

Hybridization: The challenges an ADN program faces in entering the academic cyber world

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Abstract Nursing students have multiple responsibilities that complicate their ability to attend a traditional class format. In an effort to be sensitive to the needs of these students and utilize available technology, introduction of a hybrid associate degree nursing program option was developed. This article presents the process undertaken to change nursing classes to a hybrid format and the challenges faced by faculty and students. Following initial reluctance by students, this format has become a primary choice.

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1. Introduction

Prince George's Community College (PGCC) has converted its nursing courses to include a hybrid option to meet the changing educational needs of contemporary nursing students. Current nursing students are often seeking a second degree, or they are older with numerous family and work responsibilities. Traditional course presentation of once-or-twice weekly on-campus classes often is a challenge for students to attend. In an effort to be sensitive to the needs of these students and to utilize available technology, introduction of a hybrid associate degree nursing program option was introduced. Located in Maryland in the suburbs of Washington D.C., PGCC serves approximately 44,000 students providing 200 programs of study. Current enrollment in the nursing program is approximately 450 students, with a largely minority and multicultural student population.

2. Literature review

Utilization of on-line or distance learning-based education has seen significant growth with improvement of and availability of Internet service. In the 1998 Dearing Report on Higher Education, it was identified that, "Communications and Information Technology holds out much promise for improving the quality, flexibility and effectiveness of higher education." This report also identified that, within 10 years, some of all course presentation, organization, and communication would be conducted utilizing a computer and that information technology would increase access and effectiveness of lifelong learning (Dearing, 1997). In addition, Dearing (1997) identified the responsibility of higher education to exploit the benefits of information technology as fully as possible to remove barriers for those seeking education. Internet-based education allows for flexibility in student access, availability of courses to larger populations, and interactivity of all students allowing for a broader enrollment and increased student engagement (Ayala, 2009).

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Internet-based education allows for asynchronous and synchronous learning experiences for students. Asynchronous learning is presented through use of prerecorded lectures, Web-based resources, and on-line learning tools enabling students to participate during time frames convenient for them. Prerecorded lectures and threaded discussion forums permit students to have increased access to course content and time for reviewing and responding. Synchronous learning occurs when students and faculty participate in a learning activity, such as video conferencing or chat rooms, at the same time (Tao, Ramsey, & Watson, 2011). Internet-based education requires utilization of a course management system, such as Blackboard, Moodle, or Sakari (Tao et al., 2011).

Engagement theory (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998) served as the educational framework utilized in developing the hybrid courses. Engagement theory integrates technology for active collaborative learning, which assists engagement that would be difficult in other formats (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Components of engagement theory are relate–create–donate. The relate principle focuses on team efforts such as management, social skills, planning, and communication. Create promotes learning as a purposeful and creative activity that focuses activities on a specific topic. The final component, donate, indicates that contributions by each member of the team are important to achieve the final goal (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998).

Hybrid or blended learning is emerging as a new format in higher education, bringing both face-to-face and on-line learning together to facilitate student learning (Ayala, 2009). In hybrid or blended learning, faculty are able to incorporate pedagogical learning strategies best suited for each format and encompassing multiple learning styles into one course. Blending of face-to-face and on-line learning in a successful manner has the potential to provide students an environment favorable to learning (Vaughan, 2007). The hybrid format allows faculty to utilize a wide variety of teaching methods and techniques to foster student interaction and exchange of ideas. On-line portions of a course may include tutorials, case studies, simulations, self-testing (Vaughan, 2007), and discussion boards. Frequency of face-to-face meeting in hybrid education is determined by faculty or college requirements while meeting the course learning outcomes.

Students select hybrid courses for a variety of reasons. Flexibility of time and location for course activities, decreased commuting time, and avoidance of on-campus parking issues are key reasons for students to select hybrid courses. This flexibility also poses challenges for students who are unfamiliar with sophisticated technologies, have poor time management and priority setting skills, are unfamiliar with accepting responsibility for personal learning, and have the perception that with fewer classes there is less work (Vaughan, 2007).

Faculty members teaching in hybrid courses also face benefits and challenges. Benefits of hybrid education include getting to know students better, increased student interactions,

flexibility in teaching schedule, and having the opportunities to continually improve course format (Vaughan, 2007). Faculty challenges include the increased time required for course development and planning to incorporate on-line activities, insufficient support for course redesign, learning and keeping current with technology, and assisting students with technology issues (Vaughan, 2007).

Teaching in a hybrid or blended and on-line course utilizes advanced technology and Internet-based educational resources. Inappropriate use of Internet resources within an academic setting may result in academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty can include such activities as plagiarism, having someone else complete examinations or assignments, or group completion of an individual project. Academic dishonesty in general has increased because the use and development of technology has increased (Harper, 2006).

3. Process

Changes were made in traditional face-to-face courses to convert them to the hybrid format. Hybrid education is the term currently used by PGCC to represent courses presented in a combination of face-to-face and on-line format. Face-to-face meeting frequency varies by course design campus wide. Hybrid courses meet face-to-face on varying schedules based upon the course, with additional course content being presented on-line. College administration approved a grant proposal submission for nursing program conversion to hybrid education, and they continue to be supportive of the process and the faculty.

Grant funding was sought and obtained to support conversion of core nursing courses to the hybrid format. Funding was pursued through the Maryland Higher Education Commission for the Nurse Support Program II (NSP II), specifically Phase 4. The goal of NSP II is to increase the number of bedside-registered nurses (RNs) in Maryland with Phase 4 focusing on the education of nurses. The grant proposal included the costs related to hiring a full-time instructional developer/designer to assist faculty with developing hybrid courses. Funding was awarded, and development of hybrid nursing courses was initiated after an instructional developer/designer was hired.

In the nursing program, face-to-face classes in the hybrid courses occur every other week, and all examinations are given in a face-to-face class in a paper-and-pencil format. In addition to face-to-face classes, students are also required to attend on-campus nursing skills laboratory and weekly clinical hours as assigned. Several courses combined 2 weeks of skills laboratory hours and met on the same day as the face-to-face class. This provided additional flexibility for students.

After receiving the grant funding, the next step was to identify the order of course conversion to hybrid format. It was decided that two (2) of the final semester courses would

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