

Widening Participation: A Virtual Approach to F.E.Collaboration.

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Background and Rationale

The aim of the project is to devise a Wolverhampton On Line Learning Framework (WOLF) programme specifically designed for use by students undertaking nursing access courses at local colleges of Further Education. They would access the WOLF site using 'guest status' to log on.

A selection of exciting, interactive learning activities, related to nursing and linked to modules studied during the first year of pre-registration training, will be devised and transferred onto the WOLF programme.

There are three main intended outcomes:

- 1) provide the students with a 'taster' of the reality of pre registration nurse training both theoretically and practically hoping that this will aid retention rates and increase the employability of the students on qualifying.
- 2) To create a smooth transition from studying as a student at further education level to higher education level. It is further hoped that the introduction to WOLF prior to commencement on pre-registration courses will improve students' key skills in preparation for studying at higher education level and familiarise the students with WOLF as it is used quite extensively in pre-registration training.
- 3) To generate enthusiasm and interest in the pre-registration nurse training available at Wolverhampton University, with the assistance of Technology Supported Learning, to aid recruitment.

The outcomes link with the School of Health Teaching and Learning Strategy (2001) where it states a mechanism should be provided for interactive information exchange and a resource should be provided for developing key skills in I.T.

Part of the author's role, as Senior Lecturer within the School of Health, is to 'link' with Wolverhampton College, Bilston Campus. One of the aims of the role is to work closely with the course leaders for the Nursing Access course to ensure the pre-registration training provided at higher education level compliments, nurtures and expands on work they have completed at further education level. One innovative way of achieving this, as well as working at a face to face level, may be to utilise TSL by devising a WOLF site just for access by students at Bilston Campus (initially). This would provide easy access to high volumes of diverse learning resources including texts, audio and visual materials and library materials.

Ease of access could be provided to simulation of dangerous or complex situations for learning purposes. There can be feed back loops from teachers, peers or from within the materials themselves through progress checking, quizzes and on line assessment (Stephenson, 2002).

A choice of learning styles could also be provided within the same package according to the needs of the learner (Laurillard, 1993).

The Innovation

A variety of activities and information were devised and loaded onto the WOLF programme. The programme was named 'Stepping up to Student Nurse'. It was felt that this would be inviting to the user group than the title of the project and indicated the 'step up' from Further to Higher Education.

Activities included:

- What kind of person becomes a nurse
- Welcome to the University
- Frequently Asked Questions
- What us Communication
- Information relating to Portfolio
- Information relating to Reflection
- Practice Placements
- What would you do if.....? (5 multiple choice questions on emergency procedures)
- Fancy working in another country. (Information relating to The Socrates Exchange Programme open to all nursing students in their 3rd year of training)
- Preparation for Interview

Included within these activities were exercises for the students to participate in and a sample 'off duty' for when working on a ward, a sample timetable for when in University, general information about the course and some video clips. These included a 'talking heads' section where the students talk to the camera giving their first impressions of the University and of their first day in clinical placement. Another section included a 'video diary' where the students talk through a day on the ward stating what hours they have worked and what activities they have been involved in. The main aim of this was to give prospective students a 'reality check' of what nursing is really like prior to their commencement on the course.

Additions to the project site, since it was formed in 2005, included extra video clips and more information on the Family Friendly Route.

At the beginning of April the programme was launched to the students at Wolverhampton City College of Further Education, Bilston Campus and Sandwell College, Smethwick Campus. A total of 40 students were involved in the project. This involved the author and other team members visiting the college to assist the students with logging onto the programme. Prior to this the students had all necessary paperwork

required by IT Services within the University to enable the students to be issued with passwords and user names to log on to WOLF as guest users. The session was booked and arranged to take place in the computer suite at the colleges.

A printed sheet was issued to all students with written instructions on how to log on next time and then it was left to the student to access the programme at their own pace. They had a time period of 8 weeks before access was discontinued to allow for evaluation. The 'cut off' date was 13th June.

Benefits

The project, if successful, would benefit the University by aiding recruitment and retention into Pre Registration nurse training. It is hoped that with the assistance of the activities devised and transferred onto WOLF, students would want to train at The University of Wolverhampton as oppose to other local Higher Education Institutions and because the students would have had insight into the academic and practical elements of the course, may be more likely to complete.

May it be noted that despite undertaking a literature review ,no evidence could be found that a project similar to this has been undertaken elsewhere thus have no proof that the benefits mentioned would indeed occur.

Evaluation

Out of a total of 40 students initially involved with the project, 19 students attended for the final evaluation session. Early comments about the programme include:

"The whole of the information that has been supplied on WOLF has benefited me greatly, especially the video clips and information supplied about what to expect during an interview. I also thought that information supplied on 'what is communication' was very informative".

"The Family Friendly information provided clarity about that route."

"Knowing about the shift patterns was very useful."

"The interview section helped to prepare me for my interview."

One Course Leader stated that the video clips and seeing sample 'off duties' was a real reality check for some. Some students had commented that they had not even considered the hours worked by nurses, organisation of child care to allow them to participate in the course or issues around communicating with 'ill' people.

The students were also asked if they were still considering nursing as a career. Of the 19 who attended the session and completed the evaluation form 1 had deferred her application until the following year, 1 had applied, and been accepted, for Midwifery training. Four did not respond. All had applied to the University of Wolverhampton except for one. Of those who had applied 16 had been accepted. The other applicant had been refused a place.

When asked if the project site had helped to improve their knowledge of the Nurse Training course, on a scale of 1-10 [1=not improved at all and 10= very much improved.] the following responses were given:

Score 5	1 student
Score 6	4 students
Score 7	2 students
Score 8	7 students
Score 9	1 student
Score 10	2 students

2 students did not complete this section.

When asked if the students thought the project should be on the University of Wolverhampton, School of Health web site 17 answered yes and 2 did not answer. Comments from this question included:

“My first port of call when researching about the course was the website”

“I believe everyone should have access to the project as it was sad when our access was stopped.”

“Helpful to know what to expect before you start the course.”

“I feel the project provides a lot more information than the prospectus which is necessary when undertaking a huge commitment.”

Future Developments

Both colleges involved in the project have requested that they use the programme again with their new intake of students in October 2007.

Work is in progress with the Marketing and Recruitment Group for the School of Health and I.T services to upload the project onto the School of Health website in the near future.

When it is on the website a short questionnaire will be added at the end to ask how useful the site has been and also to allow us to monitor the number of users.

A similar site could be developed for the 3 other Branches of Nursing.

If you would like further information about this project please contact Sally McConville, Senior Lecturer, School of Health, Mary Seacole Building, City Campus. S.McConville@wlv.ac.uk. 01902 518683.

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