

## **Nursing Plugged In: Evaluating a Web-based Graduate Nursing Program to Inform Web-Based Instructional Programs in Ohio and Across the United States**

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The College of Nursing at The Ohio State University offers a Master of Science degree in Nursing with several specializations. The curriculum for all of the specializations includes five core courses: Scientific Thought in Nursing (N 601), Theoretical Foundations for Advanced Practice Roles in Nursing (N 602), Nursing within the American Health Care System (N 603), Utilization of Research in Nursing Practice (N 702), and Reimbursement and Cost Methods for Advanced Practice Nurses (N 707).

As of Autumn Quarter, 2001, all of these courses plus four others—Pathophysiology of Altered Health States (N 703), Pharmacology for Advanced Nursing Practice (N 706), Advanced Health Assessment (N 705), and Theories, Concepts, & Issues in Advanced Family Nursing (N 721)—were offered in a web-based format for a wholly online family nurse practitioner master's degree. Classes are also taught in a traditional face-to-face format. The web-based format was conceptualized and implemented to afford convenience and accessibility, since the target student population comprises practicing registered nurses and other working health professionals.

The College of Nursing had invested significant resources—infrastructure, personnel, faculty development, and marketing—into making these courses available to a widely distributed group of learners, catering to the special needs of non-traditional students. The question now facing the college is this: Are the courses doing what they are supposed to be doing?

To answer this question, several research questions were posed regarding the quality of the learning that occurs in these courses. The results of this study were intended not only to answer the operational question, but also to inform OSU, and other web-based graduate programs in Ohio and across the country so decision-makers might make curricular, faculty development, and student services decisions before investing in web-based program development or expanding current levels of investment.

Only one component of the study was completed successfully, that of the materials evaluation and only for four courses. The success of this study was extremely limited for several reasons including difficulty in recruiting student participants, technical issues with the online data collection tool (Flashlight) in the OSU environment, health issues of the members of the project team, and extemporaneous confounding events.

The outcome of the materials evaluation showed that the majority of the matter that appeared online was at either the remembering or processing levels with nearly two-thirds at the remembering level. Potential implications are that successful online learning experiences occur when the majority of the materials are at the lower cognitive levels of remembering and processing, while sprinkled with some creating and evaluating. A successful online program may be characterized by 90% of the materials at the lower end of the spectrum of cognitive level.