Phyllis D. Morgan, PhD, APRN, BC, Joshua Fogel, PhD,
Pauline Hicks, MSLS, AMD, AHIP, Laura Wright, MSLS,
and Indira Tyler, MS, RN

Strategic Enhancement of Nursing Students Information Literacy Skills: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Abstract: *Nursing students are required to keep abreast of evolving new health care information. It is important for nursing students to develop the skills and knowledge to access nursing and medical databases for their professional growth and development to perform evidence-based practice. A collaborative approach between faculty and librarians is one way to ensure the success of students in acquiring the skills on how to access and use new health care information. The collaborators of this paper discuss strategies of how to conduct database searches for research articles. This paper is written in collaboration with faculty, librarians, and a doctoral student who have experience teaching nursing students at a historically black college and/or university, or at minority serving institutions.*

Key Words: *Information Literacy, Health Disparities, Nursing Students*

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In our rapidly changing health care society, information literacy programs are becoming essential to the success of nursing programs. More specifically, nursing programs are incorporating information literacy programs into their curriculum to ensure students' success in developing lifelong learning skills for obtaining information useful for their professional development. Current literature suggests that the major advantage of incorporating information literacy programs into nursing curricula is to prepare students with the ability to recognize when information is needed and to develop the necessary skills to locate, evaluate, and use information legally and ethically (Barnard, Nash, & O'Brien, 2005; Little, 2006; Verhey, 1999; Wallace, Shorten, Crookes, McGurk, & Brewer, 1999).

Typically, nursing students will need information literacy skills to implement evidenced-based approaches to clinical practice, to complete classroom assignments such as scholarly papers and research projects, and to actively participate in class discussions on current and relevant health care issues in nursing. Ultimately, the goal is to create a scholarly environment conducive to a positive teaching and learning environment for faculty, students, and librarians (Dorner, Taylor, & Hodson-Carlton, 2001; Verhey, 1999; Wallace et al., 1999).

Several historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and/or minority institutions (MIs) have been funded through private and federal agencies to conduct health disparity research. One approach to assisting nursing students make a linkage between theory, research, and clinical practice is to have students focus on a specific research area such as health disparities. Selecting health disparities as a focus can provide nursing students with information about the problem. It will also ensure that they will work toward either eliminating health disparities or to help ensure that they do not exist in their personal health care practices.

The purposes of this paper are to: 1) discuss the benefits of traditional and integrative information literacy programs; and 2) describe activities to enhance information literacy among nursing students at a HBCU and/or MI. This paper is written in collaboration with one nursing faculty, two health science librarians, one statistician, and one doctoral student. All the collaborators of this paper have participated in health disparities research at HBCUs and/or MIs. The collaborators on this paper have also been advocates for providing instruction and guidance for nursing students to enhance their information literacy skills. In today's thrust to eliminate health disparities among racial/ethnic groups, it is essential to equip nursing students with the necessary information skills to locate appropriate quantitative and qualitative resources that address health disparity issues.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: A STATISTICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

There are a number of areas that are helpful for teaching nursing students how to conduct database searches for quantitative health disparity articles. One point that is useful to convey on the first day of class and reinforce over

a number of classes is that everyone can accomplish this task. Some students may believe that a lot of what they are taught in college about nursing research is quite intimidating. After all, their goal is to become a nurse and not some professor who conducts research. The professor should emphasize that as long as a student attends class and listens to what is being discussed, this seemingly complex process can be demystified. It also is useful to emphasize numerous times the professor's respect for students' ideas and provide constant positive reinforcement for the ideas that students think of based upon information students retrieve from their literature reviews. It is also useful for the professor to convey that the professor views student contributions as similar to what the professor experiences when working with peers with a great deal of research experience. This concept of promoting respect, encouragement, and considering the students as possible colleagues has similarly been successfully applied with diverse ethnic and low income high school students in a summer seminar to encourage their interest in attending medical school (Greenhalgh, Russell, & Dunkley, 2006).

