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The Utilization of Adult Learning Models to Increase Course Evaluation Scores in a Poorly Evaluated Graduate Level APRN Pharmacology Course

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History:

The online Pharmacological Principles of Clinical Therapies N543, a foundational course for Nurse Practitioner students at the UNM College of Nursing, had historically been poorly evaluated by students taking the course. Student IDEA scores were consistently low in all areas measured, and the course was also consistently identified by the UNM College of Nursing faculty as a course in need of significant and urgent improvement.

Theoretical Models Employed:

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Learning Domains¹

Cognitive (mental skills), Affective (growth in self), Psychomotor (physical skills)

Revised Cognitive Domains:

1. *Remembering*: recall of previous information learned.
2. *Understanding*: comprehension of the meaning, translation, interpolation, and interpretation of specific instructions or problems and ability to rephrase in one's own words.
3. *Applying*: Use of a concept in a new situation, or the unprompted use of abstract thought. The ability to apply classroom ideals in the workplace.
4. *Analyzing*: The ability to separate material and concepts into specific parts and the ability to distinguish between fact and inference.
5. *Evaluating*: The ability to make decisions about the value of specific ideas or materials to their learning environment.
6. *Creating*: The ability to build structure or pattern from diverse elements and put parts into a whole with an emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure.

Four Models of Adult Education²

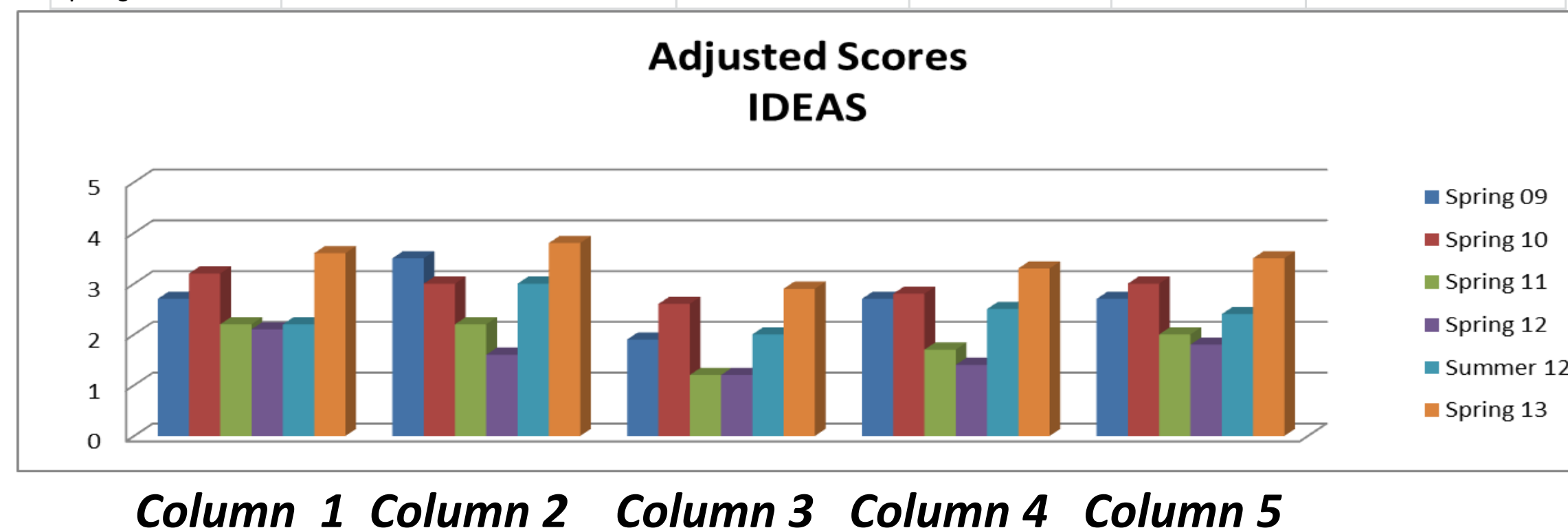
1. **Pedagogy**: Assumes that the learner needs to acquire certain knowledge or mastery- "empty mug" scenario.
2. **Andragogy**: The learner has some experience, still deficit-based- ½ empty mug scenario.
3. **Transformation**: The creation of a learning environment for learning and transformation to occur.
4. **Appreciation**: Does not focus on new learning, but appreciates and gives voice to existing wisdom, knowledge, and insight. It is an environment co-created by the student.

Intervention:

In the Spring semester of 2013, Drs. Haynie and Addington were assigned to teach N543 Pharmacological Principles of Clinical Therapies as a part of their academic teaching load. The instructors decided to blend their two adult learning models in the hopes of having the most complementary course that served the student population and the needs of the College of Nursing.

1. Each student was asked to read the text in preparation for the course.
2. Each student was assigned a specific drug class/topic to create a scholarly and informative paper or power point presentation to engage their peers and facilitate learning.
3. Each student was assigned a presentation to "respond to" by teasing out alternative points of view, other therapies, and any other additional information or experience pertaining to the topic offered in a scholarly fashion.
4. Test questions were derived exclusively from these paired presentations, which encouraged the students to read and stay abreast of the shared knowledge and ask their peers for clarification when applicable.
5. The instructors managed this shared learning environment on the discussion boards, providing additional information, knowledge, resources and/or practice caveats when needed.

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
Adjusted Scores	Progress on relevant objectives	excellent teacher	excellent course	Overall Ratings	summary evaluation
Spring 09		2.7	3.5	1.9	2.7
Spring 10		3.2	3	2.6	2.8
Spring 11		2.2	2.2	1.2	1.7
Spring 12		2.1	1.6	1.2	1.4
Summer 12		2.2	3	2	2.5
Spring 13		3.6	3.8	2.9	3.3



Conclusion:

The methods employed utilized all the domains of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, specifically all the Revised Cognitive Domains. The students were asked to recall what they had read, have sufficient understanding and comprehension to analyze, create and apply the new information in presentation form, and evaluate their peers in a scholarly fashion.

The methods employed also adequately utilized all four of the Models of Adult Education, specifically the higher level models of andragogy, transformation, and appreciation which are unique to graduate level Advanced Practice Nurses. Although the students in the programs come with a large amount of knowledge and experience from their Nursing careers, there is still need for more foundational learning discussed in andragogy. The Blackboard Learn discussion board environment was created and structured for transformation to occur, and the environment was student co-created by the student population. The entire process was reliant upon the student involvement.

Summary:

An essential part of being effective as a teacher dealing with adult learners is to understand how adults learn. Adult theories of learning are based upon valuing the students' prior learning and experience. It is also important to understand that adult learners have different styles of learning which must be assessed and utilized.³ This course design seemed to be a tailored approach to the specific characteristics of graduate students. "Transition from an undergraduate to a graduate student can be difficult...You should not only become smarter, but you should develop a greater appreciation for the amount of commitment and hard work required to accomplish worthwhile goals".⁴

References:

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