Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Educational Innovations in the UTHSC College of Nursing Make a Difference in People’s Lives

By: Cynthia Russell, PhD, APN, BC, and Vicki Murrell, MEd

The 2002-03 academic year marked 105 years that the UTHSC College of Nursing has been active in educating nurses. For most of that time, the college has been at the forefront of innovative nursing education, thanks to the quality, energy, and dedication of the college’s administration, faculty, staff, and students.

Myriad changes in the world of healthcare have spurred a continual metamorphosis of the nursing profession; among them are the advancements in technology that have changed the workplace, as well as the educational environment. The college has harnessed the energy of innovation to help its students and faculty to become stronger, more flexible, and more efficient practitioners of care both within the school and outside its “walls.” As you look at the record of change in our past, the rich dimension of people and experience in our present, and the incredible capacity for our future, we hope you will join us in an appreciation for the unique contributions made by the UTHSC College of Nursing.

Yesterday: 1898-2001

The UTHSC College of Nursing has a long history of innovation in the design and delivery of exemplary nursing education. As a leader in education and patient care, the college was among the first nursing programs (and often was—the first nursing program) in the country to:

- transition from diploma to baccalaureate education as initial preparation for nurses (1950s)
- initiate a graduate program in nursing designed to prepare advanced practice nurses (1970s)
- begin an accelerated baccalaureate program in nursing for individuals holding a baccalaureate in another field (1970s)
- realize the importance of forensic nursing, opening a rape crisis center for family nurse clinician students (1970s)
- devote full attention to graduate-level preparation of nurses by suspending the baccalaureate program and concentrating on the MSN, DNSc, and PhD programs (1990s)
- implement a clinical doctorate program (DNSc) that co-exists with a research doctorate program (PhD) (1998)

Many of today’s ideas about healthcare and education have been common practice for years in the college. Interdisciplinary education, which first occurred when our faculty and students partnered with physician colleagues and medical students for classroom and clinical experiences, was implemented decades ago. The college has long realized the importance of having faculty active in practice. We began using telephone conferences to connect distant public health nursing students and utilized state-wide interactive television for family nurse practitioner students. In the early 1990s, we started using the Internet for delivery of course materials and formally started our online DNSc program in 1998, using an integrated course management system.

This rich history of innovations has poised our college to be the vanguard in the global delivery of a quality curriculum. Our unique educational programs are making a marked difference in the lives of current students and faculty. Just as importantly, however, are the seeds being sowed for future learners.

Today: 2002-2003

Living Life As Normally As Possible

Anita Noble, a 2nd year DNSc student, attends UTHSC College of Nursing from her home in Israel. Adding to the responsibilities of being married and the mother of five children (ages 7 to 21), Anita spends “about 7 to 12 hours per day doing schoolwork. As the semester progresses, I spend more time at the computer. There are many times that I’m on the computer in the very early morning hours doing coursework.” Such flexibility in completing coursework, even though Israel is eight hours ahead of the Central time zone, is possible because of the asynchronous structure of our online courses.
“Beyond My Expectations”

Living in rural Tennessee, Jeff Young dreamed of continuing his education. Married and working full-time (from 10 to 18 hours a day), Jeff would not have been able to quit work and relocate to pursue his education. However, he stated, “The distance program at UTHSC allowed me to have a busy life, yet at the same time complete my dream of continuing my education.” Indeed, while Jeff believed that his “goals and future were set” on entering the master’s degree program in the family nurse practitioner option, he commented, “Through the excellent training I received at UTHSC, I was able to see myself in an expanded role as an Advanced Practice Nurse. I now have set my course in a new direction.” Jeff has accepted a position in an independent FNP clinic with possibilities for partnership, which, he said, was fulfilling his goals beyond his expectations.

Jeff credits the structure of the distance program with enabling him to serve as the Student Government Association President for the College of Nursing and to forge lifelong friendships. “The distance program at UTHSC in Memphis allows you to live your life while achieving your goals and dreams. However,” he stated, “it will also challenge you to stretch those goals and dreams and become more.”

Professional Success and Personal Fulfillment

Carol Lockhart, PhD, a faculty member teaching Healthcare Economics and Leadership in Healthcare in the DNSc program, has had a health systems relations and policy consulting firm for the last 13 years. In that time, Lockhart Associates has provided assistance to local, national, and international organizations planning for and implementing health and public policy and program change. Doing this means that Carol must travel for work within the USA, as well as overseas.