- Another area that nursing students may find quite confusing is what is considered a relevant peer-reviewed quantitative research article. For many of their other classes, these students may typically search on the Internet for relevant sources. The Internet is a useful resource but is not necessarily the best place to find material on quantitative research about health disparity topics. The professor should explain that a peer-reviewed article is reviewed by scholars to ensure accuracy and meaningfulness. Quantitative data that are discussed and published in the peer-reviewed literature often involves inferential statistics that have been reviewed by scholars to ensure that the methods used and the analytical techniques performed are proper. This contrasts with an article published on the Internet, where anyone can have an article published, and often there are no formal measure of quality requirements in order for material to be published on a website (Connor-Greene & Greene, 2002).

It is useful for the professor to individually show nursing students in a computer laboratory how to search relevant databases such as CINAHL, PsycINFO, and PubMed for health disparity topics. This approach allows nursing students to use their computer to simultaneously replicate searches so that they can actually master the skills taught. Although many students have excellent Internet search skills, an explanation of subject terms, key words and database "limits" is needed. For example, students can be shown how to limit search results to particular racial/ethnic populations. These are new skills that many may have never previously performed (Joswick, 1994). Also, although students could ask librarians about how to properly search these databases for particular topics, they may not perceive the librarians as experts for their particular class research topic.

Another important area is the actual article retrieved from the searches. Students can be instructed to look for academic peer-reviewed articles on health disparity topics that have quantitative data. A simple way to help students determine if it is a quantitative article is to specify that it should have a great deal of numbers in the Results section. Many of the nursing students do not have the advanced statistical background to understand all the statistical details that are described in the article. It is useful to emphasize to nursing students that they do not have to read and fully understand the entire article with all these possible complex statistical results. It is also worth stating that even those with doctoral educational levels do not always understand every statistical point in a published article. One can suggest to nursing students that a

useful approach is to select specific points from the obtained article on the particular health disparity topic. A sentence or two based on the content from each quantitative article read is the typical style for quoting quantitative research. This style is typically employed by seasoned health disparity researchers.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: A NURSING PROFESSOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Similar to quantitative research, qualitative research also requires systematic and rigorous approaches toward addressing a problem identified in nursing. Qualitative research involves subjective and interactive approaches to develop a more in-depth understanding of the life experiences of individuals and/or families to give those experiences meaning. Qualitative research is often used to validate or confirm quantitative research findings. Often qualitative research is viewed as a "soft science" when compared to quantitative research; therefore, in many nursing research courses, the goal is to assist nursing students to develop an appreciation for qualitative research, as many researchers use qualitative methods to develop a richer understanding of the phenomena of interest being studied (Speziale, Streubert, & Carpenter, 2003).

A basic understanding of the various methods used to conduct qualitative research should be initiated in an undergraduate nursing program. Nursing students should acquire the knowledge and skills to identify a qualitative research study and have an understanding of the various methods used to conduct a qualitative research study. These methods are based on the focus of the research project. There are different methods used to conduct qualitative research such as ethnographic methods, phenomenologic methods, grounded theory methods, and focus group methods (Speziale, Streubert, & Carpenter, 2003). Qualitative research is often used to understand the cultural beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of illness and disease of an understudied and/or vulnerable population which may not be captured utilizing quantitative instruments that are not culturally appropriate or specific for the population being studied. Several researchers have demonstrated the utility of qualitative research methods to explore health disparity issues among minorities and vulnerable populations (Forrester-Anderson, 2005; Henderson, Gore, Davis, & Condon, 2003; Morgan et al., 2005; Williams-Brown, Baldwin, & Bakos, 2002).

There are several strategies that can be used to facilitate the teaching-learning process of nursing students to understand the uniqueness and importance of qualitative research. The goal of a nursing curriculum should be to provide a foundation regarding nursing research and theory for applicability to nursing and health care delivery. Often, nursing students find it difficult to translate research into clinical practice. One strategy to help focus nursing students' attention to the need and applicability of nursing research to clinical practice is to select a general, but relevant nursing topic that has a strong implication for nursing research. Some requirements for a nursing course may include various techniques and strategies to ensure that students have a comprehensive understanding of the implications that can be drawn from a qualitative research study.

