



## Design and impact of an orientation for an interprofessional education program



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### ABSTRACT

Students who participate in the Vanderbilt Program for Interprofessional Learning are required to attend Immersion, our program of orientation for teams of interprofessional students. Medical, advanced practice nursing, pharmacy, and social work students coming from different institutions are required to complete the 4 day “Immersion” before beginning in their respective academic programs, as a way to decrease the development of professional bias. Many of the students are also new to the Nashville area, and the Immersion program introduces the students to the community and the populations they will be serving in professional school and beyond. Immersion includes a range of activities, including community tours, poverty simulations, creation of life maps, personality identification, team building, patient storytelling, and introduction to professional life. Each day has a specific theme: Self, Community, Professions and the Patient. Student evaluations for Immersion are overwhelmingly positive. The focus of this paper is to describe the curricular design of the Immersion week, report student feedback, and discuss lessons learned that might provide guidance for other educational programs.

### 1. Format

The Vanderbilt Program in Interprofessional Learning (VPIL)<sup>1</sup> summer Immersion is a 4-day intensive orientation experience with the goal of preparing novice interprofessional students to work and learn together over a two-year period. Each day uses a variety of formats to deliver content, including experiential learning activities (e.g. community tours, poverty simulation), team building activities, speaker panels, small group facilitated discussion, and didactic lectures. Immersion activities are designed to take place before students start their respective academic programs.

### 2. Target audience

The target audience are students entering the beginning of their training programs. The orientation could be used for a wide variety of professionals. In VPIL, we include first year medical, advanced practice nursing, pharmacy, and first or second year Masters of Social Work students. Medical, nursing and pharmacy students all apply during the matriculation process at their respective schools, whereas social work students have often completed their first year of study.

### 3. Objectives

The primary purpose of Immersion is to prepare a novice group of health professional students for working and learning together over the course of two-years. There are three sub-objectives for Immersion. First, students are introduced to the competencies associated with interprofessional learning<sup>2</sup> so they can understand the professional responsibilities for interprofessional collaboration. Second, students will build relationships with their interprofessional cohort, the healthcare community and the community-at-large. Third, students will familiarize themselves with the wide range of social and psychological determinants of health factors that influence the healthcare system as well as individuals.<sup>3</sup> Each orientation day has assigned learning objectives based on the overarching theme: Introduction to IPE and to The Self,<sup>4</sup> Introduction to the Community, Introduction to the Professions and Teams, and Introduction to the Patient Experience (See Table 1).

### 4. Activity description

The Vanderbilt Program in Interprofessional Learning (VPIL)<sup>5</sup> is a longitudinal program where teams of four students work and learn together in clinical environments, one afternoon a week over two years. Before entering the program, students are required to attend a

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**Table 1**  
Daily learning activities for VPIL immersion experience.

Day 1: Introduction to IPE and the Self	(1) describe IPE and practice (2) describe the history and evolution of VPIL (3) examine how personality and temperament characteristics influence teamwork (4) recognize how essential professionalism is in the health care environment
Day 2: Introduction to the Community	(1) examining the environmental and social factors that have a profound impact on health (2) discover the diversity of neighborhoods in this community (3) discern the barriers to good nutrition
Day 3: Introduction to the Professions	(1) recognize the importance of professionalism in health care (2) describe the scopes of practice of each profession (3) discuss the impact of collaborative practice on the health care system and the patient experience (4) promote team building
Day 4: Introduction to the Patient Experience and Personal Wellness	(1) identify methods for positively engaging with patients and their families (2) identify barriers in obtaining complex medical care from a patient perspective (3) examine how an interprofessional model of care supports patients and their families (4) discuss strategies of self-care

weeklong summer orientation program, called Immersion. Immersion is strategically scheduled before most of the students start in their respective academic programs in hopes that students can develop a collaborative practice identity as health professionals before entering their chosen profession “silos” and be free from academic distractions.<sup>7</sup> The Immersion curriculum is designed to actively engage the interprofessional students in learning together before they knew much about their own professions, so the content focuses on cultivating respect for the broader issues facing individual and community health. Additionally, many of our students are in Nashville for the first time. Therefore, we also wanted to provide a method for them to get to know the needs of the community.

