

Sigma's 30th International Nursing Research Congress

Intercultural Health Certificate Designed to Increase Linguistic and Cultural Competence in Undergraduate Health Field Majors

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Over the past three decades there have been changes in the trends of immigrant settlement in the United States due to economic transformation. Instead of settling in the traditional sites of New York, Florida and California, newcomers have opted for non-traditional destinations such as the Midwestern states. These trends have impacted the readiness of communities to provide equitable healthcare services in terms of language and cultural needs.

As the demand for dual-language and culturally competent healthcare providers grows locally, nationally and worldwide, so grows the need to provide a curriculum that provides an advanced knowledge of other languages and cultures. Unfortunately there is an inadequate number of healthcare workers that can provide this level of knowledge proportionate to the composition of the population served. For example, statistics show that very few nurses are from the culture of those they serve, pointing to a need for educating nurses about cultural competency so that they might advocate for diverse populations' health care needs. Dual-language healthcare providers must engage in an exacting practice that demands lexical precision, detailed knowledge of contexts or terminologies, and a nuanced sense of the purpose of communication and cultural knowledge on patient information and safety. Research has shown that when patients and providers speak the same language, patients are more likely to report positive physical and mental health outcomes, and that patients' inability to communicate in their native language can lead to delays in healthcare, non-adherence, missed appointments and medical errors.

In response to this growing demand, the departments of nursing, public health and world languages at a Midwestern university collaborated to formulate an undergraduate certificate that helps prepare students to meet healthcare needs of a linguistically and culturally diverse population. Part of the planning process included surveys of community healthcare stakeholders and potential students, review of similar and related programs, review of workforce data and job postings for bilingual healthcare workers.

The intercultural health certificate is designed to increase students' ability to reflect critically on the relationship between the theory and practice of being a dual-language provider, to appreciate differences in discourse typologies, and to be better equipped to confront the complexity of the linguistic choices and their potential ethical implications before they treat future patients. Through this, students are able to theorize on best practices in public health both in practice and in research.

The purpose of the intercultural health certificate is to enhance the knowledge and clinical skills of nurses, public healthcare providers, and other health professionals by promoting an awareness of intercultural relationships. The four-semester program provides a curriculum that incorporates language proficiency levels in tracks in Chinese (Mandarin), French, or Spanish at the 300 and 400 levels for undergraduates, combined with a focus on core nursing, public health, and other health science skills that include clinical laboratory and human patient simulation experiences in a bilingual setting. Students enrolled in the program engage in practicums with community partners in order to identify and plan for improved healthcare outcomes.

Baseline assessment for placement into the program requires completion of second-year language courses or equivalent coursework. A baseline questionnaire for intercultural knowledge, attitude and skills is given prior to starting the program and is repeated at the conclusion of all coursework.

Assessment is an essential tool of learning and takes place in courses and in practice settings. Students must complete all requirements and pass all courses to demonstrate success. Information gathered through the assessment process are used to help determine the summative effectiveness of the program in meeting its intended learning outcomes and to inform any adjustments that are determined to be needed to help with continuous programmatic improvement.

Learning outcomes for the program include 1) the achievement of an intermediate to advanced language proficiency in the target language 2) ability to communicate about health topics in a realistic context when working with patients 3) understand patient's cultural background, worldviews and perspectives on health 4) locate appropriate language resources for patient education 5) be prepared to provide patients with culturally and linguistically appropriate healthcare services. The program is aligned with the university's International Learning goals, and an overall assessment is conducted through a student questionnaire at program completion.

The Intercultural Health Certificate prepares students in health field areas to become leaders in the service of international and intercultural community members.

Title:

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Keywords:

cultural competence, intercultural and linguistic

References:

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Abstract Summary:

This presentation illustrates how an intercultural health certificate program provides the opportunity for healthcare students to hone necessary cultural and language skills prior to joining the workforce.

Content Outline:

I. Introduction

- A. Increase in culturally and linguistically diverse patient population
- B. Inadequate number of culturally and linguistically prepared healthcare professionals

II. Body

A. Background of the intercultural health certificate

1. Rationale for creating the intercultural health certificate

- a) Improve healthcare quality to diverse population

- b) Advance health equity to diverse population
- 2. Collaboration of departments to offer blend of appropriate coursework

- a) School of Nursing

- b) Public Health

- c) World Languages and Cultures

B. Components of the certificate program

1. Language skill level

- a) Provide intermediate to advanced language skills

- b) Courses include conversation, writing and medical terminology

2. Cultural skills

- a) Cultural competence/global issues course

- b) Practicum/immersion course

C. Assessment and evaluation

1. Baseline assessment

- a) Assess language proficiency of student

- b) Assess student cultural knowledge, attitude and skills (pre)

2. Overall assessment

- a) Student success in each required course

- b) Repeated measure of student cultural knowledge, attitude and skills (post)

III. Conclusion

- A. Learning outcomes

- B. Goal of the certificate aligns with university undergraduate and international learning goals

- C. Overall goal of Intercultural Health Certificate

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Author Summary: Dr. deRose has been a clinical and university educator since the 1990s. During that period she has given multiple presentations at local and international conferences, including the 25th International Nursing Research Congress for Sigma Theta Tau International in Hong Kong and the 30th STTI International Nursing Research Congress in Calgary, Canada.

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