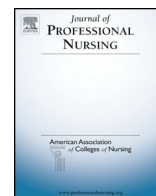




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# Implementing healthy work environment standards in an academic workplace: An update

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## ABSTRACT

In 2005 the American Association of Critical Care Nurses defined six Healthy Work Environment (HWE) standards for the clinical setting (AACN, 2005), which were reaffirmed and expanded in 2016 (ANCC, 2016). These clinical standards were adapted for use in the academic setting by Fontaine, Koh, and Carroll in 2012. The intention of this article is threefold: to present a revised version of the academic workplace standards which are appropriate for all School of Nursing (SON) employees, staff as well as faculty; to propose the addition of a seventh standard, self-care, which provides the foundation for all standards; and to describe the continuing implementation of these seven standards at the University of Virginia School of Nursing (UVA SON).

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(See Table 1.)

In 2005 the American Association of Critical Care Nurses defined six Healthy Work Environment (HWE) standards for the clinical setting (AACN, 2005), which were reaffirmed and expanded in 2016 (ANCC, 2016). These clinical standards were adapted for use in the academic setting by Fontaine, Koh, and Carroll in 2012. The intention of this article is threefold: to present a revised version of the academic workplace standards which are appropriate for all School of Nursing (SON) employees, staff as well as faculty; to propose the addition of a seventh standard, self-care, which provides the foundation for all standards; and to describe the continuing implementation of these seven standards at the University of Virginia School of Nursing (UVA SON).

To implement HWE standards in an academic setting requires the support of both faculty and staff. Inviting staff and faculty to participate as equal partners in all HWE efforts is essential because both are essential to the daily functioning and success of the school. A small group of faculty and staff volunteered to begin the step-wise process of intentional assessment and to make recommendations to enrich the teaching and learning environment. This HWE team embraced the challenge of becoming a healthy academic community that promotes the values of self-care, civility, respect and appreciation identified in the HWE Standards. Although the revised workplace standards focus on faculty and

staff, because the work of an academic institution is student preparation, we also include student exemplars.

## Academic standard I: communication. Faculty and staff are as proficient in communication skills as they are in their respective academic responsibilities

In 2009 all SON stakeholders attended a strategic planning summit which served as the foundation for the mission, vision, and expected behaviors for the SON community (Harmon, Fontaine, Plews-Ogan, & Williams, 2012). Expected behaviors were defined by a staff workgroup and endorsed by all faculty and staff, yet a 2011–2012 HWE school survey indicated there was room for improvement. Based on these survey results the HWE team used a variety of forums, including role play and panel discussions, to provide education and engage members during all-school meetings and retreats. Participation was encouraged but not mandatory. A 2015 resurvey indicated some improvement; however, achieving skilled communication among all members of the SON academic community is a long-term process which requires ongoing dialogue to maintain awareness of behavioral expectations. Currently, applicants for positions within the SON learn about and discuss HWE expectations with team members during the interview and orientation processes. Recent applicants have cited the focus on HWE as one of the reasons to join UVA SON.

Self-assessment of personal contribution to the HWE is expected and was incorporated into the annual faculty evaluation process in 2013, appearing alongside scholarship, teaching, and service. SON staff participate in a standardized university-wide evaluation process; however, in 2017, through the efforts of the HWE, a new SON-specific performance

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**Table 1**  
Healthy work environment standards for the academic workplace.

AACN established HWE standard	AACN clinical standards	Academic workplace standards
#1 Skilled communication	Nurses must be as proficient in communication skills as they are in clinical skills.	Faculty and staff are as proficient in using and role modeling communication skills as they are in their respective academic duties and skills.
#2 True collaboration	Nurses must be relentless in pursuing and fostering true collaboration.	Faculty and staff are relentless in pursuing, fostering, and role modeling collaboration within and beyond the university.
#3 Effective decision-making	Nurses must be valued and committed partners in making policy, directing and evaluating clinical care, and leading organizational operations.	Faculty and staff are valued and committed partners in implementing shared governance within the school and university setting.
#4 Appropriate staffing	Staffing must ensure the effective match between patient needs and nurse competencies.	Faculty and staff ensure the effective match between the mission of the school and designated employee competencies.
#5 Meaningful recognition	Nurses must be recognized and must recognize others for the value each brings to the work of the organization.	Faculty and staff are recognized and recognize others for the value each brings to the work of the organization.
#6 Authentic leadership	Nurse leaders must fully embrace the imperative of a Healthy Work Environment, authentically live it, and engage others in its achievement.	Faculty and staff leaders fully embrace the imperative of a healthy work environment, authentically live it, and engage others in its achievement.
Proposed standard #7 self-care	Nurses and nurse leaders must embrace self-care as foundational to the creation of a healthy work environment where patients and clinical partners can thrive.	Faculty and staff engage and are supported in developing self-care as foundational to the creation of a healthy work and learning environment in which all members of the academic community can thrive.

