General Education Objectives	Evaluation Methods (Applicable General Education Objectives in Parentheses)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop the foundation for education, scholarship, and service in the discipline of nursing. 2. Develop strong human values and ethical behavior. 3. Develop problem-solving skills for practice in a global society. 	<p>GENERAL EDUCATION KNOWLEDGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative exams, essay exams, quizzes (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) • Graded worksheets (all) • Preparation for clinical experiences on care plans (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9) • Teaching plans (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8) • Preparation for case studies (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9) • Preparation for clinical scenarios (1, 3, 6, 7, 9)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Communicate effectively using all modalities. 5. Discuss systems as political, historical, and social entities. 6. Apply critical thinking to a variety of real problems and situations. 7. Develop an awareness of the physiological, psychological, sociocultural, developmental, and spiritual needs of diverse populations. 8. Develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to pursue lifelong learning. 	<p>GENERAL EDUCATION SKILLS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class critical thinking and problem-solving exercises (1, 3, 5) • Graded ability to apply critical thinking and problem-solving during clinical experiences (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9) • In-class discussion/application of adult learning theory and other theories in class (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9) • Graded ability to apply ethical, physiological, psychological, sociocultural, developmental, and spiritual ideas & theories • during clinical experiences (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9) • Demonstrated ability to assess physiological, psychological, sociocultural, developmental, and spiritual realms (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9) • Math worksheet assignments (1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9) • Demonstration of library/information literacy skills when completing coursework (1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9) • Ability to calculate drug dosages accurately on paper



<p>9. Critique and apply knowledge gained from a variety of research perspectives to problems and dilemmas.</p>	<p>and during clinical experiences (1, 3, 6, 8,)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to apply scientific method, the research process, and the nursing process in paper assignments and during clinical experiences (all)• Ability to use common computer programs for class assignments and to chart accurately on hospital computer system (1,2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9)
	<p>General Education Attitudes/Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstration of placing value on privacy, confidentiality, respect of all persons, teamwork, honesty, open-mindedness (all)• Noted ability to apply active listening skills, nonjudgmental attitude, self-evaluation (all)

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