

**Proposal submitted to the Center for Teaching Excellence  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth  
January 2005**

**College of Nursing Interdepartmental Proposal to Enhance Measurement of  
Student Learning**

**Submitted by:**

**Jeanne Leffers, PhD, RN Graduate Program Director and Associate Professor  
in consultation with Adult and Child Health and Community Nursing Departments  
Kimberly Christopher, PhD, RN and Sonja Peterson, Ed.D, RN Chairs**

**Contact Information: Jeanne Leffers, PhD, RN**

**Background and rationale:**

Currently the College of Nursing (CON) is experiencing an increase in number of entering undergraduate students with a resultant need for more FTL and PTL positions. In addition, the CON is beginning a new undergraduate curriculum for the fall of 2005. This curriculum change will feature a major departure from our current program in that the courses that have a clinical practicum will now have a separate grade for that practicum experience. Almost all of the nursing courses offered to undergraduate nursing students are required and part of a very structured curriculum in order to meet the requirements for accreditation. The new curriculum includes approximately 15 required courses. The CON is in the process of preparing for an accreditation visit by the National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission in the fall of 2006. Consequently, both course content and assessment of student learning will be evaluated by the accreditors and the CON is deeply involved in outcomes assessment.

Additionally, assessment of student learning in the CON serves two purposes. The first and most important is to provide a fair, effective way to measure student mastery of the material in the course, to demonstrate that they meet the course objectives while encouraging inquiry and learning beyond the course requirements. The second purpose is to prepare students for success in testing formats that mirror the NCLEX examination that they must pass in order to become licensed as RNs.

This need to serve both purposes often causes faculty difficulty in several areas.

1. Faculty must be proficient in item writing in order to ensure for strong questions for the standardized exams that prepare students for the NCLEX.
2. Faculty also need to create opportunities for students to become critical thinkers, effective writers, able to communicate effectively orally, and encourage creativity, compassion and ethical thinking in each course setting and/or collectively as a program outcome.
3. Currently student evaluation of learning has a strong objective measure through the use of multiple choice format examinations. The move to grade a clinical

practicum experience that involves some subjectivity requires that the CON faculty achieve some consensus for this to be a fair assessment process.

In addition the CON currently has about 30 full time faculty and 15-20 part time faculty members any semester who must work collaboratively to provide the baccalaureate program. This number of faculty members can lead to inconsistency in teaching and learning strategies for undergraduates enrolled in the program.

**Goals:**

This proposal seeks to provide two opportunities for faculty in the CON to discuss and plan better teaching strategies for both quantitative examinations and other learning activities.

**Plan:**

We propose two workshops. The first will address the need to improve faculty ability to write effective questions that prepare students for the NCLEX examination. We plan to invite an expert in item writing to come to the college for this workshop and schedule this workshop in the spring of 2005.

The second one will feature a broad discussion of how various assignments currently in use in the undergraduate nursing program might be better balanced in order to maximize student learning. Additionally, this workshop will address the issue of how to fairly evaluate student performance in a clinical practicum setting. We plan to use an expert in nursing education to facilitate the workshop. The plan will be that this workshop will be held at the end of the semester when faculty members are re-evaluating their courses and planning syllabi of the fall of 2005. For example, we might discuss some of the following issues:

What types of writing should be a part of every course?

Do students need to have different criteria for their oral presentations as they progress through the program?

What is an appropriate amount of written work, reading and applied projects?

Which assignments help to foster caring, ethical and creativity in our graduates?

How do we balance the workload among the two to three nursing courses that the students will take each semester?

The two workshops will provide an opportunity for the faculty to assess current practices for evaluation of student learning and plan for more effective teaching, learning and evaluation in the classroom setting. In addition we hope that this series will engage faculty in this process and will lead to further examination of teaching and learning for

the graduate program in nursing in the CON. The money will be used to pay for the item writing expert and educational consultant.

All nursing faculty will be required to attend these workshops. At the completion of the workshops, faculty members will submit their proposed innovations to their courses for the coming semester. In addition, the outcome will be an article for publication in a professional nursing journal that addresses how teaching and learning in an undergraduate nursing curriculum can be improved through such workshops and coordinated planning.

It is expected that this publication will be of use to the wider university community for faculty to plan better coordinated teaching/learning strategies for other departmental majors.