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Advancing Global Health Outcomes Through International Collaboration & Education

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INTRODUCTION

Study abroad opportunities for students are readily integrated into higher education. Curricular challenges exist for professional programs regulated by state & national accrediting bodies. However, mission driven values at the broader institutional level facilitate implementation of these learning opportunities.

Institutional learning outcomes at Dominican University foster intercultural understanding. Global education outcomes of Dominican University further delineate levels of intercultural competencies to be achieved through coursework and service. The Dominican Department of Nursing seeks to prepare nurses who are competent, culturally sensitive, & ethically grounded within a global community.

The Bwindi School of Nursing mission seeks to improve the health of the community through excellent nursing education, research, & practice. Mission statements of both schools reflect like values: professional competence, cultural sensitivity, excellence & compassion in care within a global community.



OBJECTIVES

This presentation highlights an effective educational process through an ongoing partnership. An undergraduate course, “Global Health Nursing & Healthcare: Bwindi, Uganda” used conceptual definitions of the Global Advisory Panel on the Future of Nursing (GAPFON) to guide course development & learning experiences (Wilson, et so, 2016). Imperative in this educational collaborative is that faculty:

- Recognize the importance of mission driven values in fostering cultural sensitivity, diversity, & respect for others,
- Utilize evidence based interventions that promote intercultural understanding in the teaching-learning process that includes multiple worldviews, experiences, & power structures,
- Facilitate student understanding through comparison & contrast of healthcare delivery systems, and the roles of healthcare professionals & community liaisons in health promotion & illness prevention
- Utilize evaluative activities that intentionally facilitate student’s personal reflection & professional growth through collaborative participation in cultural immersion

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The Bwindi region faces many challenges including access to healthcare, economic, and material resources, which may vary widely within Uganda. Malnutrition, food and water safety, sanitation and hygiene concerns, illness and infectious diseases across the lifespan, and the scarcity of safe birthing facilities are widespread issues (Braveman, 2014; Skolnik, 2016a; Skolnik, 2016b; Skolnik, 2016c).

Orientation sessions with assigned readings were scheduled with Dominican students prior to travel to familiarize students with historical, cultural, socio-economic, and political factors in the region of Bwindi. Student expectations included utilization of cross-cultural knowledge and culturally sensitive skills in implementing care to individuals and families, or in implementing community based interventions. Dominican students were also introduced to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2016). Once abroad, frequent informal meetings took place between Dominican faculty and the Director, UNSB to coordinate learning activities among students of both schools, to discuss unanticipated issues as they arose, and to implement contingency plans for learning as needed.

Pedagogy included active engagement and outreach with village health teams in providing health assessment, HIV/AIDS education and prevention to the local schools, collaborative “windscreen assessments” and home visits to the community for the purposes of planning and intervention. Under the supervision and guidance of faculty of both schools, the UNSB Director, and hospital staff, Dominican and UNSB students rotated in pairs through various areas of the hospital and clinic. Community discussions, people-to-people interactions, observations, and debriefings were ongoing activities. Faculty-led debriefings from both schools were a vital part of helping students examine other perspectives, systems, and roles within context of culture.



EVALUATION OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES & LEARNING OUTCOMES

An evaluation involving students and faculty of both schools took place at the end of the experience. For the purposes of academic credit, visiting students to Bwindi submitted written assignments to faculty which consisted of the following:

1. Reflective journals, which the faculty read, and provided written commentary.
2. A collaborative plan of care developed jointly with students of both schools using the “windscreen assessments”.
3. An integrative paper utilizing the literature, experience, and observation, that focused upon health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as defined by the United Nations.

Overall, students expressed appreciation and value for this high impact learning experience which has informed their worldviews. Ongoing communication, and advanced planning among participating entities is vital to ensure mutually relevant teaching-learning opportunities, and logistical coordination of personnel and resources for both the host and visitors.



SUMMARY

Strengths of this bilateral collaboration are:

- Enriched cultural perspectives and worldviews of nursing and healthcare delivery systems,
- Exposure to diseases and illnesses uncommon in the U.S.,
- Comparison and contrast of treatment interventions in both resource constrained, emerging and developed countries,
- Opportunity for faculty to share and exchange educational materials and teach classes in host country,
- Awareness of changes in ecosystems and their impact upon the health of individuals, families, and communities.

As study abroad programs continue to grow, it is important to develop effective bilateral measures to determine the long term impacts such programs have upon families and communities in the host country, and upon student learning, professional practice, and education.



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