

Developing a Virtual Community of Nursing Scholars among PhD Students

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Introduction

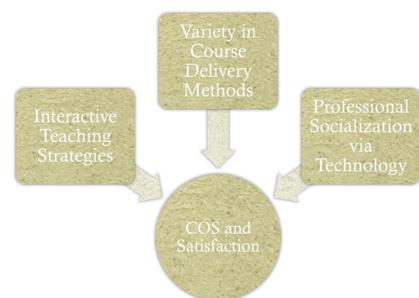
- AACN (2014) found that 96/132 programs (72.7%) provide doctoral coursework to at least some extent in online format
- AACN (2001) identifies student collaboration within nursing and other disciplines as a key indicator of quality
- Developing a COS is essential component of professional development
- Imperative students utilize technology and other social media resources to develop their COS

Online/Distance Education

Pym (1992) defines distance education as teacher and student in separate geographic locations:

“Simply put, distance education can be viewed as a set of teaching and learning strategies for connecting people who have learning needs with the resources required to meet those needs”

Benefits	Challenges
Online/distance education programs seek to combine the flexibility of working from home with the rigor of classroom education and training by combining any method of online and in person instruction (Martyn, 2003)	Difficulty in the online/distance learning environment due to trouble with group commitment and finding adequate time to participate (Moule, Ward, & Lockyer, 2010; Place, MacLeod, John, Adamack, & Lindsey, 2012)
	Distance from peers and mentors (Terrell, Snyder, Dringus, & Maddrey (2012)



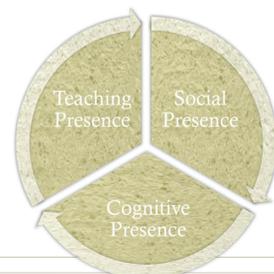
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Online/Distance Education

- Interactive Teaching Strategies:
 - Instructor-facilitated interactions
 - Introductions
 - Group projects
 - Relating personal stories
 - Class discussions
 - Sharing resources
 - Multiple teaching-learning formats that target different types of learners (VARK: visual, aural, read/write, kinesthetic)
- Course Delivery Methods:
 - Online courses with beginning and end dates resulted in higher satisfaction, confidence, and knowledge
 - Video communication resulted in relationships that were comparable to face-to-face courses
 - Cohesion between peers was not as strongly affected

Educational Experience

Community of Inquiry (COI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000)



Our Experience

- Online/Distance Program
 - 6 in-person weeks of coursework
 - In-person weeks also include seminars and socialization activities

Course Delivery Methods

Technology	Description	Advantages/Disadvantages
Video Conference System (e.g. Scopia Desktop, Skype, Lync, FaceTime, etc.)	Allows users to access “virtual conference rooms” from their personal computer. Users can see and hear each other in real time while also sharing the content of their computer screens if they desire.	Face-to-face communication with instructors and other students Some options require subscription fee and high-speed reliable internet connection. Occasional connection problems.
Course Management Systems (e.g. Blackboard, Moodle, etc)	Online “space” for storing course content, quizzes, discussion boards, and other academic tools.	Some options require subscription fee. Not as beneficial as videoconferencing in making students feel connected. Unable to receive real-time feedback.
Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	Permits interaction among students outside of the academic setting whereby more personal information can be shared.	No subscription fee. Allows users to participate in non-academic discussions that are important for professional networking and building long-lasting relationships. Privacy is limited.

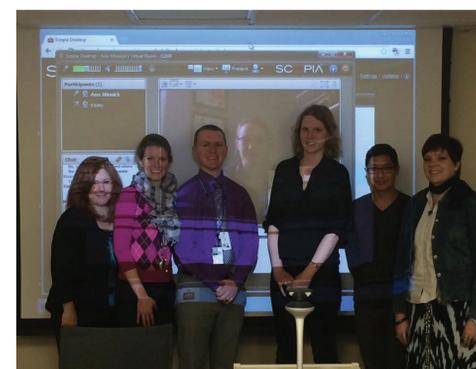
Socialization via Technology:

- Custom social networks
 - Promote access to course information
 - Joining learning communities
- Facebook
 - Students participating in an optional Facebook group reported feeling more engaged with peers and better prepared for exams

Course Delivery Methods

- Second Life
 - Virtual networks have been discussed as strategies to engage students in clinical skills and active learning in the online/distance environment

Our Class



Recommendations for Future Research

- Explore COS
 - Other nursing degrees: DNP
- Descriptive studies
- Experimental methods
- Longitudinal Studies

Quotes

Video Conferencing:

“Videoconferencing makes me feel like everyone is so much closer than they actually are. I think the weekly sessions we have with just us students has resulted in my classmates being some of my best friends.”

“The video software has been extremely helpful in allowing us to bond as a group. I especially appreciate that they have allowed us our own CEspace for meeting.”

“Classmates and faculty are accessible in more ways and at more times than my past experiences in traditional in-person courses and programs.”

“I feel like I am in the classroom. You have a direct line of communication with your instructor.”

Course Management:

“Using discussion boards for some discussions has allowed more time to formulate my thoughts and provide richer responses to my classmates.”

“I have used discussion boards since my undergrad. I consider them a standard part of a class, whether distance-based or in person.”

“The use of discussion boards as one of multiple technology-based educational modalities has enriched my experience. I also appreciate that this is not the main method of communication and coursework.”

“It is a helpful and organized platform. I can return to review posted information to study for finals and it makes submitting assignments easy and stress free.”

Social Media:

“I love that we can share photos of our face-to-face time together or even encouraging messages for those difficult times in the semester.”

“Social media provides a convenient outlet to be light-hearted about school.”

“I enjoy the use of social media to communicate relevant material along side humorous and personal information.”

“It keeps students in contact with each other outside of the classroom.”

Reference

Myers, L.H., Jeffery, A. D., Nimmagadda, H., Werthman, J., & Jordan, K. (In-Press). Building a community of scholars: One cohort’s experience in an online/distance education PhD program. *Journal of Nursing Education.*