Concepts of Community Health (NURS 4550) meets the criteria for a service learning course as defined in the Beyond the Classroom Course/Experience Faculty Application. Community Nursing is not well-understood so a brief discussion will be helpful to the reader of this application. Community Nursing is a specialty nursing practice that combines the science of nursing with the science of public health. The terms community nurse and public health nurse are interchangeable. The mission of public health is “fulfilling society’s interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy” (Institute of Medicine, 1998). Our operational definition of a community nurse in NURS 4550 is this one from Anna Brainard (1919) “any graduate nurse who is doing any form of social work in which the health of the public is concerned, and in which her training as a nurse comes into play or is recognized as a valuable part of her equipment.” Community nurses are not focused on medical care but on prevention and the conditions that impact health. There are the eight necessary characteristics that define community nursing practice. They are: (1) the patient or “unit of care” is the community, (2) the primary obligation is to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people, (3) the processes of community nursing involve working with the community as an equal partner, (4) primary health prevention is the priority, (5) the focus is on selecting strategies that create healthy environmental, social, and economic conditions in which communities can thrive, (6) community nurses are obligated to reach out to those who need services, (7) optimal use of resources is a key element, and (8) collaboration is the most effective way to achieve goals (American Nurses Association, 2007, pp. 8-9). The overarching goal of NURS 4550 is to prepare novice community health nurses.

The clinical practicum experience in NURS 4550 engages students in community practice. The UTC School of Nursing has affiliation agreements with the Chattanooga
Community Kitchen (CCK) and Northside Neighborhood House (NNH) for Fall 2013. At CCK students staff and manage a foot care clinic for homeless persons. This is the first year they are taking on management responsibility in the clinic. They also participate in health education based on their community assessment of the homeless population there. At NNH students will be engaged in several programs including afterschool homework help, healthy living cooking classes, and teaching coping skills to kids. NNH will be the agency experience evaluated for the Beyond the Classroom program because many more students will do their practica there (36 there vs. 4 at CCK). The objectives are the same for students in both agencies. This is the first year we are working with NNH.

These are the course objectives for NURS 4550 that align with the evaluation rubric for BTC courses:

2. Integrates skills of inquiry, analysis, and information literacy to address community practice issues in an ambiguous and unpredictable environment.
12. Tolerates ambiguity and unpredictability while demonstrating leadership in public health nursing.
   (Both align with: Identifies, evaluates, and interprets information by raising pertinent questions and identifying uncertainties.)

3. Applies the nursing process and Orem’s power components to communities, systems, individuals, and families to provide community practice in an imaginative and creative way characterized by innovation and divergent thinking.
   (Aligns with: Solves problems by determining limitations, making connections, and prioritizing the potential solution—the nursing process involves assessment and prioritization of possible interventions)

7. Demonstrates a repertoire of effective communication skills with communities, systems, individuals, and families.
   (Aligns with: Communicates ideas and information effectively)

13. Develops imaginative, creative, evidence-based strategies to facilitate community systems change.
   (Aligns with: Creates innovative solutions to problems through creative thinking)
Some brief information about the clinical experience follows. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America (2009) a large body of evidence strongly and consistently links education to health even when other factors like income are taken into account. Education is one of the social conditions that determine health. A community nurse using the nursing process in working toward improving this social condition is working to improve the health of a community. Students in NURS 4550 are providing a service to the community by joining Northside Neighborhood House in their mission “to promote the independence of residents north of the river by providing a hand up through education and assistance.” More about NNH can be found on their website at www.nnhouse.org/nnabout. This is the reflection planned in NURS 4550 for the students at NNH.

BEFORE

1.) As a group, students, instructors, and NNH staff will meet prior to the experience. NNH staff will share the mission and operations of the facility. Students will share their questions and reflections about the planned experience.

DURING

2.) Instructors will provide space for reflection as they mentor students in small groups about specific work at the agency.

3.) Each student will write a reflections journal over the course of the experience. Each of 16 reflections will focus on one of the course objectives. These reflections will be used for the BTC evaluation process. (Examples of other objectives outside the scope of BTC are cultural competence, ability to use epidemiologic principles, and quality and safety.)
4. After the practicum experience students, NNH staff, and instructors will meet again to process and reflect on the experience. (This is what is planned. My hope is to also include a service participant).

5. Each student will meet with the clinical instructor for the practicum evaluation and grade.

NURS 4550 inherently meets the criteria for an applied learning course. Students learn Community Nursing and then apply their learning in the community. They are evaluated by clinical instructors in the field. NURS 4550, though, also meets the criteria for a BTC service learning course. This application addresses the service learning designation. The clinical practicum is a substantial portion of the grade in NURS 4550. Unless students demonstrate mastery of the course objectives (which are also those on the BTC rubric) they do not pass the course. Additionally the service learning takes place with organized community and includes reflection before, during, and after the experience.

Thank you for your consideration of NURS 4550 as a service learning course at UTC.

References

