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Joyce Cappiello, Associate Professor, Nursing (CHHS) ~ Australia

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UNH Global

Joyce Cappiello

Associate Professor, Nursing (CHHS) ~ Australia

Day One: James Cook University (JCU) campus is located about 15 kilometers outside of Cairns, Queensland, Australia, a short bus ride away. I know I am not in Kansas anymore, as this is a campus set in a rainforest. When I walk out of air-conditioned buildings, my glasses fog up so that I cannot see. Buildings are connected by covered walkways to protect against the tropical rains. I stop in the bookstore (why not check out the sale?) to purchase a foldup umbrella. The salesperson recommends that a foldup umbrella is inadequate for the rainy season here. A solid, real umbrella is needed. I thank her and mentally thanked her many more times on subsequent days. However, today, the last day of summer vacation is hot and muggy, sweltering. A week or so later, when the rains finally arrive, everyone cheers as the weather will begin to cool off and slide into fall. I'm astonished to watch the runners, bikers, skateboarders in the park across the street, cheerfully exercising through the heavy rain. No raincoats, just enjoying the cooler weather.

On this last day of summer vacation, offices are quiet, although faculty that are present are quite busy. One nursing faculty is trying to complete all clinical placements and contracts before Monday, and the stress is palpable. Securing sufficient clinical sites seems a common challenge worldwide.



James Cook University, Cairns campus

There are three groups of nurses that I want to meet: the nurse researcher that supported my sabbatical, the WHO Center of Excellence staff and the nursing faculty. I had developed a working relationship with a nurse researcher/senior lecturer in the College of Public Health, Medical, and Veterinary Sciences over the past few years regarding our shared research. This relationship leads to the sabbatical invitation at JCU.



(l. to r.) Dr. Cappiello, Dr. Karen Yates, Deputy Director and Andrea Grimes, Nurse Research Officer at the WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing and Midwifery Education and Research Capacity Building, James Cook University

The second group I shared office space with, the nursing researchers and staff of the WHO Collaborating Center for Nursing and Midwifery Education and Research Capacity. The WHO Center of Excellence at JCU is one of only 44 in the world, supporting the education, workforce, health service provision, and research capacity building in the Western Pacific Region for the past decade. It was fascinating to learn about their work in the region and their ongoing research, especially in rural, aborigine communities.

The third group was the nursing faculty at JCU. JCU Nursing and Midwifery has a tropical focus, considered a leader in regional, rural, and

tropical healthcare sciences. Nursing is within the College of Healthcare Sciences with 1500 undergraduate students and postgraduate programs at four main campuses. JCU Cairns specializes in undergraduate nursing. Students begin their three-year program upon arrival at the university without the year of liberal arts credits required in the US. I was very interested in learning how JCU taught research skills at the undergraduate level. The faculty member who integrated most of the research concepts into a course was not teaching the course during this semester. However, we reviewed course materials and engaged in lively discussions. Faculty were surprised that, at UNH, I had taught an 80 student undergraduate course in what is to us is a traditional, face-to-face classroom environment. Australia has a long history of online education. In the early days of the country, sparsely populated with vast distances among communities, Australia provided education through correspondence schools. State and federal governments supported the infrastructure for

such distance education endeavors since the beginning of the country. Over the years, distance education has remained a feature of all types of educational settings. University students generally take all of their large classes online, coming to campus for face-to-face small group work, called tutorials. Innovative uses of technologies to provide communication and interaction and ease the isolation of distance have also been a feature of Australia's distance education history. I watched a nursing faculty, with three screens active at one time, designing elaborate and expertly designed online modules. At least at JCU, there is a move away from hardcopy textbooks to all electronic resources. JCU's traditional nursing course of study has students come to campus regularly for small group tutorials of about 30 students. Larger, lectured oriented classes are taught online. The "external" nursing course of study is geared to the nontraditional student with all classes online. However, these students come to campus once a semester for intensive skills assessment. A few faculty said they did provide face-to-face lectures for first-year students, but there was no expectation that students must attend. Nursing students, however, must attend tutorial sessions unless they are in an external program. Similar to CEITL and Academic Technology at UNH, there is robust support for designing and teaching online courses.

However, we reviewed course materials and engaged in lively discussions. Faculty were surprised that, at UNH, I had taught an 80 student undergraduate course in what is to us is a traditional, face-to-face classroom environment. Australia has a long history of online education. Sparsely populated with vast distances among communities in the early days of the country spawned the initial provision of education through correspondence schools. State and federal governments supported the infrastructure for such distance education endeavors since the beginning of the country. Over the years, distance education has remained a feature of all types of educational settings to serve all communities. University students generally take all of their large classes online, coming to campus for face-to-face small group work, called tutorials. Innovative uses of technologies to provide communication and interaction and ease the isolation of distance have also been a feature of Australia's distance education history. I watched a nursing faculty, with three screens active at one time, designing elaborate and expertly designed online modules. At least at JCU, there is a move away from hardcopy textbooks to all electronic resources. JCU's traditional nursing course of study has students come to campus regularly for small group tutorials of about 30 students. Larger, lectured oriented classes are taught online. The "external" nursing course of study is geared to the nontraditional student with all classes online. However, these students come to campus for intensive skills assessment each semester. A few faculty said they did provide face-to-face lectures

for first-year students, but there was no expectation that students must attend. Nursing students, however, must attend tutorial sessions unless they are in an external program. In an external program, they participate in a sim lab skills assessment each semester. Similar to CEITL and Academic Technology at UNH, there is robust support for designing and teaching online courses.

Most faculty use assessment measures that do not include quizzes or exams. Faculty report that grading assessments are very time-consuming. Interestingly, Australia does not require a national certifying examination for nurses upon graduation. However, national accreditation of programs occurs every five years. My colleagues at UNH are deep within preparations for every ten-year accreditation for our department. We should be happy with our decade interval!


I am now a consultant on a joint research project between nursing faculty at James Cook University, the University of Queensland, Central Queensland University and Queensland University on “Unintended pregnancy, options counselling and abortion care education in undergraduate nursing and midwifery programs in Queensland universities”. I have conducted a similar survey in the US and shared my survey tool with the group. I look forward to our continued collaboration with this group.


We watched the advance of COVID 19 march across China, Singapore, then into southern Australia. Northern Queensland is far away from the major southern cities, the Sydney to Cairns driving distance is about 1500 miles. The virus was slow to arrive in Cairns, but as borders were beginning to shut down in many countries, the JCU faculty began to prepare for possible closure. Moving to online education was much easier than at UNH as faculty had robust experience with it. However, as with our nursing faculty, they needed to design accurate assessments of clinical skill competency in a fully online environment in a short time period. As with our UNH nursing department, they have a robust simulation lab for teaching and assessing clinical skills competency that had required in-person attendance.


When COVID 19 reached southern Queensland, almost 900 miles south, the most notable development was with Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson. It became apparent that I would not be able to complete my sabbatical appointment unless we prepared to stay in Australia indefinitely in our small Airbnb under a much stricter, national, stay-at-home policy. Within a few days, we decided to return home. We re-booked airline tickets, canceled meetings at the Townsville campus to discuss study abroad opportunities for UNH students, canceled meetings with nursing faculty in Brisbane to explore future collaborations, boarded a flight, and returned home.




I am thankful for what time I did have at JCU with sincere gratitude to the faculty and staff for welcoming me and sharing their expertise in online education. A thank you also to the Global Education Center Faculty International Development Travel Grant at UNH for your kind support.

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