Adapted from Fontaine et al. (2012) and American Association of Critical Care Nurses: *American Association of Critical-Care Nursing Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments: A Journey to Excellence*, 2nd Ed. 2016.

goal was added: “*Healthy Work Environment: demonstrate respect and appreciation for all individuals at all levels; communicate respectfully, openly, honestly and constructively; actively cultivate a work/life balance.*” This was the result of a grass-roots effort; a staff member suggested to the Associate Dean of Administration that staff, like faculty, could benefit from performance goals in this area. The Administrative Dean championed the idea; he worked with the SON Human Resources Director to draft the language, sought input from stakeholders, received approval from the Dean, and incorporated it into institutional performance measures. In addition to increasing staff awareness of HWE, this new goal has helped facilitate manager/staff discussion about communication and respect in our workplace.

For student members of the community, professional socialization and introduction to skilled communication is woven throughout the curriculum. For example, third year nursing students work with medical students in simulated interprofessional sessions to enhance communication skills. Nursing case studies require small teams of undergraduate students to work together to recognize, research, and plan interventions to address bullying and workplace violence (Harmon & Hills, 2015). Interdisciplinary graduate student teams role-play crucial conversations and report developing empathy for the roles of other team members (Brashers, Peterson, Tullmann, & Schmitt, 2012). Collaborative learning experiences are crucial for achieving short and long term personal and professional satisfaction, to better prepare nurses for work in healthcare

teams, and to shift the “culture of incivility and bullying in colleges of nursing to one of collaboration and tolerance for differences” (Morton, 2015, p. 165).

### **Academic standard II: true collaboration. Nursing faculty and staff are relentless in pursuing and fostering collaboration within and beyond the university**

The process of collaboration occurs over time and with the commitment of all members of the organization. One of the pioneering collaborations is the integration of interprofessional education (IPE). This has been a long-standing and intentional strategy led by a physician Professor of Nursing faculty member and initiated with undergraduate nursing and medical students (Owen, Brashers, Peterson, Blackhall, & Erickson, 2012; Rider & Brashers, 2006). This work led to the creation of a nationally recognized Center for Academic and Strategic Partnerships for Interprofessional Research and Education (ASPIRE). The development of this center addresses two critical gaps; first, between the health professionals' training and team-based care, and second, between education and practice. The ASPIRE Center supports the development, implementation, and evaluation of educational and clinical programs that train students, faculty, and clinicians to deliver safe team-based care. This collaboration across professional schools addresses the Institute of Medicine (IOM) 2010 goals for safe care.

In the spirit of collaboration, the Inclusion, Diversity and Excellence Achievement initiative (IDEA) is led by an Associate Dean with experience in developing best practices to promote an engaged and respectful community (Clark et al., 2011). This same collaborative approach is used in developing Global Health education, transitioning our global health experiences to a model of sustained partnership with host universities and communities. These partnerships are built around a core of faculty research and student educational experiences, and they are centered on locally determined needs and priorities (Kools, Chimwaza, & Macha, 2015).

Collaborations across the University with other professional schools interested in partnering with health care and nursing are increasing. Examples include Global Health, graduate leadership education with the business schools, and joint student and faculty research teams in engineering. The percentage of non-nurse faculty who collaborate in teaching and research at the SON continues to expand and now includes faculty appointments shared with the professional disciplines of law, ethics, medicine, architecture, engineering, business, and religious studies.

With staff leadership, staff and faculty members come together to participate in collaborative community activities such as the United Way National Day of Caring. While academic, research, and clinical collaborations are critical, the faculty and staff recognize the value of building informal relationships intentionally through social and service opportunities, such as weekly wellness walks, Family Weekend events, and Commencement activities.

### **Academic standard III: effective decision making. Nursing faculty and staff are valued and committed partners in implementing shared governance within the school and university setting**

The school actively seeks employee feedback through SON and Health System surveys. Through this process, improvements and ongoing challenges are identified and shared with all. The HWE Team uses this formal feedback to analyze employee satisfaction and to plan activities to address identified need. Administrative leaders address areas of concern in open forums, seek recommendations for solutions, and follow up in individual and group meetings. The goal is to empower faculty and staff to become “valued and committed partners in making policy, and leading and evaluating organizational initiatives” (Morton, 2015, p.166). All voices are welcomed; all are invited to share suggestions or concerns on their own or another's behalf.

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