Although Carol has taught in schools of nursing in each city in which she has lived, her consulting business prohibits her from being available for a set schedule of face-to-face classes — the norm in most educational institutions. When Dr. Michael Carter, then dean of the college, approached her about teaching online at UTHSC, Carol commented, “It seemed to offer the perfect solution to being able to continue my commitment to teaching but within the context of a schedule that is constantly changing. It also offered me an opportunity to stay abreast of new technol-

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And, finally, it offered me a way to continue to work with students who constantly challenge and expand my own thinking by their questions and experience.”

One of Carol’s current projects is consulting with USAID Cost Recovery, a Sustainability Project for the Jordanian Association for Family Planning and Protection, a project that takes her to the country of Jordan several times a year. Last year, while in Jordan, Carol had scheduled a virtual chat for the Health Economics class which was to take place when she returned to the US. However, because of situations beyond her control, she was delayed in Jordan, so the chat proceeded … with Carol logging in from Amman, Jordan. In that same chat were Anita Noble from Israel and students in the US stretching from Maine to California – across 10 time zones! Carol stated, “This is what online education has facilitated — open access to people and information at anytime and from anywhere.”

Similar to the students that she teaches, Carol keeps “unusual” hours. “I am most often on the computer and responding to e-mails and assignments on courses first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Since your sleep patterns get all mixed up, and there is a 9-10 hour time difference, I am often up and on the computer at 3 a.m. Sometimes close to daylight I can hear the first call to prayer from the mosque near the hotel.”

**Flexibility in the Face of War**

Gerry Hogan is a 2nd year DNSc student in the College of Nursing who is also on active duty with the Air Force. Until recently, he served as a flight nurse for the 315th Aero Medical Evacuation Squadron, transporting combat victims of the war in Iraq to hospitals in Germany, the Middle East, and the USA. When he was called to duty in March 2003, he said, “My initial thought was that I needed to call the school and get a refund— that I would have to withdraw.” However, by working with the college’s faculty and administration, Gerry designed an online program that would permit him to remain in the DNSc program, even while serving overseas.

The distributive nature of the curriculum accommodated Gerry’s need for flexibility. He often used the computer in the middle of the night or caught up on readings during medical flights. He sent a required presentation via the Internet rather than having to present in person (which he was able to do later). The adaptability of the curriculum and the college’s willingness to make adjustments in courses and timelines has allowed Gerry to continue working toward his doctorate and to serve his country at the same time.

**Leaving a Legacy**

The distributed educational programs offered by the UTHSC College of Nursing provide a rich experience for students and faculty. No longer are examples localized and provincial. Dialoguing about the effects of world events on healthcare within regions and countries is more dynamic and informed by those who are living in these areas. These experiences expand the content that could be delivered within a traditional face-to-face course that accepts only students who live in a defined geographic region. Additionally, the dialogues add to the content for each future generation of students who take courses.

**Tomorrow: 2004 and Beyond**

The College of Nursing has demonstrated its flexibility in education and commitment to advancing nursing education not only in keeping up with the times, but also in being ahead of the times. The pace of technological advances means that the tools of the future hold unlimited potential for educating the next generation of nurses. Healthcare will continue to evolve and to demand more and different things from providers. Whatever changes the future brings, our graduates are equipped to be adaptable in their practices, in part, because of the flexibility brought to them by their educational programs.

Exciting possibilities exist in the college’s partnership with Methodist Healthcare’s School of Nursing. Just as we demonstrated foresight in the design and delivery of yesterday’s education, our future holds promise for exciting curricular innovations that facilitate students’ learning. We are creating a unique and comprehensive educational continuum with a career path that will enable nursing professionals to enter the program at different points with minimum redundancies. According to Donna Herrin, the UTHSC College of Nursing Assistant Dean of Nursing for Methodist Healthcare, “It is essential that this program be implemented as soon as possible to meet workplace demands, as well as deliver the highest level of patient care and safety. Implementing innovative educational programs like this will enable us to reach our goals of improving patient outcomes.”

Within the UTHSC College of Nursing, a vision for the nurse and for the educational programs of tomorrow has always been a component of our practice for today.