One strategy that is commonly used by professors teaching nursing research is to have students select a qualitative research article for critique and discussion. This article may focus on an issue relevant to health disparities. For example, one can discuss the study which used grounded theory methods to explore the coping processes used among African

American women with breast cancer and their spouses (Morgan et al., 2005). The professor can discuss with students how the study provided more insight about strategies nurses can use to improve the health outcomes of African American women and their spouses coping with a breast cancer diagnosis.

A second strategy is to demonstrate how to conduct library searches in classrooms that have available advanced technology and computer equipment. For example, a health science librarian can be invited to a nursing research course to provide an electronic visualization of how to access online databases relevant for nursing students. This has been regarded as a positive experience among nursing students. Nursing students often find this engaging and especially helpful if it is offered at the beginning of the course.

A third strategy is to have nursing students interview a researcher who conducts qualitative research and whose focus is on health disparity issues. For example, the professor of the course can provide a semi-structured interview guide for students to interview faculty who conduct health disparities research. Before the interview, the students can go online and access articles that have been published by this researcher, as well as obtain any relevant articles related to that particular health disparity issue. This will allow students to connect both with the published research in that article and also with the researcher. Additionally nursing students can obtain more insight about how qualitative data are collected through face-to-face interviews with a health disparities researcher.

Lastly, the final product of a nursing curriculum, in particular a nursing research course, is generally a major paper or research project. Eliminating and/or reducing health disparities by the year 2010 is a major priority for nursing and other health sciences research (Campanelli, 2003; Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova, & Harper, 2005). It is essential to guide nursing students to develop an appreciation for qualitative research to explore health disparities. According to Sullivan-Bolyai and others (2005), utilizing qualitative methods can assist researchers with assessing, developing, and refining interventions for individuals with health disparities. Nursing students can be instructed to select a researchable health disparities topic and develop a concept or theory based paper. This can demonstrate to the professor that the students are able to conduct a comprehensive literature review of a health disparity topic.

INTEGRATIVE APPROACH: A HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU) libraries have long realized the crucial role they play in information education at their institutions. They have, therefore, become very effective in developing instructional programs that introduce and orient information users so that students gain a good degree of exposure to information literacy skills. However, the world in which libraries operate has changed dramatically since the advent of the Internet and the shift of information resources to electronic format. These changes have resulted in a revolution in the ways that libraries operate and how library users are taught about library resources (Lorenzen, 2006).

Changes in curricula and subsequent workforce requirements demand information competencies that exceed library instruction alone. Academic libraries, faculty disciplines, and professional organizations have now recognized the need for a paradigm shift from traditional isolated, unstructured library instruction to the development of strong and enduring information literacy skills. This concern is especially critical to undergraduate nursing programs in HBCUs. The information environment and the proliferation of electronic resources in new health-related databases are constant, creating a need for almost continual end-user training and support. These future nurses not only must be trained to become proficient users of information resources and in obtaining health information about their profession, but also to reach out to an underserved population whose members may not be aware of, or have ready access to web-based health information resources. In order for these nurses to provide safe and effective care, they need a satisfactory knowledge base and the skills to incorporate research findings into practice. HBCU libraries not only must have well equipped facilities that provide sophisticated access to a wide range of information in a variety of media and formats, but must also assure that the users have familiarity with computers, adequate skills in researching information, and the ability to interpret and use the content.

The trend toward evidence-based research in nursing education programs has also impacted a change in focus on library information literacy instruction. The Medical Library Association Task Force on Health Information Literacy has defined Health Information Literacy as the set of abilities needed to "recognize a health information need, identify likely information sources and use them to retrieve relevant information, assess the quality of the information and its applicability to a specific situation, and analyze, understand, and use the information to make good health decisions" (Medical Library Association, 2003). The definition as applied to evidence-based research in nursing requires that nursing education tackle the issue of information literacy. The health care fields are now demanding a more research-based approach to nursing and health care. The idea underpinning the concept of information literacy in the nurse education context is that nursing students need to be provided with opportunities and incentives to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for research awareness and learn how to access and appreciate relevant research findings (Wallace et al., 1999). Nursing programs where this concept is embraced believe that the primary aim of undergraduate nursing courses is to enable graduates to provide safe, effective nursing care in a variety of health-care settings. In order to provide individualized and effective solutions for their clients, nurses have to be able to solve clinical problems and meet competing demands. In pursuit of that objective, librarians and nursing faculty may need to consider alternative approaches to nursing information literacy instruction.