The curriculum design is rooted in Kolb's theory of experiential education<sup>6</sup> where “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (p.38). In addition to the clinical experience, every 3–5 weeks the students attend a seminar. During the seminar, students learn health coaching, medication reconciliation and quality improvement skills. In addition, students are assigned projects such as a home visit and patient advocacy to complete during their clinic time.

#### 4.1. Pre-work required before immersion

Prior to coming to Immersion, students receive readings that correspond to each day's theme, as well as a survey to learn more about them (including a personality inventory) and submit questions they have about each profession.

##### 4.1.1. Day one: introduction to IPE and the self

The first half of the day focuses on the rationale of the program and the field of Interprofessional Practice and Education (IPE). Academic leaders from partnership institutions welcome the students to VPIL and emphasize the commitment of each academic institution to IPE and collaborative practice. Afterward, the students learn about the history of IPE and the Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice.<sup>2,8</sup>

The second half of the day focuses on students understanding themselves. Students examine how personality and temperament characteristics impact teamwork through highly interactive scenarios that highlight examples of how people handle stress in different ways.<sup>9</sup> Students also participate in a facilitated discussion about the importance of personal reflection in learning to provide compassionate care and participate in a writing exercise.

The day concludes with a dinner where the students construct a “life map” as an icebreaker activity. Using drawing materials, the students develop a roadmap of their lives, highlighting important events that inspired, affected or supported them in their journey to their chosen discipline. This exercise helps them to reflect on their personal journey thus far and introduces them to the different journeys of others.

##### 4.1.2. Day two: introduction to the community

The community day is spent completely out of the classroom. Students start their day at a community agency (e.g. public health department or local food bank) where a social worker facilitates discussion about a wide range of social factors affecting health in each of the city's primary neighborhoods. Students learn about local history and culture, current strengths and opportunities for growth in the larger community. In preparation for the day the students complete brief poverty simulation activities such as the self-quiz “Do you live in a bubble?”<sup>10</sup> or the online game “Spent”<sup>11</sup> to aid the student in reflecting on ways their background and life experiences impact their ability to make life decisions.

During the afternoon, students take small group bus tours of a local neighborhood with agency representatives and community organizers. The neighborhoods chosen are designated underserved communities and considered food deserts, lacking of healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat milk.<sup>12</sup> While in the neighborhood, each student group completes a windshield survey. The windshield survey involves observing the variety of housing options, open spaces, physical boundaries of the community, faith communities represented and retailers available.<sup>13</sup>

While in the community, each student group is given a budget for shopping in a local market with the goal of preparing a meal for the entire student and faculty cohort (40–50 individuals). The menu must include an entrée, two side items that must include one fresh vegetable and one fresh fruit, a dessert and beverage and the budget is based on national poverty guidelines.<sup>14</sup>

The groups return to the designated community agency equipped with a professional kitchen and prepare their meal for the group. During the dinner, faculty facilitate discussion and reinforce the social determinants of health<sup>3</sup> they learned about at the beginning of the day.

##### 4.1.3. Day 3: introduction to the professions

The morning session consists of a panel discussion with practicing clinicians and students representing the four professions (physicians, advanced practice nursing, pharmacy and social work). Program leaders strive to select panel members who are all current or former members of the program. Using the questions submitted prior to Immersion, a facilitator asks panel members to discuss scope of practice and current, discipline-specific challenges within healthcare.

The second part of the day focuses on team dynamics, conflict management and communication. Students learn two assignments this day: 1) who will be on their team, and 2) what clinic the newly formed team are assigned to for the next two years. This is purposely delayed until this day in order to encourage the larger cohort to coalesce, regardless of clinic or profession. The new clinic team participates in team building activity to promote communication and strategize conflict management. Using specific instructions, each clinic team builds a small Lego® project and record the time it takes them to complete the

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