

Creating a Community of Inquiry to Improve Learning Outcomes Frontier School of Midwifery and Family Nursing (FSMFN)

The FSMFN is a private, not-for-profit school that provides advanced educational preparation for nurses who seek to become nurse-midwives (CNM), family nurse practitioners (FNP), or women's health care nurse practitioners (WHCNP). FSMFN provides community-based distance graduate programs leading to either a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), or a post-master's certificate. The offerings include an ADN-MSN Bridge entry option. The school meets the needs of prospective nurse-midwives and nurse practitioners who are not able to leave their home communities to obtain the graduate education desired to fulfill their professional aspirations. The focus is on those nurses who live in rural and/or underserved areas. The FSMFN community worked together to identify the challenges facing the School. This process revealed three issues of most importance to FSMFN. These include the need for:

- improved critical thinking skills
- development of effective distance learning courses using technology appropriately
- engaging students
- encouragement of students to value learning within a community.

After exploring strategies for fulfilling our mission and for meeting these needs, the Community of Inquiry (COI) model proposed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2001) was adopted as a framework. The COI model is based in constructivist learning theory and builds on Dewey's practical inquiry model. The COI framework addresses the creation of understanding via teaching, cognitive and social presences and was developed specifically for the online education environment. At the junction of the three presences the higher-order learning, which is a hallmark of higher education, takes place (Garrison et al., 2001).

Nurse-Midwives and Nurse Practitioners are required in their professional roles to synthesize information from diverse sources and apply the information and skills to complex problems as members of interdisciplinary healthcare teams. The goals of the COI plan are for students to increase the depth of learning, effectively use the process of inquiry to solve complex problems and value learning and working within a community

A comprehensive set of goals, related action plans, resource allocations, and administrative assignments have been established to ensure the institution's capability to successfully initiate and fully implement the COI Project. A plan is in place to develop and grow the community (faculty, staff and students), using a process of induction into the community, acquisition of knowledge and skills to participate in the community translation of knowledge to practice in the clinical setting expansion of the COI in professional practice

In order to facilitate the transition, a process of faculty and staff development, course design, and evaluation has been proposed. Multifaceted assessments have been outlined to provide internal and external, as well as formative and summative, evaluations of progress and success in achieving each of the COI project's goals and its overall purpose.

For more information please contact: Dr. Joyce Knestrick, FSMFN Coordinator of Graduate Education at Joyce.Knestrick@frontierschool.edu