

Development of an International Learning Experience for Baccalaureate Nursing Students in Population-Based Care

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to describe international learning experience titled the *Thailand International Learning Experience* which was to provide baccalaureate nursing students the opportunity to explore population-based care through a comparative clinical learning experience.

Methodology: The international learning experience was designed within the structure of a four-week clinical course where nursing students from Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) joined in collaborative learning with nursing students at Mahidol University Faculty of Nursing (MU FoN). Learning outcomes were designed to meet essential population-based nursing content and curricular requirements. To meet learning outcomes each student was required to choose a health care issue focusing on a population, which included identifying the population context and practice setting. Demographic and geographic conditions were defined, which considered the impact of potential socio-economic, or urban/rural variances. Participating in clinical practice, attending presentations and interviews with population-based experts provided students with foundational information which they used to evaluate nursing performance, roles, and nursing outcomes in population-based care. The review of evidence-based peer-reviewed nursing journals from both the United States and Thailand were utilized to increase the students' knowledge. To demonstrate evidence of competence of required learning outcomes, students prepared an individual presentation and paper outline that were evaluated by both MU and OHSU nursing faculty.

Outcomes: Nursing students had the opportunity to increase their knowledge of nursing practice in population-based care through a comparative international learning experience.

Keywords: baccalaureate nursing education, international learning experience, learning outcomes, population-based care

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Background and Significance

International learning experiences are an active teaching-learning approach used to provide nursing students meaningful cultural and practice exposures. Such learning is an active learning strategy for baccalaureate nursing students, fulfilling each component of scholarship: liberal education, professional values (including caring, altruism, autonomy, human dignity, integrity, and social justice), core competencies, core knowledge, and role development of *The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education*.¹

Recent demographic trends project an increasingly ethnically diverse U.S. population. With the increase in the diversity of the population, nurses who possess the knowledge and practice skills are needed to provide culturally appropriate care. In addressing the implications for nursing education, an integrative literature review of study abroad programs for nursing students reported that international learning experiences benefit nursing students in contributing to the development of critical thinking and real-time problem-solving skills and the ability to navigate and communicate in unfamiliar environments.²

Developing and leading international learning experiences is time consuming,

requiring affiliations and partnerships with international universities, however the additional effort has shown positive association with students' development in their ability to work with people from other cultures. In 2015 results from the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey which was administered to 287,498 undergraduate students with a response rate of 34.7% (99,810) across twelve large, public universities showed that studying abroad through another college/university program was also associated with higher increase in students' intercultural and global competencies.³

Providing international service-learning opportunities for nursing students can be a way to improve their ability to provide culturally competent health care and expand their global vision of health.⁴ Immersive service-learning experiences can facilitate a deep understanding of social justice concepts and social determinants of health.⁵ In considering the scope of population-based care for undergraduate nursing students in an international learning experience findings from a clinical nursing course led by nursing faculty on a study abroad trip to Ghana demonstrated a significant shift in student's understanding regarding social determinants of health.⁶ These findings suggest that a

short-term study abroad experience helped students begin to transcend individualistic approaches and to value community and societal-level health influences and intervention, addressing what is a critical learning need for future nurses.⁷

Themes evident throughout the literature suggest that international learning experiences can provide effective learning opportunities resulting in a number of positive learning outcomes which include the development of a global nursing perspective, and an understanding of cultural competence. It has also been called “a useful strategy for bridging the theory-practice divide” for nursing students.⁸ One study on the transformation impact of international immersion programs with nursing students showed that student who lived and practiced the profession of nursing along with their hosting counterparts in an environment completely different than their own and without a common language, developed an “openness that continually broadens their overall worldview and professional practice”. This study also recognized the positive value of comparative clinical learning experiences in that students increased their understanding of providing individualized care to people with a variety of needs.⁹

Objective of Project

The overarching objectives of an international learning experience for baccalaureate nursing students at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) School of Nursing (SoN) is two-fold:

- To support OHSU Global & SoN missions of participating in education, research, and clinical initiatives to improve human health globally.
- To prepare nurses in the practice of community and public health nursing, enabling them to contribute to the overall public health mission through international and cross-cultural exposures.