While there is an acknowledged need for all students and faculty to become information literate, there is little information on what are the most appropriate and effective ways to assist in this development. Libraries have a variety of approaches to user education from which to choose. They can choose to provide information and instruction through course-related and course-integrated instruction, hands-on active learning, orientations, formal courses, tutorials, pathfinders, and point-of-use instruction, including the reference interview. Technological advances makes possible for any and all of these modes to be combined with traditional methods of library instruction. Libraries have a long tradition of classroom-based education, utilizing all of these formats. In some institutions, librarians and classroom faculty form liaisons to plan for incorporating the skills into the subject discipline including educational outcomes assessment. This involves a library staff member attending all the department meetings of the nursing department.

One consideration may be of the knowledge transmission type, a c*redit bearing information literacy class* where information literacy can be taught as a stand alone subject of study with appropriate learning and teaching methods. Another option is a *curriculum-integrated approach* in which the development of skills and knowledge is integrated into the teaching, learning, and assessment of curriculum objectives and content. Where institutions have a common first year curriculum, information literacy components may be included within a *core curriculum* of the foundation year. Information instruction in this type program would need to be reinforced and extended to later years in order to have lasting effectiveness. For example, some institutions depend on online information tutorials to support the literacy efforts. Effective use of tutorials require that librarians and faculty become actively involved in guidance, as students seldom will volunteer to use this mode of instruction.

TRADITIONAL LIBRARY INSTRCUTION: A LIBRARIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Traditional library instruction, consisting of one class taught by a librarian at the request of the instructor, is limited by its very nature. The librarian has only one opportunity to reach the students in a formal setting. In schools that lack a formal information literacy program, faculty and librarians must make a consistent effort to reach out, connect, and collaborate to bring students the learning opportunities they need. There are several things the librarian and nursing faculty can do to ensure the information literacy is as useful and meaningful as possible. Before the bibliographic instruction occurs the librarian and nursing faculty can discuss and design a focused course outline. Timing of the class is important; instruction needs to occur after an assignment has been made but before the majority of the semester is over in order for students to fully take advantage of what they have learned. When students have a chance to participate in hands-on practice, they will be more engaged and remember more of the instruction. At the end of the bibliographic instruction, students should understand and be able to:

- access off-campus library databases
- conduct advanced searches (e.g., Boolean, saving citations)
- search specific databases (e.g., CINAHL, PsycINFO, PubMed)
- identify types of research (i.e., primary versus secondary, qualitative versus quantitative, scholarly articles versus non-peer reviewed articles)
- evaluate search results for relevance and reliability.

A review of the nursing and library literature reveals various examples of nursing faculty and librarians collaborating to integrate library and information literacy skills into the nursing curriculum (Dorner, Taylor, & Hodson-Carlton, 2001; Jacobs, Rosenfeld, & Haber, 2003; Xiao, 2005). An interesting program designed to introduce nursing students to resources and research skills in transcultural nursing addresses many of the challenges faced by nursing students researching health disparities. The librarian and nursing faculty must meet before the class begins to discuss and decide upon program objectives, class size, timing of the instruction within the semester, and program components. Working together to define the program objectives allows for more focused and timely instruction. When information literacy instruction occurs after a major project or paper has been assigned, students are motivated to participate and can clearly see a benefit to the instruction. Smaller class sizes allow for more interaction between the students and librarian,

and allows for students to do hands-on exercises. Creating a website focused on a specific research topic gives students a starting point in their research and extends the information literacy session. Of course, the most important element to such a program is having faculty and librarians committed to the program (Xiao, 2005).

