

**Preparing Nurses for the New Millennium:
Information Competence for the Beginning Rural Nurse**



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Introduction

Humboldt State University (HSU) is located in Arcata, a small town with a population of 16,164 (1998 estimate by the Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau) nearly three hundred miles north of San Francisco. The area is remote and has a population density of 33.3 people per square mile in a county with 75% as much land area as the state of Connecticut (sources: *USA Counties 1998* ; *The World Almanac of the U.S.A. 1998*). HSU has a strong nursing program with 117 majors, 44 pre-majors, and 11 graduate students. The nursing student at HSU graduates with a bachelor of Science in Nursing degree and is prepared for entry level positions as: adult health nurses, medical-surgical nurses, geriatric nurses, mental health nurses, child health nurses, community health nurses, or childbearing health nurses. There is also a cooperative distance learning graduate program between HSU and Sonoma State University which offers a Master of Science in Nursing degree with a concentration as a Family Nurse Practitioner. The nursing program at HSU is approved by the California Board of Registered Nursing and accredited by the National League for Nursing.

According to the *Humboldt State University Catalog 2000-2001*, "Humboldt nursing students find the program emphasizes independence, problem solving, and critical thinking, which helps them develop flexibility in their careers." As a result, nursing students do research projects for which they need skills in seeking, locating, acquiring, and critically evaluating information. For twenty years, the author has worked closely with nursing faculty in teaching library research skills. Beginning with the fundamental nursing skills course taken in the first semester, the author teaches basic library skills in a "one-shot" library instruction class to all nursing students. Nursing students are then taught more advanced skills (e.g., how to search CINAHL, how to search the web, etc.) in subsequent semesters. The immediate goal is to have students learn the skills necessary to do research, prosper in school, and ultimately graduate. But what happens to these students after they graduate? A large percentage of the nursing graduates at HSU go to work in rural locations and do not have access to many, if any, libraries. However, most graduates should have access to computers and Internet resources. Thus, the new professional nurse in a rural setting relies more on digital information than the new nurse in a more metropolitan setting.

Information Competence in the Professions Project

HSU is the northernmost campus of the *California State University (CSU)* system. In 1997 the *California State University Information Competence Work Group Report* was published. This report included a list of seven *CSU Core Information Competencies*. A system wide conference on information competencies was held in fall 1997. After hearing a report from the representative who attended the conference, a group of four HSU librarians decided to apply for a grant from the *CSU Commission on Learning Resources and Instructional Technology* to fund the Information Competence in the Professions project. The project was designed to develop lists of information competence skills and course modules to

teach those skills for the professions of journalism, nursing, and social work. The project was funded in early 1998.

The author was responsible for developing the list of skills and course modules for nursing. To develop the list of information competence skills, the nursing faculty was consulted and asked what skills they felt all nursing students should have upon graduation. The author was surprised to learn that, in addition to the standard skills related to seeking and evaluating information, the nursing faculty thought it was important for all students to be able to *present* information and data using such software as Powerpoint and Excel. The Nursing Information Literacy Skills were approved by the nursing faculty in spring 1998. Course modules were then developed to address the identified skills. The entire project may be viewed at the Information Competence in the Professions page as seen below:



Course Modules for Nursing

Modules developed specifically for nursing students include:

- Nursing: A Guide to Doing Research in HSU Library
- CINAHL on WebSpirs: A Crib Sheet
- Nursing Resources on the Web

- [How Are Your Nursing Information Competence Skills?](#)

Course Modules for General Competencies

In addition to the discipline specific modules, a number of modules were created to teach general competencies. The general competency modules include:

- [Coping with Information Overload](#)
- [Information Overload Bibliography](#)
- [Kuhlthau's Model of the Stages of the Information Process](#)
- [Join the Conversation: Listservs](#)
- [How to Get Started Using PowerPoint 4.0](#)
- [PowerPoint 97 Tutorials](#)
- [Excel Tutorials](#)
- [3 Steps to Creating a Web Page at HSU](#)
- [How to Format a Web Page](#)
- [How to Grab Images off the Web](#)

Incorporation of Modules into Curriculum

Nursing professors have incorporated some of the modules into their courses on an as needed basis. One senior level course, Nursing Research, had students take the [How Are Your Nursing Information Competence Skills?](#) test at the beginning and end of the course for extra credit in fall 1999. The author will continue to work with nursing faculty to integrate and revise the modules into their courses.

Future Plans

Future plans for the Information Competence in the Professions project include:

- Continue the integration of modules into courses
- Develop a module on free and inexpensive modules that students will be able to search after graduation
- Continue development of assessment tools and tests
- Develop tutorials on multimedia use, e.g., streaming videos
- Add a module on inexpensive document delivery services for those who have no access to Interlibrary Loan services
- Add more professions to the project; e.g., environmental engineers, psychologists, etc.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the nursing modules developed for the Information Competence in the Professions project will help students not only develop skills needed to complete their coursework, but will also help them after graduation by providing resources to them no matter where they may roam. As long as there is access to the web, nursing students will have the world of information "at their fingertips."