Specific to the *Thailand International Learning Experience*, the primary objective of the course project is to provide students opportunity to identify health problems that impact population-based care both in Thailand and the USA. Secondly, students are engaged in learning about the role of nurses in Thailand in their practice and delivery of care related to a particular health problem or health related topic within the context of culture and the Thai health care system. The emphasis of comparative practice for the project was an additional objective requested by the Dean of Mahidol University Faculty of Nursing (MU FoN) in an effort to demonstrate the value of

the investment and appreciation of international partnership.

Achievement of the learning outcomes in the *Thailand International Learning Experience* will be demonstrated through the preparation and presentation of an individual presentation and paper outline. This assignment offers the individual student an opportunity to “dig” deeper into a nursing care specialty, a health care problem/condition or a nursing practice issue that they are interested in within the context of population-based care. The student will also examine the role of the nurse and nursing from the perspective of the delivery of health care in both Thailand and the USA. Additional demographic and geographic conditions are also to be considered, such as socio-economic, urban/rural, or immigration impact. The framework of the student’s exploration in their chosen topic must match the following learning objectives of NRS 410: Population-based Nursing and NRS 424: Integrative Practicum:

- Integrates concepts of resource utilization, quality improvement and systems to enhance care delivery across the continuum of care.
- Analyzes the health care issue with system-level policy, practice, ethical, and

economic implications.

- Apply, analyze, and evaluate leadership and management skills, including decision-making with the health care team.
- Articulate a personal view of nursing practice that exemplifies quality and safety in care.

Method/Approach

The *Thailand International Learning Experience* became possible through the institutional affiliation and commitment of senior leadership at OHSU SoN and MU FoN, and the support of OHSU Global in 2015 to begin international student learning exchanges. A faculty lead at OHSU SoN was then chosen to work closely with the Department Chair of Public Health Nursing at MU FoN to develop a one-month international learning experience for OHSU SoN baccalaureate nursing students in Bangkok, Thailand. An OHSU SoN faculty lead was chosen based on the following criteria:

- Interest and experience in leading international learning experience
- Global and public/community health expertise
- Cultural and language proficiencies

The steps of preparation by faculty from OHSU for project delivery were as follows:

- Student Selection
- Course Alignment
- Introduction to Thailand Health Care System
- Identification of Population-based Health Care Problem or Topics
- Clinical Observation and Participation Experiences
- Interview Nurse and Population-based Experts
- Review of Evidence-based Peer-reviewed Nursing Journals
- Preparation of Individual Presentation and Paper Outline to Faculty (MU FoN & OHSU SoN)

Student Selection: The student selection process was competitive. Fourth year baccalaureate nursing students completed an application, in which they were required to provide information as to why they would like to participate in the international learning experience, and what they hope to gain from the opportunity. The student's academic record was submitted as evidence that the student was in good academic standing. Applicants were also required to have a letter of recommendation from a clinical faculty, with their application being vetted by the appropriate Associate Dean. A face-to-face interview was then conducted by the OHSU

SoN Global Coordinator before final student selections were made.

Course Alignment: The *Thailand International Learning Experience* was aligned with the clinical learning outcomes of the NRS 410: Population-based Nursing and NRS 424: Integrative Practicum in the required undergraduate program of study. The one-month international learning experience was designed to meet 150 required clinical hours for each of these courses.

Introduction to Thailand Health Care System: Arrangements were made for nursing students to visit the Thailand Ministry of Public Health to learn about the health care system, health care delivery, and the mechanisms of access for the Thai population. Students were also introduced to Thai Traditional Medicine and how it is integrated into health promotion and health care delivery.

Identification of Population-based Health Care Problem or Topics: Students were given up to two weeks to choose their health care topic. This time frame provided the students the opportunity to have a number of health care exposures in population-based care. Some examples of population-based care topics were: teen pregnancy, immigrant health, depression in the elderly population,

psychiatric mental health nursing, rural health & social determinants of health, diabetes & amputation.

