

Assessment of the Key Components of a Curriculum

Crystal S. Graening

University of Mary

Health care is in a constant state of change. It is essential that nursing programs evolve based on those changes in order for the students of programs to be prepared for healthcare and the changes that come with it. Nursing programs build upon a foundation to ensure students who are successful in it have mastered the skills and knowledge needed to become practicing nurses (Keating & DeBoor, 2018). The success of students depends on the curriculum that nursing programs have in place, and the dedication faculty has in evaluating and redesigning it as needed so that best practices are implemented within the program (Keating & DeBoor, 2018). This paper seeks to explore the key components of the curriculum for the nursing program at North Dakota State University.

Accreditation Status

North Dakota State University's (NDSU) Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing program is currently accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). The CCNE granted a ten year approval of accreditation in 2015 to NDSU, making it valid through September of 2025 (NDSU, 2019a). The CCNE is a national accreditation agency recognized by the United States Secretary of Education that contributes to improving the health of the public by ensuring the quality and integrity of baccalaureate, graduate, and residency programs of nursing (CCNE, 2019). The process for nursing program to receive accreditation from the CCNE is a voluntary, self-regulatory process, which allows for the support of continuing self-assessment by those programs (CCNE, 2019). This support ensures the continued growth and improvement within professional education of colleges and nurse residency programs and effective educational practices (CCNE, 2019). CCNE accreditation indicates a confidence in the ability of the parent institution to offer a program to students that is of quality and deserving of public approval (CCNE, 2019). The baccalaureate nursing program is also approved by the North Dakota Board

of Nursing, which regulates nursing programs that prepare students for practice at the entry level (NDSU, 2019a).

Mission

NDSU's School of Nursing (SON) mission statement is "to advance nursing knowledge and develop dynamic nurse leaders who improve the health of all people, including underserved, rural, and diverse populations" (NDSUc, 2019, p. 5). The mission sets out to provide students of the nursing program at NDSU an advancement of their knowledge in nursing while also developing their leadership skills in order to improve the health of others. An emphasis within the mission statement is placed on serving specific populations, including the underserved, rural, and diverse ones. This mission strongly reflects all that encompasses nursing, being knowledgeable in caring for individuals, providing care to every population, and advancing the profession by being leaders.

The mission of the parent institute states it "with energy and momentum, North Dakota State University addresses the needs and aspirations of people in a changing world by building on our land-grant foundation" (NDSU, 2009, para. 1). As with the mission of the SON, the institution seeks to address the needs of all. The mission also wants to ensure that the aspirations those who want to help others by advancing themselves are met by providing the education needed to do so. These two missions are congruent as the SON also wants to aspire individuals to make a change in the world by helping all populations by bettering their health and providing care.

Philosophy

While NDSU and the SON do not specifically list a philosophy statement, both identify a list of core values. Like a philosophy statement should, these core values flow the mission and

vision of the SON (Keating & DeBoor, 2018). While some of the core values of the parent institution and the SON are different, they are congruent. The core values of the SON promote excellence in the education, practice, service, and research of nursing and include professionalism, caring, service, scholarship, quality, social justice, and learning (NDSUc, 2019). The parent institution identifies its core values as land-grant, people, scholarship, teaching and learning, ethics, culture, and accountability (NDSU, 2009). As demonstrated between the two, both strongly focus on learning, scholarship, and serving all cultures. NDSU has a strong commitment to the individuals who chose to attend their institution by ensuring their academic success to further promote those individuals and the impact they will have on communities around the world. The institution and SON strive for excellence by promoting these values.

Specifically, the SON core values represent the commitment the SON faculty have to their students. The faculty facilitates learning that is active, reflective, and promotes learning life-long for nursing students by providing an environment that engages students and incorporates innovation in education. The dynamic learning environment strives to promote critical thinking, which is a crucial element in nursing. A commitment to the liberal arts and sciences is reflected through professionalism, as part of this works to provide a foundation for the nursing practice, which is accomplished by ensuring students participate in a program that is well-rounded as the curriculum is designed in a way that the students learn content of other disciplines (NDSUc, 2019).

A strong commitment to the health care system is also identified in the core values of NDSU's SON as the core value of quality focuses on improving health care quality and patient safety through the education and research provided to students. The core values of caring and service promote the health of populations as the SON focuses on caring for and meeting the

needs of all and providing nursing expertise to multiple levels, including NDSU and the state, national, and international levels. The SON strives to provide a high quality nursing program that will allow for the health of citizens to be positively impacted. The core value of social justice addresses being able to ensure that those who are served are done in a manner that is equal and fair while teaching students about the importance of honoring the dignity and diversity of one another and others. The professionalism core value also works to ensure interprofessional collaboration is understood and practiced within the nursing practice. Lastly, through scholarship, the SON works to discover and share new knowledge through nursing scholarship and the practice of evidence-based care, promoting nursing as both an art and science. The outcome categories of the undergraduate program further exemplify this as they focus on communication, clinical competence, critical thinking, professional values, and leadership and achievement of those outcomes leads to nurse leaders dedicated to improving the health of all (NDSUc, 2019).