A generic course outline, developed for nursing literacy instruction at a HBCU, allows the librarian to focus each instructional session to meet the needs of that particular class. The generic nursing literacy course introduces students to the library's services and online presence, shows students how to access library services both on and off campus, and covers the major nursing databases, such as CINAHL and PubMed, among others. When the class has specific research needs, in this case health disparities research, the generic nursing course provides a backbone the librarian can customize by focusing on how to conduct a literature search on health disparities and selecting appropriate databases and websites. Using a customizable generic course outline ensures that each class receives the same basic elements of instruction (i.e., off campus access, Boolean search skills, etc.) and also allows the librarian to focus on advanced search skills and topics specific to an individual class. Another advantage of utilizing this format is that the librarian does not have to create a unique course every time, which is an important consideration when there is only one health sciences librarian at an institution. Figure 1 provides a sample course outline. Table 1 provides relevant website resources useful for students conducting

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Figure 1. Generic Nursing Information Literacy Course Outline, Collaboratively Developed by the Librarian and Nursing Faculty

- **Faculty**
  - ❏ Introduce the Librarian
  - ❏ Review Research Assignment(s)
- **Librarian**
  - ❏ Introduction to the Library
  - ❏ Library Services
    - ■ Off-Campus Access
    - ■ Interlibrary Loan
  - ❏ Nursing Subject Guide
  - ❏ Introduction to Library Research Subject Guide
  - ❏ How to Conduct a Literature Search
  - ❏ Search Skills and Tips
    - ■ Boolean Search
    - ■ Saving Citations
  - ❏ Library Catalog
  - ❏ Selecting and Searching Online Databases
    - ■ Database Finder
    - ■ Conducting Database Searches
      - • Basic Search
      - • Advanced Search
      - • Boolean Search
      - • Save/Print/Email Results and Searches
  - ❏ Focus on Health Disparities Information Resources and Search Examples
    - • CINAHL, Medline/PubMed, PsycINFO, Proquest Nursing Journals
    - • Health Disparities Websites and Online Resources
  - ❏ Conclusion

Table 1. Useful Websites for Students Interested in Conducting Health Disparities Research

Name of Web Site	Web Site Address
National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities	http://ncmhd.nih.gov/
Center for Disease Control (CDC) Office of Minority Health	www.cdc.gov/omh/
Child Trend Databank	www.childtrendsdatabank.org
Healthy People 2010 Database	www.healthypeople.gov
Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Library	www.mchlibrary.info
National Quality Measures Clearinghouse (NQMC)	www.qualitymeasures.ahrq.gov
National Cancer Institute, The Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences	http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/dccps
PubMed	http://www.pubmed.gov

health disparities research.

INFORMATION LITERACY: A HBCU DOCTORAL STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

The expectations of undergraduate nursing students differ somewhat from the expectations professors have of graduate nursing students. In an undergraduate program of study, students are expected to have a broad knowledge base that incorporates research and its influence on nursing practice; in contrast, graduate students are expected to engage in conducting research and to engage in the development of theoretical frameworks and conceptual models that will promote the delivery of quality health care. As a nursing doctoral student, having access to information to complete assignments, to conduct literature reviews, and to verify information is a vital and integral part for successfully progressing through a program of study. Professors expect that graduate nursing students have a working knowledge of how to conduct a comprehensive literature search. This skill is embedded in various assignments, and, on a doctoral level, it is expected that students are continuously gathering scientific research support from relevant databases for their area of research. Particularly within many graduate degree programs, tutorials and modules are offered that facilitate knowledge of nursing informatics to ensure that students are aware of and are able to utilize the resources available through library services.

Many nursing programs offer modules at a juncture in the curriculum where students are in need of access to library services. Integrating the module into the curriculum is vital. In fact, the library services information content is closely associated with class assignments that provide an opportunity for application that furthers the student's comprehension (Dorner, Taylor, & Hodson-Carlton, 2001). In the tutorial or module, library services can provide an orientation that enables the student to learn about the following activities: how to search for relevant articles, how to obtain relevant articles, how to mark and e-mail/print the desired information, how to search for e-books, how to create a web-based library account, how to request articles that the library does not own, how to request and receive a library card allowing one to use library services, and how to use the library website to access nursing and medical databases, and, most importantly, how to contact a librarian for assistance.

