

Building International Partnerships: Exploring Spanish Healthcare Through the Lens of Nursing Leadership

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We live in a global society, where nurses impact and influence healthcare within and beyond U.S. borders. *The Essentials of Baccalaureate for Professional Nursing Practice* states “the increasing globalization of healthcare requires that professional nurses be prepared to practice in a multicultural environment and possess skills needed to provide culturally competent care” (AACN, 2008, p. 30). As the rapidly changing cultural geography is occurring in the United States, cultural competence among nurses is crucial (Roller & Ballestas, 2017; Thompson & Johns, 2009). Additionally, the baccalaureate nurse is competent to care for diverse patients while applying leadership concepts, decision making skill, and critical thinking in varied settings and environments (AACN, 2008). A *New York Post* article clarified there are more Spanish speaking individuals in the U.S. than in Spain (Perez, 2015). While many higher education specialties offer study abroad programs which prepare students to reside in and work in global communities, the structure of nursing curricula often prohibits opportunities for cultural immersion and exposure to study abroad experiences (Carpenter & Garcia, 2012). Wright (2010) documents that most literature related to study abroad focus on research or accounting of personal experiences, lacking information related to planning and developing sustainable programs. The purpose of this abstract is to share how a baccalaureate-nursing program developed a sustainable and ongoing collaboration with the Spanish culture. In addition, findings from our 2019 Spanish nursing study abroad program will be shared, demonstrating student perceptions related to unique opportunities for cultural immersion, comparing and contrasting U.S. and Spanish healthcare, nursing regulation and nursing leadership.

A Southeastern Conference (SEC) Travel grant framed the basis to begin developing a nursing study abroad program. Included in this effort is the ability to improve cultural competence. Initially, three SEC nursing schools were anticipated to participate, however, due to unforeseen circumstances, the collaboration did not materialize. Subsequently, a year of intense planning led to the development of an independent study abroad program, *Healthcare and Leadership in Nursing Abroad*.

Crucial to developing a sustainable study abroad program is selecting a reliable and trustworthy vendor to lead in developing and planning the experience. In collaboration with the university’s study abroad department, a vendor was selected. A planning meeting took place on the SEC host campus where a program outline and requirements were defined. The plan included a 10-day study abroad program in Seville, Spain, where nursing students would learn about differences in health care systems between Spain and the U.S., regulatory policies that govern hospitals, roles and responsibilities of nurses in a Spanish hospital, care of the elderly and the academic curriculum of nursing schools. Program participants would have the opportunity to meet local nursing and medical students as well as participate in a variety of cultural activities and a weekend excursion to Granada, Spain. Student accommodations would include *homestays* where students reside with Spanish families, further allowing for cultural immersion. Families would be carefully selected by the vendor to offer an invaluable international family life experience. Additionally, family housing would be located within reasonable walking distances from the hospital and nursing school.

The university’s study abroad liaison and nursing faculty believed it would be best practice for faculty leading the student experience to become familiar with the study abroad location and sites where students would be traveling. Thus, two faculty traveled to Seville where they visited vendor staff, host families and facilities. Having faculty familiar with the *lay of the land* and who could navigate students through a foreign country increased security and safety of participants. In spring 2017, *Healthcare and Leadership in Nursing Abroad* came to fruition when nine nursing students traveled to Seville to

experience a real-world perspective on health care, nursing culture and leadership.

Further development and to build on the inaugural and improve the nursing study abroad program morphed into an expanded three-week experience in Pamplona, Spain summer 2019. In addition to cultural experiences, building Spanish language skills became a focused priority, largely because of the need for effective communication skills among nurses and the diverse patient populations within the United States (Kostovich & Bermele, 2011). Lead faculty worked with an alternate vendor specializing in international education to develop a detailed day by day itinerary. Students would attend Spanish lesson classes where they would learn general and healthcare Spanish language in addition to experiencing educational and cultural activities. Such activities would include hospital and nursing school collaborations, interactions with healthcare leaders, cooking class and castle/winery/museum tours. A major difference for students who attend this program would be that weekends would be free to allow independent travel throughout the country. Pre-nursing as well as current nursing students were eligible to attend and the ability to speak Spanish was not a requirement. Summer 2019, nine pre-nursing and nursing students participated in *Spanish for Healthcare and Culture* study abroad in Pamplona, Spain. With university IRB approval, upon return, students were invited and provided consent in research regarding their experience. Students completed a faculty developed survey which included items from the Cultural Awareness Scale (CAS) designed to measure outcomes of a program promoting multicultural awareness (Rew & Becker et al., 2003). For the purposes of this presentation, five of the survey items are summarized.

Out of the entire group, none had participated in study abroad. All students preferred more healthcare Spanish lessons and less general Spanish lessons. Additionally, they unanimously believed an instructor with medical terminology background should teach the healthcare Spanish lessons versus an instructor lacking a healthcare background. All students expressed favorite parts of the program as being the healthcare and cultural tours, excursions, independent weekend excursions and healthcare Spanish lessons. Students cited the top two needed changes to the program as 1) No Spanish lessons on Friday to allow for longer independent weekend travel, and 2) Shorten class time to less than five hours and/or break into shorter class times. Other suggestions for change included arranging for homestays to be closer to school, more healthcare visits and more variety of restaurants for the 'paid' daily lunches.

As the 2020 study abroad program developed, survey results from the 2019 experience informed modifications to the program and agenda. A major modification included adding an elective international course to be taught by nursing faculty. Approximately 15 students had registered to participate in the elective course and had begun plans to study abroad in Pamplona four weeks during summer 2020. Unfortunately, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic halted study abroad programs. Given the uncertainty of the pandemic outcome, faculty opted to postpone the elective course and travel experience until 2022.

In conclusion, nursing curricula facilitate the acquisition of leadership abilities through didactic and clinical opportunities for leadership skill development. One strategy to achieve cultural competence is through sustainable study abroad programs. Learning from a global perspective is a unique opportunity to enhance cultural competence and build skill in foreign languages (Carpenter & Garcia, 2012). In response to the University's goal to *elevate the student experience*, nursing faculty are committed to maintain an international presence while preparing students to practice in a global economy. Teaching and learning must be supported by a commitment to develop and maintain an international presence and prepare students for today's global society.

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