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Perspectives on Nursing

Using Multimedia Interviews to Influence Career Decisions

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Students often have misconceptions regarding the reality of nursing and the opportunities available to nurses that sometimes result in poor choices related to pursuing nursing as a career. To help prenursing students make better-informed career decisions and address misunderstandings, faculty developed the DVD and Web site Perspectives on Nursing, a collection of 15 nurse interviews. The authors describe and discuss the project, the value of recorded nurses’ stories, analysis of student feedback, and recommendations.

Popular media and society portray particular images of nurses, images that influence many students’ perceptions of modern nursing.1 Prenursing students, who are relatively new to nursing education, generally have an even more limited understanding of professional nursing realities. Incongruity between perceptions of nursing and actual nursing can lead students to make poor career choices, resulting in frustration and stress. Unfortunately, exposing prenursing students to the actual work of nursing is increasingly difficult because of confidentiality laws and limited access to clinical settings for nonlicensed personnel. Limited introduction to authentic clinical work settings leaves many prenursing students wondering what exactly RNs do at work and whether they possess the attributes required for a successful nursing career.

At Brigham Young University, prenursing students not yet admitted to the nursing program are required to take a course, Preview to Nursing, as part of the nursing program admission process. The Preview to Nursing class introduces students to nursing education, the roles and responsibilities of nurses, and opportunities available in the nursing profession. The primary objective of the course is to help students determine if nursing is a viable career choice for them. Faculty members responsible for exposing these Preview to Nursing students to the realities of a nursing career came up with an innovative way to convey this information without student access to clinical settings. Nursing faculty developed Perspectives on Nursing,2 a multimedia project containing 15 recorded nurse interviews from a variety of nursing specialties. Perspectives on Nursing was conceived and developed based on the assumption that students can learn from and identify with professional nurses through personal nursing stories.

Value of Storytelling

The video Perspectives on Nursing is a collection of guided nurses’ stories. These stories are a powerful tool for increasing student understanding of daily nursing practices. Storytelling allows students to vicariously participate in others’ experiences.3,4 This sharing can provide a means for transferring unique nursing knowledge and learned perspectives.5 Indeed, many nurse leaders have endorsed storytelling as a legitimate strategy to teach the art of nursing.6,7 Stories can demonstrate to students nursing attributes such as caring, decision-making skills, critical thinking, and coping.6,8 Sharing stories and relating personal experiences via video allow the students to visualize the storyteller while hearing the story, making the events more realistic and, hopefully, more meaningful to the students. Although using video to teach nursing skills is common in nursing education, little has been reported in literature regarding the use of video in capturing and sharing nurses’ stories for the purpose of teaching in the affective domain. (See Video, Supplemental Digital Content 1, which shows a clip of one nurse’s interview, http://links.lww.com/NE/A32.)

Description of the Video Project

Perspectives on Nursing was a collaborative project between Brigham Young University’s faculty from the College of Nursing and the Center for Teaching and Learning. A grant proposal explaining the project was submitted by nursing faculty and accepted by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Filming resources such as personnel, including camera operator and project supervisor, and the actual filming equipment were provided (and paid for) by the Center for Teaching and Learning.
The video was filmed on campus in the Nursing Learning Center Lab, providing a realistic “workplace” backdrop. Filming on campus also eliminated travel time to various locations for interviews and saved the film crew from having to set up and take down the equipment multiple times. Overall, the entire project took a year to complete. No one was working on the project full-time, and the nursing faculty involved fit the project into their everyday work schedules.

Nursing faculty created the interview questions, recommended working nurses from local agencies as potential interviewees, and conducted the interviews. All the nurse interviewees donated their time to the project. The criterion for inclusion as an interviewee was current enrollment in or completion of a baccalaureate nursing program and a recommendation from nursing faculty. The goal was to portray a variety of nurses representing different specialties, ages, sexes, ethnicities, and work status (full- or part-time). This diversity resulted in a rich portrait of the nature of nursing and the types of opportunities available in nursing.

Figure 1. List of suggested interview questions.

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All the nurse interviewees were asked similar questions, but the script allowed flexibility to show individuality and personal interests (Figure 1). During the editing process, nursing faculty noticed the development of several specific themes contained in the interviews. These themes included interesting narratives regarding the nurses’ decisions to become nurses, how they dealt with death, their spiritual insights, and other topics. Faculty decided to expand the project to include a disc of “Special Topics” developed from these themes (Figure 2); this disc provided collections of clips from the interviews, organized by theme.

