

# EDUCATE, EXCITE, ENGAGE



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## Haitian nursing education: eLearning experiences

Using instructional technology has brought benefits to many learning environments around the world. As the infrastructure of Haiti continues to develop and grow, these benefits can be realized in nursing education. Through the use of Web conferencing software, eBooks, and handheld computers, nursing care in Haiti can help meet some of the staggering health challenges faced by the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

The importance of nursing in Haiti cannot be understated. In a country where 90% live below poverty level and 50% of the population is illiterate, access to health care is severely lacking in part due to the severe shortage of nurses. For example half of all women and children currently are anemic (World Food Programme, nd.).

### 1. Background

The Faculté des Sciences Infirmières de Léogane (FSIL) nursing school is the first indigenous baccalaureate and master's family nurse practitioner (FNP) program in Haiti. Adjacent to the southern coast of the Golfe de la Gonave, in the city of Léogane, the nursing school can be located on most of the Global Positioning System maps on-line. The school is 30km west of the Port au Prince airport, and the trip usually takes 2 hours. Currently, there are 115 undergraduate students, 19 graduate students, 9 full-time Haitian nursing faculty, and 7 American and Haitian adjunct faculty that visit on a regular basis (mostly from the United States). The school was founded in 2004 and has graduated 82 students from the undergraduate program (Haiti Nursing, nd.). The nursing school is governed by the Episcopal University of Haiti.

The undergraduate program is a residential 4-year curriculum, whereas the graduate program is hybrid with a 3-year plan of study. A majority of students (95%) are on full scholarship and subsequently are required to work in Haiti for 2 years after graduation. Because Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere, going to college is a serious strain for students and their families. While in college, these nursing students are unable to work to help provide food, shelter, and other essentials for themselves and, just as importantly, for their families. A majority of the students have nutritional deficits when arriving to the school; hence, all students are allowed to take part in the school meal plan regardless of their ability to pay.

### 2. Technology availability

Currently, through assistance from multiple donors, the nursing school has access to stable high-speed Internet and a computer laboratory with 17 laptops. Wifi is available throughout the main building of the campus when electricity is available. One of the nursing students is hired to help maintain the computers and provide faculty support. This nursing student receives oversight by one of the nursing faculty and the dean.

All the faculty are issued a laptop. Approximately 10% of nursing students own a laptop. Handheld tablets and smartphones are owned and used by 15% of the students, faculty, and staff. These are personal devices and are not supported by the school.

Part of moving the school forward is effectively using technology to meet the educational needs of the learners and

the health care needs of the community. Some of the current technologies include eBooks, handheld devices, asynchronous discussions (ADs), and live Web conferencing. For each instructional technology, a review of the current need, current use, lessons learned, and future plans will be reviewed.

### 3. eBooks

#### 3.1. Current need

The need for evidence-based practice cannot be understated in Haiti. Because nurses account for a majority of the health care available, these professionals need to be able to access updated information as part of their studies and their practice. Often, nurses and students find themselves in isolated situations where no other health care providers are available, leaving them to individually identify best practices for the client being served.

Another concern is accessing print-based books in Haiti. Current editions of print media are difficult to find. Shipping print media to Haiti is prohibitively expensive for most of the nurses and organizations, including the FSIL nursing school. These issues make access to eBooks vital.

#### 3.2. Current use

The FSIL Nursing School is using eBooks in certain areas. The current concern is limited access to computers loaded with the eBooks and limited access to French eBooks. Less than 10% of the nursing students have their own laptop or tablet that is compatible with eBooks. The eBooks available are on computers in the laboratory, which is also used as a classroom. This limits access because the laboratory is used all day every day for class (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1** Marah Armand, BSN, Faculty, assisting nursing students with a fundamentals of nursing eBook.

The current eBooks (textbooks) are also currently in English. All FSIL nursing students take English throughout the 4-year program. However, the English in the textbooks is a struggle for a majority of the students and some faculty. There currently are no French or Creole digital textbooks being used. Print-based French nursing textbooks are available to the students in the library; however, most are outdated. The 115 undergraduate students and 9 nursing faculty share 18 sets of these textbooks.

#### 3.3. Lessons learned

When students access the eBooks on the computers, many will use a free on-line service to translate and study small passages. Because of the limited access and the language barrier, most of the students and faculty treat these textbooks as reference materials as opposed to in-depth study tools.

#### 3.4. Future plans

Current plans include fundraising for more computers and tablets for all students to easily access eBooks in French. There also is an initiative to have more French print-based material readily available.

## 4. Handheld tablets and smartphones

#### 4.1. Current need

Accessing the evidence base at the point of care is a vital need in Haiti. As was noted before, most of the students and nurses find themselves in isolated situations needing to make important health care decisions. Mobile technology will help to address this need (Bristol & Zerwekh, 2011; Hebda & Czar, 2012). These devices can have resources downloaded to address concerns such as practice guidelines, pharmacotherapeutics, skills, and even patient education.

Handhelds used in this environment need to have all resources downloaded to the device so that Internet is not required at the point of care. Although 3G mobile Internet is becoming more universal in Haiti, there are many remote regions with no Internet access. These devices also need adequate battery life because access to electricity is not consistently available. Having an additional battery is also needed.

Devices with voice, texting, and cameras can also be useful (e.g., basic mobile/cellular phones). Mobile phones can be used to call or text for consultation and sending a picture. These actions only require basic cellular service to include Short Message Service or Multimedia Messaging Service texting capability. This service is almost universally available in Haiti. It should be noted that photographs can be taken and saved to the devices and transmitted from a location with adequate service and connectivity. No 3G or

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