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Personal Experience

The Power of a "Word Cloud" in Marketing a Nursing Program

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There are different routes one may take to obtain the educational preparation required to become a registered nurse (RN). The more traditional options include completion of a diploma, associate, or baccalaureate program of nursing. Once completing the specific program, graduates sit for the NCLEX-RN® licensure examination (National Council of State Boards of Nursing [NCSBN], 2009). Change has occurred in the educational preparation of nurses. The percentage of nurses with basic educational preparation in diploma programs has decreased from 63.2% in 1980 to 25.2% in 2004. For the same time period, the percentage of nurses receiving basic educational preparation in associate programs increased from 18.6% to 42.2%. Additionally, the percentage receiving basic preparation at the baccalaureate or higher level increased from 17.4% to 31.0% (Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2006).

The School of Nursing (SON) at WKU began with an Associate Degree program in the late 1960s and has since expanded to include baccalaureate nursing programs (prelicensure and RN to BSN programs) along with a master's degree in nursing. Multiple strategies have been used to sustain and grow the RN to BSN program of nursing with noted success. Enrollment in this educational program has grown from 10 students to over 160 students currently enrolled in the program. The delivery of this educational program provides a means for local as well as place-bound, rural, working RNs the opportunity to advance their education. The majority of the students enrolled in the program attempt to balance

the demands of family, work and their studies. The entire nursing curriculum is accessible through interactive video systems and/or online. While the curriculum can be completed in one academic year, most students elect part-time academic studies. The increase in enrollment reflects accessibility of the program, flexibility in scheduling, diverse methods of delivery, and planned recruitment and marketing efforts. The purpose of this article is to describe the development of an innovative marketing strategy that is adaptable to other programs of nursing.

During the Fall 2008 semester, the faculty evaluated many aspects of the program, including curriculum, delivery method, and marketing material. The curriculum review and evaluation of the content was conducted using two frameworks: the revised *Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice* (2008) published by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing and *Nursing: Scope & Standards of Practice* (2004) published by the American Nursing Association. Another aspect of review was the mode of delivery. The courses were primarily being taught using the delivery methods of on-line and interactive video services. After discussion, a plan was designed to offer the complete nursing curriculum using the on-line delivery method. When evaluating the marketing material, faculty quickly realized that such material was limited to a one-page flyer that is distributed to provide an overview of the program. The faculty had included a photograph of students in an interactive video classroom in an attempt to provide a visual image of the program. Upon reviewing the flyer, one question that the faculty continued to ask was "What does the visual picture say about the program?"

Since the flyer is often the first written information the prospective students see, the faculty wanted this to be the beginning of the socialization of the students into the baccalaureate nursing program. With this in mind, the faculty decided they needed to critically examine what was included in the flyer. They reviewed/revised the general information including such items as the contact information, program description, and curriculum. The faculty took a closer look at the photograph and determined a change was needed.

The faculty engaged in a brainstorming session to address what was important for prospective students to know about the program. They believed it was important that potential students understand that the education they would receive was different than what they had received in the Associate or Diploma nursing programs. Faculty in the RN to BSN program make assumptions that students come with a solid foundation in basic nursing principles with excellent psychomotor skills required for practice as a registered nurse. In the RN to BSN, they gain an additional set of skills to enhance their professional nursing practice.

The faculty wanted the prospective students to realize that their individual experiences and knowledge was valued and the goal of the RN to BSN courses is to provide them with additional knowledge and skills.

The faculty reviewed the program outcomes and courses and developed a *word cloud* to inform prospective student about the valuable educational content to which they would be exposed. Once this was decided on, they had a desire to include something that would be specific to the School of Nursing. It was determined they would use a diagram of the School's nursing pin displayed as a watermark behind the words. The final product was placed at the top of the flyer and serves as visual picture of the program. (Figure 1)



Figure 1

The School of Nursing's pin was designed by a group of nursing students in the first traditional baccalaureate prelicensure nursing program. By including the School's pin a historical symbol representing the values and beliefs of the School of Nursing was evident and the socialization process to the School of Nursing could begin. Additionally, the program outcomes and courses which reflect the roles and knowledge of a professional nurse were used to begin the socialization of students to professional nursing practice.

The faculty are pleased with the development of the *word cloud*. They believe this creative visual image emphasizes important threads and content in the baccalaureate nursing curriculum, fosters the initial socialization process of baccalaureate nursing education and serves as a powerful tool when marketing a RN to BSN nursing program.

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Professional Nursing in Kentucky Yesterday Today Tomorrow

The historical narrative, *Professional Nursing in Kentucky: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, is a KNA Centennial Project. Research and authorship was a collective effort of the KNA Centennial Publication Committee. The content was derived from published and unpublished documents in public and private archives of Kentucky schools of nursing, hospitals, colleges, universities, health agencies, libraries and historical societies. Selected photos and individual anecdotes lend a personal touch.

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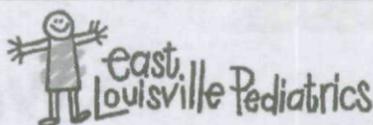
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