The finished interviews, ranging in length from 12 to 31 minutes (21-minute average), were recorded on 3 discs and made available to students via a Web site developed by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Placing the interviews on a Web site allowed students continual access, which enhanced learning through individual exploration and repeated exposure to the material. Although the original recorded nursing interviews contained all the “Special Topics” material for student viewing, the disc “Special Topics” (Figure 2) was reserved for faculty to use to enhance in-class discussions.

In conjunction with Perspectives on Nursing, nursing faculty developed student learning activities for Preview to Nursing students. Early in the semester’s curriculum, students participated in several learning activities: They watched 2 interviews (of the students’ choosing) and identified 5 attributes they observed in the nurses interviewed. Then students were asked to complete a written assignment in which they contrasted the observed attributes to ones the students themselves possessed. Students were also asked to identify 1 new concept that the interviews taught them about nursing. These learning activities were placed early in the semester’s curriculum to encourage familiarization with course resources available for personal exploration and to provide common experiences for classroom discussions.

Assessing Student Feedback

Faculty developing and using new learning activities should ensure that the experiences are relevant and meaningful for the students. One way to assess quality is by surveying students for their perceptions and for suggestions on how to improve their experiences. After implementation of the video Perspectives on Nursing and the associated learning activities into the prenursing curriculum, faculty acquired institutional review board approval to perform an evaluation study of the project. The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the video’s effects on students (particularly regarding career decisions) and to explore the breadth of students’ experiences regarding the project.

Figure 2. Special topics.
The evaluation study was designed in 2 phases: An online survey followed by interviews. All 175 Preview to Nursing students enrolled in the 2010 winter semester were invited to participate in the survey; there was a 41% response rate. The survey included open- and close-ended questions regarding how the videos affected students’ decisions to pursue careers in nursing, the value of the current learning activities associated with viewing the videos, and suggestions for improving the video’s use. After the survey phase of the evaluation study, students were asked to participate in interviews conducted by researchers from the Center for Teaching and Learning. Student consent was obtained at the beginning of the online survey and immediately before being interviewed.

The researchers analyzed the qualitative data resulting from the survey and interviews for themes related to how the videos and associated learning activities affected the students’ views of nursing and their decisions to pursue careers in nursing.

**How the Videos Influenced Students**

Most students responding to the online survey thought viewing the videos influenced their decisions to pursue a nursing profession. Although students, overall, thought other class activities (such as guest speakers and personal RN interviews) influenced their career decisions the most, 82% of the survey participants felt the videos influenced them in some way. The evaluation study identified several predominant themes among the student comments: reflecting on attributes, discovering variety, finding inspiration and motivation, appreciating realism, and changing perspectives.

**Reflecting on Attributes**

When asked about the effectiveness of the learning activity requiring identification of attributes, student comments centered on themes of self-evaluation and reflection. One student acknowledged, “It was helpful to watch videos of real nurses and compare the attributes they seemed to have to the ones that I had.” Another student commented, “I was able to compare the qualities that I have with the qualities that real nurses had when I watched the Perspectives on Nursing DVD. I thought this was especially helpful because I was able to get a confirmation that nursing is something I should pursue because I found that a lot of my attributes matched up with those of the nurses on the DVD.” Because exploration of individual personality traits and attributes and students’ possible fit with the profession was a desired outcome of the learning activity, the evaluation study validated this teaching technique.

**Discovering Variety**

Many students were surprised to discover the variety of career paths available to nurses. “Viewing the Perspectives on Nursing interviews helped me see the many different areas of nursing,” said one student. Another added, “I keep getting bored with occupations. In this career, I could never stop learning and growing and I have a plethora of fields and specialties and schools I could go into.” Information regarding the variety of nursing specialties created future interest and increased the possibility of choosing nursing as a career. One student explained how the nurses’ personalities affected their understanding of nursing variety: “I was able to hear [the] different nurses talk about their... specialty and the attributes that they needed to have to survive in their particular specialty.” Identification of distinctive attributes required for various specialty areas assisted students in better understanding which areas would be appropriate for them as individuals while informing them about areas of nursing that might interest them.

