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University of Lethbridge celebrates advances in nursing education during National Nursing Week

Exploring the uses of digital health technologies in nursing education

The theme of this year's National Nursing Week is *Our Nurses. Our Future.* — one that resonates with Dr. Laura Vogelsang (BN '11), an assistant professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Lethbridge.



“Working as a nurse in an educational institution, what better theme to have,” says Vogelsang. “I truly believe education *is* health care and health care *is* education.”

As a new nursing graduate, Vogelsang started working at Chinook Regional Hospital and soon realized she was interested in nursing education. She attended the University of

Saskatchewan to complete a master's and PhD in nursing, but also continued to actively nurse.

“I never left bedside nursing and I still maintain an active practice as a bedside nurse,” says Vogelsang. “I often reflect that being a nurse makes me a better instructor and being an instructor makes me a better nurse. I like that I can go and have those lived experiences I can bring back into the classroom and share with students, while maintaining a presence in the community and my own competency.”

Vogelsang teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses and strives to find new and creative ways to present information to her students. Sometimes it means finding an analogy, creating an acronym or a memory trick. In her research, she's also exploring the use of digital health and emerging technologies in nursing education. For her PhD, Vogelsang worked with an interdisciplinary team to develop a virtual reality (VR) tool to see if it helped nursing students feel more confident caring for patients with dementia.

With funding from Alberta Innovates and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Vogelsang used VR to immerse students in a scenario involving a long-term care home resident. In the scenario, the students had a client named Vivian who required their help getting ready for the day. While she needed the assistance, Vivian became more agitated and frustrated as the scenario progressed. The students had to navigate the situation using their therapeutic communication skills.

“We did find that the VR improved their self-efficacy and self-confidence,” she says. “This is something that could be utilized in a lab setting or integrated into a curriculum. There’s increased recognition now for the role that nurses can play on interdisciplinary project teams in the design, implementation and evaluation of technology development, especially when the end users are patients. We have the skills and education to engage in this meaningful work.”

In a research project scheduled to begin this fall, Vogelsang and two nursing colleagues received a grant from Western North-Western Region Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (WNRCSN) to explore how nursing students experience icebreakers in class.

“The reason we pursued it is that, with the recognition around some of the EDI work that needs to be done, sometimes those icebreakers can potentially be more harmful than helpful,” she says. “They may unintentionally have a micro-aggressive undertone; we want to learn more about this and find ways to make sure the classroom is inclusive for everyone.”

Vogelsang and a friend who is a fellow nurse also have an Instagram page called Nurseitlikeyoumeanit where they post educational nursing tips. What started as a fun passion project now has more than 37,000 followers.

As a practicing nurse, Vogelsang is well aware of the health-care situation on the ground.

“There are always going to be complex challenges in health care, but there’s also going to be creative and innovative solutions, and I’m very confident that the next generation of nurses that come from the University of Lethbridge are going to be the solution finders,” she says. “A healthy post-secondary sector is critical to a sustainable workforce.”

This news release can be found online at [National Nursing Week 2023](#).

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Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.