

Undergraduate community assessment incorporating Omaha System community-level descriptors: A feasibility study

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Purpose: To develop student fluency in standardized terminology at the community level. **Background:** The Omaha System, a standardized nursing vocabulary, is used in public health for individual-level assessments, and increasingly for community-level assessments. **Method:** Feasibility of incorporating Omaha System descriptors in an undergraduate community assignment was studied by: 1) Expert panel assessment to determine if Omaha System terminology could be matched with narrative statements about community strengths and opportunities for improvement in 6 archived student community assessments. 2) Pilot with senior-level undergraduates by including Omaha System community-level descriptors in their assignment based on the Community Assessment Instrument for Baccalaureate Learners (CAIBL). To incorporate the Omaha System, students were asked to restate the community's identified "opportunities for improvement" using the Omaha System Problem Classification Scheme. In preparation for this assignment, students completed an Omaha System on-line learning module that included a community-level case study and three individual-level case studies. **Results:** 1) Expert panelists found matches within the Omaha System for each of the students' narrative statements, and reached 80% agreement on Problem Classification Scheme problems for 67% of the items. 2) Students were successful in completing the on-line community-level case study independently. Students completed the adapted CAIBL assignment in 5 communities in the Twin Cities metro area in fall 2006. Problems identified included communicating with community resources (13), neighborhood/workplace safety (7), income (5), health care supervision (2), residence (2), spirituality (2), interpersonal relationships, nutrition, and substance use. The assessments identified priority areas for each community and served as a basis for the students to develop interventions. **Conclusion:** Adding Omaha System descriptors to the CAIBL project offers an opportunity to standardize student community assessments. The future public health nursing workforce can experience using standardized terminology in describing community assessments, the first step towards measuring community-level outcomes.