Clinical Observation and Participation

Experiences: Students had the opportunity to join MU fourth year nursing students and their faculty in their public/community health clinical rotations. These experiences allowed OHSU nursing students to participate in clinical learning through community assessment, home visits, community health clinics, primary school health, elderly clubs, and primary care clinics. These experiences provided first hand observations of the role and practice of Thai nurses in population-based care settings.

Interview Nurse and Population-based

Experts: Students visited the Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council and were given an overview of the regulated professional practice of nurses, midwives and nurse-midwives to protect the public and assure quality of services. In addition, students were matched with a nurse leader, nurse faculty, or a population-based care expert to further explain nursing practice in relation to the students chosen topic.

Review of Evidence-based Peer-reviewed

Nursing Journals: Students were directed to the suggested resources to obtain information

related to nursing practice, health care in Thailand and the USA, social determinants of health and demographical information in English.

Preparation of Individual Presentation

and Paper Outline to Faculty: At the end of the one-month international learning experience, a half-day session is scheduled for the OHSU nursing students to present their topics and findings to the MU FoN. It is a formal 15-minute presentation by each student of their chosen comparative health care topics. There is also a question-answer and feedback session.

Key points of the presentation must include:

- Health care specialty or health care problem/condition
- Demographics or geographic conditions or impact
- Context
- Practice setting
- Conceptual integration of resource utilization, quality improvement, and systems of care delivery
- Student's personal view of nursing practice in the context of quality of care and safety in care
- Comparative information.

Outcomes

The one-month *Thailand International Learning Experience* has been delivered three times; in 2016, 2018, and 2019, between OHSU SoN and MU FoN in Bangkok. The dates of the learning experience have been aligned between the delivery of the OHSU NRS 410: Population-based Health Nursing and NRS 424: Integrative Practicum and the MU FoN Public Health Nursing clinical course. This has allowed optimum collaborative clinical experiences with the OHSU and MU nursing students. Nursing students have had the opportunity to increase their knowledge of nursing practice in population-based care through this comparative international learning experience.

Formal evaluation of students through their clinical participation, clinical seminars, clinical reflections, and the preparation of the Individual Presentation and Paper Outline have provided evidence and documentation that all learning outcomes have been met. Students have rated the international learning experience as excellent and reported that all learning outcomes have been met through the OHSU course evaluation process.

Anecdotal feedback from students and OHSU SoN faculty has also been very positive indicating that there is a desire for this

international learning experience to continue. Students have also expressed their appreciation for personal growth and an increased recognition that at times there may be variances in population-based nursing care between Thailand and the USA. Student reflections included the following comments:

"I gained respect for how the Thai nursing students treated their elderly patients, and was surprised how much I was able to understand just using nonverbal communication."

"I observed that the people in the community were very involved in the hospital and the hospital had a focus on community care and community health in nursing. I have not experienced this involvement in other countries I have visited."

"My nursing knowledge and skill set definitely expanded through observing Thai nurses serving the needs of immigrants. This experience made me significantly more aware of the unique health needs of migrants in Thailand."

Conclusion and Future Considerations

The development of the *Thailand International Learning Experience* has successfully supported the OHSU Global and SoN mission of participating in education, research, and clinical initiatives to improve

human health globally. It has also met the collaborative goals of OHSU SoN and MU FoN partnership to prepare nurses in the practice of community and public health nursing through student exchanges.

Future considerations need to include exploration as to how the goals and objectives of the international learning experience can be broadened, and if there are more appropriate techniques for faculty to facilitate critical reflection between the OHSU and MU nursing students. Curriculum integration of global learning, social consciousness, and global cultural competence is needed. It is also the hope that international learning experiences may also help create opportunities for today's nursing student to be inquisitive and adaptable to practice the art of nursing in an increasingly multicultural patient population which is not defined by geographic boundaries.

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