

# AN EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT GERONTOLOGICAL NURSING EDUCATION AT THE BACCALAUREATE LEVEL

LISA ANN PLOWFIELD, PhD, RN,\* JEAN E. RAYMOND, MS, RN,†  
AND EVELYN R. HAYES, PhD, APRN, BC‡

Building gerontological content into a nursing curriculum will help meet the rising nursing care needs of older adults. An educational framework used to support innovative teaching and learning strategies is presented. Using this framework, strategies for developing and teaching a new undergraduate nursing elective include exposure to and interactions with older adults, national conference attendance, and use of film to investigate issues of aging. A topical outline of the course, assignments, and additional teaching strategies are presented. To date, 58 students have reported high satisfaction and increased interest in gerontological nursing. Twenty-three percent of graduating nurses enrolled in this course and received specialty content in the care of older adults. Faculty satisfaction remained high. The innovative teaching strategies enhanced faculty and student engagement in course content. The successful use of these strategies should be considered for implementation in both elective and required courses that focus on gerontological nursing. (Index words: Gerontology; Innovative teaching; Nursing education) *J Prof Nurs* 22:103–106, 2006. © 2006 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**I**N RESPONSE TO the John A. Hartford Foundation and American Association of Colleges of Nursing's call for *enhancing geriatric nursing education* proposals, we submitted an educational framework designed to create stronger gerontological education for nurse generalists. This article presents a model and strategy for developing an undergraduate gerontological nursing course.

## Background and Need

Pre-grant, the gerontological content of the University of Delaware's undergraduate nursing curriculum was integrated and often hidden within wellness, pathophysiology, medical-surgical, psychiatric, and community health courses. These courses offered content across the life span. Faculty expertise varied among those who taught these courses; therefore, provision of gerontological content and generation of interest in geriatric nursing remained limited. The curriculum did not

contain a free-standing course in gerontological nursing yet included theoretical and clinical nursing courses in women's health and pediatrics.

The University of Delaware also offered a master's gerontological clinical nurse specialist program; however, enrollment had been declining for several years. Challenging issues facing the gerontological graduate program included negative student attitudes/stereotypes about older adults, student awareness of low salaries in long-term care, the difficulties involved in advancing a long-term care nursing career without long-term care specialty education, and the lack of baccalaureate-prepared nurses working in long-term care. After careful analysis, we identified a need to develop strategies that would encourage students to consider a career in gerontological nursing.

The findings regarding lack of gerontological nursing content and lack of interest in this specialty were consistent with national evidence across health care professions (Cummins & Galambos, 2002; Ryan & McCauley, 2004/2005; Wesley, 2005). An undergraduate nursing elective course was developed using innovative teaching strategies and incentives to build generalist nursing knowledge that supported health care issues related to aging, to interest students in gerontological nursing, and to promote interest in graduate education in this specialty.

\*Professor and Director, School of Nursing, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.

†Instructor, School of Nursing, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.

‡Professor, School of Nursing, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Dr. Plowfield: Professor and Director, School of Nursing, University of Delaware, McDowell Hall, Newark, DE 19716. E-mail: plow@udel.edu  
8755-7223/\$ - see front matter

### Educational Framework

An educational framework was developed to attract more nursing students to the gerontological nursing courses (see Figure 1). This framework guided faculty to identify specific strategies to increase student exposure to positive aging and incorporate incentives for students to pursue gerontological nursing. It was anticipated that this exposure would lead to excitement and enthusiasm for gerontological nursing. The educational strategies included developing a nursing elective that requires students to attend national gerontological conferences, meet and exchange ideas with local leaders in gerontological health care, and participate when possible on the local level with task forces addressing the needs of older adults. Specific incentives were developed to increase enrollment and encourage more students to participate. Student incentives included creation of both an annual scholarship fund for those interested in working with older adults and an undergraduate certificate program earned after completion of specialty nursing courses addressing the health needs of older adults.

### Undergraduate Course Development

Because major gerontological nursing content areas are frequently overlooked in curricular designs, a three-credit elective undergraduate course was developed to include health care in a changing system; political perspectives related to aging; chronic health care needs of older adults; coping with loss, grief, dying, death, and pain at the end of life; and community programs and support for older adults and their families. (See Table 1 for full topical outline.) Faculty named the course “Life Begins at 40: The Legal, Ethical, and Societal Issues of Older Adults,” believing that such a title would intrigue students sufficiently to enroll in this nursing elective.

