'Blending' a Postgraduate Diploma in Addiction Care
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences | Department of Psychiatry

Programme Coordinator: Dr Lize Weich lizew@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Dr Steve Walsh walsh@sun.ac.za

Context
Background overview
The Postgraduate Diploma in Addiction Care aims to enrich, broaden and consolidate the knowledge and expertise of professionals working within the field of addiction care, by providing them with a review of the current evidence base relevant to this field. The purpose is to improve the candidate's care for patients with substance use disorders, rather than to provide basic knowledge or research capacity.

The curriculum covers the most important areas within the field of addiction care and help mould well-rounded addiction-care practitioners. The intended outcomes of the programme include a comprehensive knowledge of the theory relevant to the field of addiction, as well as holistic skills to provide effective, evidence-based interventions to patients with substance use disorders. Candidates also learn about appropriate professional and ethical practices.

Student overview
For admission to this Postgraduate Diploma in Addiction Care, a candidate must hold a bachelor's degree and appropriate professional registration in a field relevant to health or social welfare, e.g. social work, medicine, nursing, psychology (a four-year bachelor's degree, such as a BPsych, or alternatively a three-year bachelor's degree and a one-year honours degree, such as a BA in Psychology followed up by a BAHons) or occupational therapy. A nursing diploma in conjunction with an Advanced Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing Science is also be deemed equivalent to a four-year nursing degree and hence meet the admission criteria. At least two years' professional experience is an advantage. Students are fluent in written and spoken English. They also must have access to the internet and be computer literate. Students are also required to use mobile and/or recording devices for participation in certain course activities.

For 2015, there are 23 registered students; three male students and 20 female students. There are 10 new students for 2015 (i.e., 10 students that registered for the first time with this program). The students come from a variety of disciplines; including, but not limited to social work, occupational therapy, psychiatric nurse, psychiatrist, general and counseling.

The challenge
Substance addiction is a significant public health problem in the Western Cape. To address the skills deficit in the treatment of substance abuse, the Department of Psychiatry has developed this postgraduate diploma in addiction care. The challenge is that many students struggle to get time off work to attend classes. They often live far and find it difficult to frequently travel to attend lectures. Therefore, this Diploma is presented in a blended learning experience, including both e-learning and experiential learning with e-supervision and limited face-to-face contact time.

There is a course outline for each module that is divided into themes that are divided into weeks. There are recorded podcasts for each theme as well as directed self-reading (articles, for which the URL link to the library is provided). Because of the difficulties in accessing bandwidth, the podcasts are also available on CD if the student prefers this. Some themes also have class notes.

Each theme have a form of evaluation, which can either be quiz on the coursework that tests knowledge, or an assignment that test application of knowledge. Assignments are also submitted online via SUNLearn. Students need to complete a log book of practical work. There is a supervision chat once a month, for two hours on a Friday, which is compulsory for students to take part in, where they are provided with supervision for the practical work. The plan is to increase this to 2 weekly sessions next year, as students find this a valuable learning opportunity. There is also a tutorial chat for one of the modules. Students are encouraged to make regular use of the discussion forums on SUNLearn. Students can bring any comments, queries, issues or problems with regards to the academic work to this forum. They can also comment on the opinions of your colleagues. All of these activities count towards their class mark. A Facebook page for students and alumni has been created in an attempt to improve the group cohesion.

There was a contact week from 26-30 January. It was mostly for Year 1 students, but Year 2 students also attended the session in the e-classroom, in order to be orientated with regards to accessing the online learning material. During this week, students also visited the library and had training from the library staff on how to use the virtual library. During 25-29 May,

'Blending' a Postgraduate Diploma in Addiction Care

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences | Department of Psychiatry

2

Programme Coordinator: Dr Lize Weich lizew@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Dr Steve Walsh walsh@sun.ac.za

Year 1 students had their second contact week and also wrote examinations for their first two modules. Year 1's will have a final contact day in October to write their final examination. Year 2 students have a contact week in September and write their examinations during three days in October. There is also a monthly addictions academic CPD meeting, but attendance is optional. The contact sessions have been grouped into contact weeks as opposed to short sessions throughout the year, allowing students who live far to attend, thereby improving the reach of the program. The contact sessions focus on application of theory and practicing of skills (e.g. tough group discussions, role plays etc.), as opposed to parting of academic knowledge, which is mainly done online.

Other relevant role players

The curriculum was developed by the module lecturer and coordinator. Psychologist colleagues helped with lecturing during the year 1 contact weeks, where the focus is on learning therapeutic skills. Guests, who are experts in specific areas, were invited to comment on the material for specific themes and make podcasts.

The Blended Learning Advisors, coordinators and IT- support provided the technical support for podcasts- they provided advice and suggestions and loaded Camtasia onto the relevant laptop to record the podcasts and then converted the files into usable podcasts and wrote DVD's for our students. This project would not have been possible without their support.

An MPhil student is helping with supervision chats and the coordinator's colleagues help with the contact weeks. An admin person was also appointed and he is responsible for the day to day running of the course.

Learning and assessment activities

Educational approach

The programme developer thought about what knowledge, skills and attitudes workers in the field need and used that to decide on the curriculum. She felt students would procrastinate if they did not have clear tasks set out for each week, with frequent checks to ensure that they were staying on top of the work. It was important to ensure they get enough support when applying the new concepts into their day-to-day practice.

Learning activities

Currently, we have 10 modules (1 of them optional), but from 2016, the diploma has been simplified so that there will be 3 year 1 modules and 2 year 2 modules, i.e. 5 modules in total. The course is offered in a blended learning mode and includes guided self-study, assignments, homework tasks and experiential learning where students will be expected to log practical hours. Students must also attend formal lecture weeks.

