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Nursing Students Immersion Has Life-altering Effect

Four Charisms Frame a Nursing Education

By Cindy Costanzo

In June each year at Creighton University, many of our students in the health sciences push the pause button, just breath, listen, taste, smell, and see an immersion into another culture that has potentially life-altering effect.

Creighton University nursing students, preparing to be health care professionals, welcome the opportunity to care for children, mothers, fathers, elders, and the community. In return, the students gain confidence in their ability to travel, provide, care, and understand the human condition within a different culture.

The College of Nursing undergraduate nursing students have opportunities to participate in two different immersion experiences. One is supported through the Institute for Latin American Concern (ILAC), a Catholic, Ignatian-inspired program in the Dominican Republic. The other is a private surgical mission supported by an anonymous donor who herself was transformed by an immersion experience. Both trips require students to work with an interdisciplinary team. The students assist in clinics focused on those with diabetes and hypertension and teaching the local health care workers. Other activities include participating in normal everyday events, celebrations, holidays, prayer with friends, families, co-workers, and the community.

This integration occurs seamlessly as students live with host families who provide the student a warm welcome and ensure they feel part of the family. Students are usually included in all celebratory events, which helps them understanding the unique elements of the local culture.

In summer 2015, Jayme Beukelman, senior nursing student, traveled to the Dominican Republic for a five-week immersion trip. She was with over 60 students from the Creighton community. She says: “My time in the D.R. was a truly amazing experience and one I will never forget. I had the opportunity to learn more about myself, how to love and serve those around me, and better myself as a future nursing professional. The people I met there and formed relationships which will always have a special place in my heart.”

Immersion experiences in China for graduate nursing students have also occurred annually since 2008 with an opportunity to be part of an interdisciplinary team of faculty and students from nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and medicine and pharmacy. This immersion develops relationships with Chinese health care providers, and students participate in an acute care system and culture in Hebei Province, Hospital No. 3, Shi Jia Zhuang, China. The graduate students are required to take a two-credit interdisciplinary course prior to their departure. The course facilitates cultural competency and leadership within an international context as preparation for their travel.

Cindy Costanzo has been at Creighton University College of Nursing for 10 years and serves as the master's program chair. She is the coordinator for the DNP Clinical Systems Administration and Clinical Nurse Leader track. (Information is available at: <https://nursing.creighton.edu/>)

Miranda Kliment, a graduate nurse practitioner student, has been selected to attend the fall 2015 trip to China. In anticipation of the trip Miranda said: "I hope to expand my knowledge and experience working with other professionals in a team approach. I am looking forward to expanding my cultural competence by working with health care professionals in China with the common goal of health and patient care. This journey will allow me to grow not only as a health care provider but as a person."

A dedicated faculty member accompanies the students during the College of Nursing immersion trips. The faculty members provide guidance during the phases of preparation, traveling, in-country encounters, the return home, and debriefing following the trip. Dr. Nancy Shirley and Dr. Cathy Carrico have led several of these immersion trips. Both are experienced educators who have a passion for teaching and a love of the Jesuit traditions and charisms. Nancy had the following to share: "After I first participated with ILAC as a nursing professional in 1985, I knew I was hooked. Having the opportunity to share this experience with students is, indeed, a blessing. The experience is fulfilling and challenging in every aspect – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It requires one to break down barriers and to build new and different relationships. It allows one to live a 'Faith that Does Justice' as we easily 'Find God in all Things.' The opportunity to be in solidarity with these communities is priceless and transformational."

In the College of Nursing, four charisms have been used as a framework to integrate the curricula. These same charisms guide the immersion and reflection activities during all phases of both trips including preparation, the experience, and debriefing post immersion. These charisms include Finding God in Others, Cura Personalis, Women and Men for Others, and Service that Does Justice.

In addition to the charisms, the characteristics of a Jesuit education are applicable to the immersion.



Creighton nursing students Becca Green (left) and Jaymea Beukelman with their Cooperadora, Carmen (center), in Canete, Peru. Canete is the name of the rural community the nursing students served and lived in, Carmen is the health coordinator who helped the students' health care group care for the members of her community.

Students' formational growth in the image of God continues, and their experiences further prepare them for a life in which they understand their talents and strengths and put them to use. The students begin to differentiate the power of relational skills and the void and disruption without that skill set. In addition, the immersion rekindles a passion to do service with an emphasis on justice and an awareness of those who are poor and suffering at the margins. The students recognize that their talents and gifts are for the good of the human community (Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, 2005).

The application of the charisms and characteristics of a Jesuit education and the formation that occurs deepen a nurse's ability to care. Caring for others is a privilege in all countries and cultures. It builds human connections that cross international boundaries. Creighton nursing students and faculty are privileged to be present during the most vulnerable and intimate human experiences. The emotions of these events are powerful and profoundly affect the lives of students. Such experiences are among the most valuable outcomes Creighton University College of Nursing can provide for its nursing students. ■