

Soft Skills in STEM: A Course Redesign Project

Jennifer Edwards, DNR, RN, WHNP, CNE, Fayetteville State University

Topic: AACN Essentials

Category: Quality Improvement/Evidence-Based Practice Project

Abstract

Background/Introduction

Nursing is an art and a science; an intersection of technical skill and communicative art. Nursing includes a foundation in hard sciences. Soft skills are cognitive and social capabilities that complement the technical skills of nursing. Highly developed soft skills are associated with a higher quality of nursing care. Benefits of soft skills include improved teamwork, communication, networking, problem-solving, critical thinking, professionalism, confidence, and career progression.

Purpose

The project goal was to enhance understanding and application of soft skills in a STEM discipline. Development of soft skills in STEM supports the AACN Essentials concepts of communication, compassionate care, and evidence-based practice. The project aimed to address the AACN Essentials Domain 2 Person Centered Care (2.2g), and Domain 6 Interprofessional Partnerships (6.1g).

Methods or Processes/Procedures

A course was redesigned to infuse soft skills required for the role in public health and epidemiology. Examples of learning activities included interactive case studies, written and oral press releases, scholarly writing, and discussion forums. Formative and summative evaluations were completed using student satisfaction scoring and course evaluation data.

Results

Evaluation supported the infusion of soft skills in a STEM-related course. Assignment rubrics showed 100% achievement of desired outcomes related to the incorporation of soft skills. Course evaluation data revealed averages higher than the departmental average, with no reports of concern about the project. Students actively participated in the weekly discussion forums addressing the topic of a related soft skill. A review of this initiative revealed a positive learning experience.

Limitations

Ideally, this would be implemented in an undergraduate nursing course with a clinical component to enhance application of these concepts in a hands-on setting.

Conclusions/Implications for Practice

Teaching soft skills in clinical simulations may support an enhanced, holistic approach to nursing care. Complementing this approach with a mixed methods study to better understand the impacts would benefit nursing science as well.

Biography

Dr. Jennifer Johnson Edwards is the Interim Associate Dean in the School of Nursing at Fayetteville State University. Dr. Edwards holds a DNP from the University of Alabama, a WHNP certificate from UNC Chapel Hill, an MSN from ECU and a BSN from Barton College. Dr. Edwards' research interests include refugee health issues across the lifespan, the study of attitudes/perceptions towards refugees as well as the scholarship of teaching and learning. She is also a member of the 2017-2018 cohort of American Association of Colleges of Nursing's Leadership for Academic Nursing Fellowship program.

Contact Information

Jennifer Edwards, DNP, RN, WHNP, CNE
Interim Associate Dean, Assistant Dean, Associate Professor
Fayetteville State University
jjohnson4@uncfsu.edu
(910) 672-2228