Organizing Framework

The framework of the curriculum for NDSU's SON was developed using various resources. An organizing framework is an important component to the curriculum as it provides a checklist that helps guide the curriculum to ensure no concepts are missed (Keating & DeBoor, 2018). The *Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice* guided the professional nursing standards and guidelines used to develop the curriculum and policies for the SON. The SON also used the *Quality and Safety Education in Nursing (QSEN) Competencies* and the *Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice* in developing the curriculum. The curriculum also follows the requirements of the North Dakota Board of Nursing sets forth for curriculum. This is not usually always the case in every state, as some State Boards

of Nursing require a framework for the curriculum, while others do not (Keating & DeBoor, 2018). This meets the mission and philosophy of the SON as the *Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice, QSEN Competencies, and Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice* ensure that the curriculum the students receive advances their nursing knowledge, creating leaders who can competency provide care to all. The organizing framework is also evident in all tracks of the program, as these essentials and competencies are listed in how the curriculum meets them for each course and track. The core values of the SON identify the importance of excellence within nursing, including practice, research, and service, which correlates with the three core guides that are used in developing curriculum to meet this (NDSUc, 2019).

Program Outcome

The overall purpose of the nursing curriculum is to prepare nurses professionally by providing the base of education for practice, professional development, graduate study, and professional and civic responsibility (NDSUc, 2019). The purpose is to provide a foundation of nursing knowledge that allows students to grow into the role of a professional registered nurse. Students within the nursing program will achieve acquiring life-long learning skills that are important within nursing careers and the rapidly changing health care system (NDSUc, 2019).

This outcome is reflective of the mission and core values, as the students who are successful in the program graduate with knowledge that is advanced within the realm of nursing and to set them up to be leaders as they grow into the role of a nurse. The outcome also is reflective of professionalism and providing service to all through the art of caring. The outcome also ensures that nurses are prepared to continue learning in their nursing profession while staying committed to improving healthcare and patient safety. The goal is stated in a way that is

measurable in regards to being successful in the program, as the outcome is that students will have the necessary knowledge to become licensed nurses and grow and develop within that role (NDSUc, 2019).

Furthermore, upon completion of the nursing program, the designed curriculum prepares nursing graduates to demonstrate five outcomes, which include clinical competence, critical thinking, communication, professional values, and leadership. These strongly reflect the mission and core values of the SON as they all focus on the pursuit of ensuring students are competent by having the necessary nursing knowledge while being professional leaders within their practice. The organizing framework also supports these outcomes, and the resources used in that framework provide the guidelines of what is to be expected of students upon the completion of a nursing program. The overall outcomes of the nursing curriculum applies to all tracks of the program (NDSUc., 2019).

Student Learning Outcomes

For each course within the curriculum of the NDSU BSN program, the learning objectives fit the mission and core values of the SON. The courses promote professionalism and build and advance knowledge as the students progress within the program, which is key to the mission. They also learn various subjects and concepts that further built on the SON's core values, such as having a course in research and evidence-based practice.

The program is designed in such a manner that allows the students to build knowledge dependent upon each course and to further enhance and advance that knowledge through course professions. For instance, the students have different levels of adult health courses, each which build upon one another to expand the knowledge in nursing for the students. The family health courses are also built in two different levels of learning. Near the end of the program, the

students are required to complete another course in research to further develop their knowledge within it.

The learning outcomes are learner centered and identify what content each course covers and seeks to achieve. Each of the courses has an outcome for the students listed that is to be met by the completion of the course. The description explains what the learner can expect from completing the course and how it relates to nursing. Over the course of the four years the program is completed by students, students can expect to develop knowledge and skills that will be valuable and necessary in their professional nursing practice (NDSU, 2019)

Implementation Plan

The implementation plan for the nursing program curriculum first ensures that students are prepared to apply to the nursing program. For the first year they attend NDSU, the students are required to complete core courses successfully. Those courses are used to calculate selective grade point averages used for admission to the professional program, and a GPA of 3.0 or higher is required. Those courses include chemical concepts, an intro to either sociology or anthropology, public speaking, intro to microbiology, elements of biochemistry, intro to psych, and an English composition course (NDSU, 2019). Being successful in these courses starts to build the foundation students need to be successful within the nursing program. The overall goal of the nursing program is to be prepared professionally and having a base of education that allows for them to practice and develop professionally (NDSU, 2019).

After acceptance into the program, the students begin their second year. Many fundamental courses continue to complete the foundation students need when they begin taking nursing courses, such as human anatomy and physiology, developmental psychology, and nutritional science. The students are also exposed to basic nursing courses such as health

promotion and a research course along with gerontology nursing and health assessment in the second half of their sophomore year. They also have their first exposure to the skills lab setting to begin the basics of nursing skills. As the students progress into their junior year, they begin to build upon the foundation that has been created with knowledge in nursing. Courses such as the foundations of clinical nursing, adult health, pharmacy, and family health are part of the curriculum along with a clinical experience in the second part of their junior year. Their senior year completes their curriculum with advanced classes in nursing, including higher level adult health courses, a leadership and management course, a course on research, and additional clinical experiences and practicum (NDSUd, 2019).

The organizing framework of the curriculum is seen in all of the courses as the SON uses the *Quality and Safety Education in Nursing (QSEN) Competencies* and the *Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice* to structure the courses to ensure these competencies can be met by the students. Each track of the program provides a course description, identifies how many credits the class is, lists any pre- or co- requisites, and provides the objectives and course outlines. Approval of this curriculum and necessary components is documented in the permanent records of NDSU's SON.

Summary

Various components must be considered in the curriculum of a nursing program. This paper discussed these in regards to NDSU's SON. The components of the curriculum are important as they ensure successful outcomes for students. The components are also all intertwined with one another, and the mission and core values or philosophy should be clear and identifiable throughout the curriculum. NDSU's SON curriculum effectively combined its mission and core values into the organizing framework and core components of its curriculum.

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