**Finding Inspiration and Motivation**

Another theme that developed from the survey and interviews was the videos’ capacity to inspire and motivate students. Students described the video as “inspiring” and “touching,” and they connected with the nurses on an emotional level. One student explained, “The interviews helped me see that there is a much more personal side to nursing than I have ever thought before.” Another student shared, “[The videos] were the most influential tools in class for me. Seeing the impact nurses have on their patients brought strong emotions to me and made me want to have that kind of impact on others.” One student acknowledged that the stories the nurses told “pulled at my heart strings and made me excited to become a nurse.” Still another student mentioned that the amount of passion the interviewees had for nursing was a source of inspiration. Other students identified their source of inspiration: relating to the students in the video and listening to their firsthand accounts. One student even felt that he could relate to the students in the video, “knowing that they were once students, as well.”

**Appreciating Realism**

Other students appreciated the realism portrayed in the interviews. As one student said, “The nurses were very real. They described not only their love for their patients and their work, but also the challenges they face every day.” Another said the videos “helped me gain a better understanding of what nurses actually do and helped clarify some nursing myths and misconceptions.” One student said the videos were “very informative and related to nursing very well. For example, the other day, we watched a video about dealing with death as a nurse, and I thought it was very helpful to hear real nurses’ opinions on what it’s like to work with a dying patient and their family members.” A clear, accurate understanding of nurses’ real working lives and daily challenges allows students to make informed decisions about whether to pursue a career in nursing. Students appreciated the realism of presenting both positive and negative aspects of a nursing career. As one student explained, “[The interviewees in the videos] also mentioned negative aspects, which is always something good to think about when making a decision.”

**Changing Perspectives**

Viewing the video created a variety of viewpoints and attitudes changes in students regarding nursing. Some students discovered new interests in nursing that they had not previously considered, whereas other students eliminated nursing altogether as a possible career. Commenting on the effect the videos had on her as an individual, one student stated, “I highly respect the career of nursing; however, the Perspectives on Nursing interviews helped me realize that nursing wasn’t for me.”

Whereas viewing the video affected some students’ attitudes greatly, others claimed the video had little influence. It is
interesting to note, however, that most of the students who were not affected by the video had already made a decision about nursing as a career path.

**Recommendations**

Before using the video, faculty typically invited 2 to 3 guest speakers from different specialty areas to class. One of the original purposes of producing the video was to replace invited guest speakers with taped interviews. After analyzing the student feedback, however, faculty recognized how valuable it is for students to be able to interact with and directly ask questions of the guest speakers. Therefore, we recommend that faculty continue to invite guest speakers to facilitate in-class discussions and not rely solely on taped interviews as a replacement for these live experiences. Instead, faculty should use taped interviews of additional guests to supplement guest speakers and add variety to classroom experiences.

Faculty who have implemented the video into their curriculum recommend that viewing of the video be supported by class discussions. Some of the content can be revealing for inexperienced students and lends itself to valuable discussions exploring students’ perceptions about themselves and the field of nursing. Students also enjoy hearing comments from their peers during class discussions and often gain new insights into the video from their peers’ observations. One student referred to the benefit of class discussions: “Our class brought up some good points about nursing that I hadn’t considered before.” In-class viewing of interviews followed by rich class discussion enhances the experience: as one student commented, “The videos brought to life the classroom discussions.”

Another recommendation from faculty and video developers is to grant students easy accessibility to the videos (eg, on a Web site, podcast, or downloaded on computers readily available to the students). This enables students to explore the interviews at their convenience and revisit the videos, if they are so inclined. Indeed, some students commented that they enjoyed being able to return to the videos after their interests were sparked in class discussions. In addition to ease of accessibility, students appreciated the ability to choose specific interviews that were meaningful to them as opposed to being assigned interviews. Bearing this in mind, faculty should encourage students to take full advantage of the opportunity to explore the videos—outside of class assignments—for their own personal insights into the nursing profession.

Finally, for those thinking about creating their own videos, we recommend including a variety of nurses who represent different viewpoints, are from different specialty areas and backgrounds, and span different ages, sexes, and ethnicities. Interviewees should be encouraged to reflect on how their own personal attributes contribute to their success as nurses along with negative and positive aspects of nursing. Faculty should also consider including student stories and graduate specialty areas as well. All of these elements contribute to a realistic and rich portrait of nursing.

**Conclusion**

The evaluation study of Perspectives on Nursing as part of Brigham Young University’s prenursing curriculum provided faculty with valuable insight regarding the project’s classroom utilization and its effects on students. Students generally regarded the video as influential and appreciated that the associated learning activities encouraged self-evaluation and reflection. Analyzing the students’ comments exposed the breadth and variety of individual students’ experiences after viewing the videos. This article provides faculty with student feedback concerning the Perspectives on Nursing project and suggestions for how faculty interested in launching a similar project might want to proceed.

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