Of all of the services that the library provides its students during tutorials and modules, one key skill is providing tutorials on how to conduct a search using Boolean Logic. Narrowing a literature search to view a particular subject area can help the student to differentiate between primary and secondary sources. This process can greatly aid the student in conducting a concise literature search and can help provide strategies that help to filter out extraneous information. This also is very relevant when conducting literature reviews and broader searches regarding health disparities topics. Addressing health disparities topics concertedly as a graduate student is the premise of the graduate education, and the graduate student's objective is to engage in efforts that seek to narrow the gap in health disparities that currently exist between American citizens of ethnic and racial origins.

When working to complete a program of study, nursing students realize that library services are paramount to successfully accessing health care information. The library or library resources are the sources for many of the relevant articles obtained. Many nursing research articles provide vital data related to health disparities using quantitative methods. As a graduate nursing student, there is an expectation that the student acquires an understanding of quantitative research; this is done through article critiques and data analysis. Also, there is an expectation that the student is able to locate quantitative research findings and has the ability to sufficiently navigate library services. Additionally in nursing research, qualitative research provides a measurement of experiences and a deeper understanding of an issue. The same skill set regarding obtaining quantitative research articles is expected too. Conducting thorough searches for articles utilizing library services is essential for success in a nursing graduate program. Thus, it is essential for nursing students to begin preparation at the undergraduate level on how to conduct database searches and critique research articles to be successful graduate students.

CONCLUSION

Nursing students are often eager learners and want to be equipped with the necessary skills to be successful nurse clinicians, educators, leaders, and client advocates once they complete a nursing program. Working with minority students often requires faculty to develop innovative ways to tailor educational information to meet their specific needs. There are many innovative ways for nursing faculty and librarians to collaborate to ensure that students are comfortable with accessing and utilizing health information to meet their lifelong professional needs (Barnard et al., 2005; Little, 2006; Verhey, 1999; Wallace et al., 1999).

Encouragement to students that they have the ability to comprehend articles discussing quantitative data is a useful

first step. Quantitative research is not some mysterious statistical process; most of an article can be understood. It is important to remember that one does not have to master every detail, as even those who are experienced researchers do not necessarily understand everything reported. Both quantitative and qualitative research can be taught with an emphasis on reading the articles for translation into clinical practice. This will help interest and motivate the students.

Formal information literacy sessions are very useful for nursing students to receive the depth and quality of instruction they need to become information literate. Incorporating information literacy sessions into a nursing curriculum helps ensure that students are motivated to learn the skills needed to complete current class assignments and meet future research challenges. When nursing faculty and librarians collaborate, they can enhance the nursing students' learning experiences.

A basic part of every health sciences library should be the task of providing a well planned library literacy instructional program that acquaints students with the effective and efficient use of the library as well as with the use of information storage and retrieval techniques. The primary goal is to cultivate information literate nursing students through the development of classes and other instructional resources and programs. This can include an emphasis on life-long learning and information management skills needed to access and evaluate health sciences information for problem solving and decision-making. An effective method of information literacy instruction can incorporate both librarians and nursing faculty to work collaboratively as a team. The librarians must become members of subject specific teams regardless of the curriculum or the courses.

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Phyllis D. Morgan, PhD, APRN, BC, *is an Assistant Professor Department of Nursing at Fayetteville State University, 1200 Murchison Road, Fayetteville, NC 28301. Dr. Morgan may be reached at: 910/ 672-2608 Fax or E-mail: pmorgan@uncfsu.edu.* **Joshua Fogel, PhD,** *is Assistant Professor of Business and Behavioral Sciences in the Department of Economics, Statistician at the Brooklyn College, City University of New York (CUNY). E-mail: joshua.fogel@gmail.com.* **Pauline Hicks, MSLS, AMD, AHIP,** *works at the University Librarian Science Research Center Library at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. E-mail: pauline.hicks@famu.edu .* **Laura Wright, MSLS,** *is the Interlibrary Loan and Reference Librarian, Charles W. Chestnutt Library at Fayetteville State University. E-mail: lwright@uncfsu.edu .* **Indira Tyler, MS, RN,** *is a Lecturer, Fayetteville State University and a Doctoral Student at Hampton University School of Nursing in Hampton, VA. E-mail: ityler@uncfsu.edu.*