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Deborah Miller
Assistant Director,
Office of Faculty Enhancement
University of North Florida



Campus Pack™ in Action:

Using Blogs to Connect Theory and Practice

How can a school make the most of its experiential learning programs? At the University of North Florida School of Nursing, the curriculum is designed “to produce reflective, socially engaged practitioners,”[†] so facilitating the integration of experiential learning and guided reflection is vital. Accordingly, UNF licenses Campus Pack™ to provide students with an interactive, online journaling platform.

Service-Learning Pedagogy

UNF’s School of Nursing is known for its innovative programs and is looked to as a model by nursing programs across the US. The feature that sets UNF apart from other programs is its community-based nursing curriculum built upon a service-learning pedagogy.

As part of preparing to care for patients beyond the traditional hospital, the school works with community partners to address the health needs of local residents. Throughout the five-semester program, students contribute a significant portion of their time to working in the community within a geographic program area called a “homebase.”[†]

Guided reflection is an essential component of service-learning pedagogy, which “helps ensure students develop an appreciation of the social, economic, cultural, political, and environmental context within which their skills are practiced.”[†] The school’s faculty have long required students to document their experiences in formats such as hand-written notebooks or weekly email summaries.

Deborah Miller, Assistant Director, Office of Faculty Enhancement, comments, “Outside of the obvious inconveniences of carrying around large stacks of notebooks, faculty felt they just didn’t have the flexibility to efficiently organize multiple students, semester levels, and community sites into groups, and keep track of the continuous stream of student experiences.”

UNF’s Information Technology Services and Office of Faculty Enhancement began evaluating blogging tools as a possible solution to the School of Nursing’s frustrations. With input from the nursing faculty, they decided to implement Campus Pack.

Reflective Journaling in Practice

To begin, the School of Nursing wanted to adopt a standard journaling format that would help students connect theory to practice. After consulting with a nationally recognized expert in service-learning, the school developed a “what, so what, and now what” format. For each entry, a student describes his activities that week, his

Campus Pack™ Blogs

Campus Pack allows blogs and journals to be created within a course, providing the classroom community with a structured and engaging forum for writing about course-related topics, projects, and ideas.

With Campus Pack blogs and journals, users can

- Explore course readings, class discussions, and field experiences in an online environment
- Share and critique each other's work, learning through both peer-modeling and peer-review
- Gain insight into their progress from individualized instructor feedback
- Sharpen critical thinking, rhetorical, and written communications skills



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impressions and reactions, and then his thoughts on how to incorporate the experiences into his development as a professional and into his future practice.

William Ahrens, nursing instructor and co-leader of the homebase group in Northwest Jacksonville, finds that the use of a consistent journal format enables his students to reflect on concepts and crystallize their thoughts in an organized manner. Says Ahrens, "I instruct students to set aside time each week for submitting journal entries into Campus Pack, and the thoughts are due each Sunday by 6pm. I prefer a closed journal technique, which means that only instructors and community partners have the ability to read and edit the student journals." Other faculty use an open journaling style, fostering dialogue by allowing classmates to read each other's blogs and comment on the postings.

Building Community Relationships

On average, UNF nursing students spend eight to twelve hours per week working alongside local health professionals. Campus Pack is used to give community partners an additional line of access to students. "Community partners already had access to an online course system, which essentially serves as a central hub for the homebase group. Here, everyone in the group can share presentations, access resources and internet links,

and plan activities. Campus Pack integrates right into this system, so our community partners now have a new way to converse with the students online, enhancing communications and saving time," says Ahrens.

Community partners have highlighted the value of using students' reflections about their experiences in the field as a way to evaluate their own staff in how they work and develop relationships with the nursing students.† "The simplicity of creating and maintaining journals means that open discussions can be established almost immediately," continues Ahrens. "Campus Pack provides a valuable venue for community partners to share and contribute to the overall process."

Moving Ahead

With the nursing program pilot a success, UNF has expanded the use of Campus Pack to support course-related blogging across the University. Says Miller, "We are excited to broaden the use of blogging to the university as a whole, as well as by the possibilities presented by other online applications offered by Learning Objects."

† Kruger, B. J., Ahrens, W., Connelly, L., Miller, D., Soles, E., & Turrin, T. (2006, January). *University of North Florida community nursing service-learning homebase, Blackboard™ Greenhouse On-line Pedagogy Award Proposal*. Washington, DC.



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