Assessment activities

Students are expected to show satisfactory attendance of classes and satisfactory participation in e-learning activities and to obtain a class mark of at least 45% for each module to be eligible to write the examinations for that module. Quizzes, assignments, supervision chats, forums make up their class/predicate mark. Those that qualify will then write examinations. Students are expected to obtain a subminimum of 45% examination mark and a minimum of 50% as a final mark to pass the module. The class mark will be made up of continuous evaluation and assignments. The final mark for each module will be made up of both the examination mark and the class mark. Students pass each module if they have a final mark of at least 50%. To qualify for re-examination in a module, a student must have obtained in such module a final mark of not less than 45%.

The final mark for the programme shall be calculated as the weighted average of the marks for the completed modules. Students will be expected to submit a logbook with the required satisfactory participation in practical work placement for a specified amount of hours before they will be allowed to graduate.

Feedback practice

Students receive feedback via SUNLearn and email, but could also make an appointment to meet with lecturers and assistants in person to discuss feedback on their activities. The quizzes give the student the correct answer to a question if they get it wrong, so that they can learn from their mistake and sometimes, comments are also included as feedback. Students who fail a quiz, are invited to re-do the same quiz. A marking rubric is used to grade assignments, to help a student identify the areas that they can improve in. Students also get detailed personalized feedback for assignments (sometimes using voice feedback, other times written feedback). Where relevant, general

'Blending' a Postgraduate Diploma in Addiction Care

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences | Department of Psychiatry

3

Programme Coordinator: Dr Lize Weich lizew@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Dr Steve Walsh walsh@sun.ac.za

feedback about an assignment is given to the whole class via the discussion forum.

Learning Environment
Learning setting
SUNLearn and the various activities that it has to offer were used. Google Hangouts, Skype and similar programs for group supervision were considered, but most students are more mature and feel threated by too much technology and it was decided against.

Content resources
Students receive a handout at the start of the year and also have a training session in the e-classroom and at the library during first contact week. Each module includes a module outline with the themes and all the reading, podcasts etc. This is available online via SUNLearn and the podcast website. The SUNLearn page has a link to the library and the podcast website.

Student Experience
Student feedback on the learning experience
Blended Learning were only implemented in the course in 2015. Therefore, only year 2 students could give feedback on how the course has changed.

Some feedback from Year 2 students:
Students felt blended learning is definitely a better option as it reduced cost and time spent on travel for students not able to take leave from work. They were also able to access the material at any time and from any place. Some students seemed to struggle with the rate/speed that real-time online chats take place at. It could be beneficial to limit the group size when engaging in certain activities (like online chats). Students valued the fact that there was a strong online presence and prompt replies to comments and enquiries. Some advantages of making use of podcasts include the fact that students can work through them at their own pace and students can also access the podcasts wherever they are. Some students commented that some of the material is not suited for communication via podcasts, and requires face-to-face tuition. Similarly, there is a Year 2 student that believes class-based lessons are a better way to encourage critical thinking at a post graduate level.

Feedback from Year 1 students:
Students commented that they were forced to improve their computer skills and felt this was a bonus for them. Some struggled with the Eskom power cuts and problems with connectivity. Almost all commented that they enjoy the online chats and gain a lot of insight from them. This way of teaching allows students to schedule their own class and homework times around an already busy work and family life; and allows them to save on leave days from work. Another added benefit is that it is also less of a financial burden, as students don't have to travel often. A recommendation is to set up some type of meet and greet or team building exercise for fellow students. This will help build good relationships and will allow students to support each other throughout the year. There was also a suggestion for 1 or 2 more contact weeks.

Also, just a direct quote from one of our Year 1 students: "I take my hat off to the brilliant mind behind the PG Dip online learning program and the way in which it has been set up".

General
Opportunities and Challenges
The implementation of blended learning have given the program a wider reach: the programme is now much more accessible to a variety of interested people, (many of the students are also full time employed and some have to come from far away, there has even been interest from other African Countries). This means that if a student work diligently throughout the year, there is no need to take extra leave days from work (except for contact weeks and examinations).

Blended learning takes an immense amount of time and work to develop the material. The benefit is that once it's done, it does cut down on actual hours spent lecturing. If you want the program to be successful however, it requires that you invest the time saved from lecturing, into online activities. The lecturers have found that we have lost some group cohesion in the class – will invest more time next year during the first week on team building. It was hoped that the forum will replace class discussion and debate around topics, but students are reluctant to use this medium and need a lot of prompting. The supervision chats have been really effective.

'Blending' a Postgraduate Diploma in Addiction Care
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences | Department of Psychiatry

Programme Coordinator: Dr Lize Weich lizew@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Dr Steve Walsh walsh@sun.ac.za

Advice

The lecturers, assistants, coordinators and support have the following advice for colleagues:

- Select reading carefully so that it is not too much, is interesting and relevant – e.g. review articles rather than papers on clinical trials. There is also a host of material already online- like YouTube videos, websites from professional organizations etc. that students can explore.
- Structure the students' calendar and build in checks, otherwise they will only procrastinate.
- Create enough opportunities for class interaction and discussion.
- With regards to supervision chats: Students send in summaries of the problems they encounter in their practical placements, and we send out case vignettes for the tutorials, which we circulate before the chat and then discuss in the supervision chats. Case summaries are sent out beforehand and numbered so that students can think about them. This is then discussed one by one. It is usually clear which case are discussed to everyone, but students are encouraged to comment with the number of the case they are referring to, so that there is no confusion. Students find the chats very helpful.