Faculty used several innovative strategies throughout the course to expose students to older adults and their health care needs. They organized an older adult panel in which the participants discussed their experiences with health care professionals. They sent their students to the movies (*Driving Miss Daisy*, *On Golden Pond*,

Table 1. Topical Outline

Week 1	Health Care in a Changing Environment Panel Discussion with Older Adults
Week 2	Coping with Loss and End-of-Life Issues Case Studies from <i>Toolkit for Nurturing Excellence at the End of Life CD-ROM</i>
Week 3	Political, Legal, and Ethical Issues (to include advance directives, autonomy, justice, guardianship, power of attorney, informed consent, etc.) Web Search and Report
Week 4	Caregiving and Mistreatment of Older Adults Assigned viewing: Film <i>Hanging Up</i>
Week 5	International Perspectives Regarding Health Care of Older Adults Student reports on specific culture or country's customs related to aging and caregiving practices related to older adults.
Week 6	Health Care Financing Web search: Medicare and Medicaid Eligibility and Services
Week 7	Interdisciplinary Collaboration
Week 8	Community Resources for Chronic Health Care Needs Small Group Report; Interviewing of Older Adults and Community Supports/Resources
Weeks 9–13	National Conference Attendance Maintain Conference Journal for Class Discussion
Week 14	Attitudes and Perceptions on Aging Student Presentations and Discussion Related to Conference and Course Work

*Grumpy Old Men*, *Trip to Bountiful*, *Pay It Forward*) and required them to develop scholarly reports regarding the media's portrayal of older adults. These papers supported in-class discussions. Students also were assigned to conduct internet web searches on Medicare and Medicaid eligibility and services. Student pairs investigated community resources for individuals living with chronic illness, interviewed these patients, and reviewed

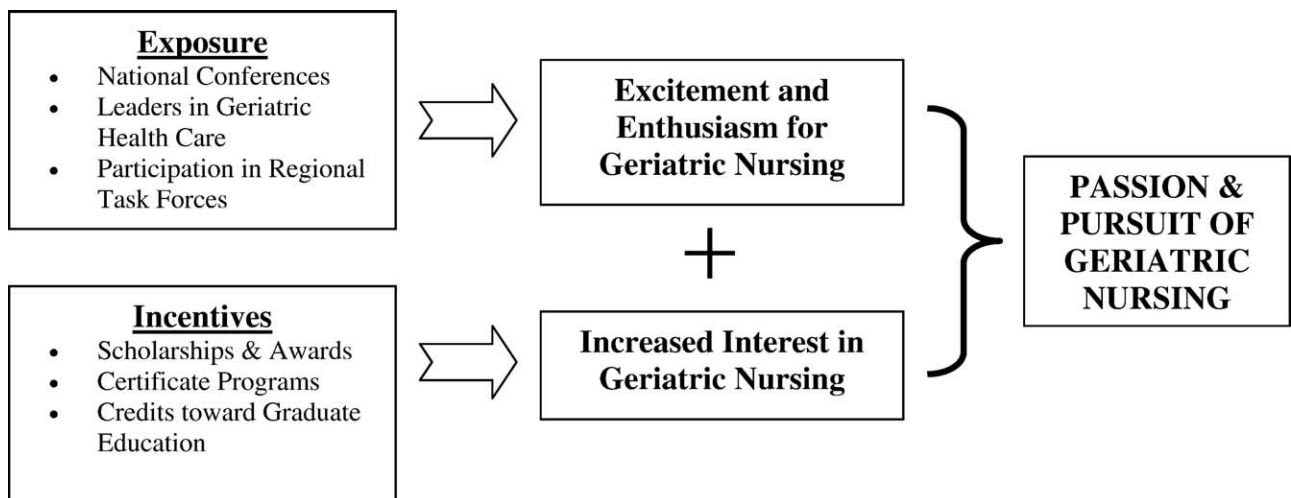


Figure 1. Framework for promoting gerontological nursing.

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