Although much has been written about the value of the ‘flipped classroom’ and ‘blended learning’ as they pertain to active participation in learning activities, much of today’s didactic classroom learning in nursing education is deeply rooted in traditional passive techniques. The concept of ‘writing to learn’ has been shown to improve understanding and performance in a variety of settings, such as engineering and human physiology to expand the breadth and depth of learning, and are used in many university settings and schools. Given the time constraints involved in the delivery of complex, content rich education in nursing, passive didactic learning represents a missed opportunity for undergraduate nursing students or graduate doctoral students to engage in scholarly writing as a mechanism to enhance learning.

The use of consistent writing prompts in the discussion of varied problems and topics can serve to expand the student population

STUDENT POPULATION
168 Undergraduate junior level nursing students
132 Undergraduate Senior level nursing students
28 First year graduate nursing students

Method

1. Each scenario evolves over time to represent the trajectory of a disease or condition
2. Elements of each scenario engage both pathophysiology and humanistic factors that can facilitate or create barriers to effective treatment.
3. Students allocate the workload of the project within the group
4. The group collectively condenses and edits their writing within one document
5. Each group provides an oral presentation of their findings

Writing across the curriculum prompts

Student writing exercise

1. Identify the relevant information and uncertainties
   Students explore the need for additional information, rectified unclear information and answer pathophysiology questions related to the specific case scenario, based on prompts that trigger additional questions for the student to consider.

2. Explore the interpretations and connections
   Students receive prompts that related to various patient conditions and explore differential diagnoses.

3. Prioritize alternatives and implement conclusions
   Students further explore the possible diagnoses, and considered confirming or contradictory information in relationship to the proposed condition and are prompted to identify confirmatory findings

4. Integrate, monitor and refine strategies to address the problem
   Various prompts stimulate the student to identify the humanistic factors that directly related to the problem, and create a patient teaching plan based on the pathophysiology that had been identified in the scenario

Conclusion

- The WAC program demonstrates a positive impact on multidimensional aspects of learning goals across undergraduate and graduate curricula in nursing.
- The impact of active learning and the provision of multiple ‘touch points’ in regard to challenging concepts may foster a deeper understanding of the conceptual course content.
- Continued monitoring of student progression will offer additional indicators as to the value of WAC in courses other than pathophysiology.

Next Steps

1. Evaluate the relationship of the WAC strategy in undergraduate and graduate education to effective scholarly writing within comprehensive capstone projects
2. Evaluate the effect of WAC strategy on performance in licensure exams such as NCLEX and nurse practitioner exams.

References