Teaching Public Health Informatics

The 5-Year Experience

Will Olmstadt, MSLS, AHIP
Gale Hannigan, PhD, MLS, MPH, AHIP
Joe Williams, MSLS

Background

- SRPH 640, Public Health Informatics
  - 3 credit hours, letter grade
- Initially required, later elective
- NLM Partners Grant curriculum (1998 – 2000)
- First taught fall 1999
  - Subsequent offerings
    - Summer semesters, 2000 – 2002
    - Spring semester 2003 (mostly via WebCT)
- 50 students have completed the course

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Guiding Principles

- Student-centered
  - Participation 20 - 30% of grade
  - Self-directed exercises
  - In-class/web-based discussion
  - Choice of project topics
- Value to future career
  - Combination of skills and concepts
- Scalability

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Course Content

- Overview of public health informatics
- Relevant bibliographic databases
- Locating government information
- SRPH Information System (SRPHIS)
- Communicating with the media

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Course Content

- Citation management software

- Information ethics

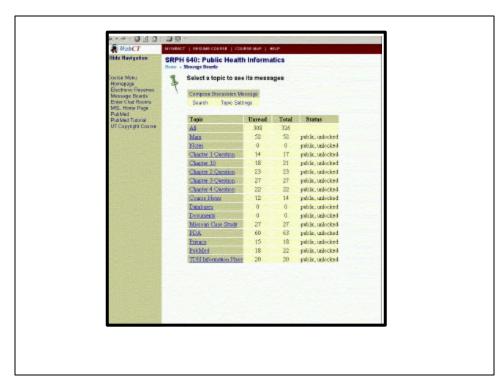- Evaluation of web information

- Presentation skills

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Changes 2002 - 2003

- Textbook (O'Carroll et al.)
- Exercises using PDAs
  - PDAs loaned to 2003 class
- Critical appraisal of public health research
  - Select article about intervention of interest
  - Follow explicit guidelines
  - Relate to local practice (rural Texas)

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Course Technology

2000	Experiments with AOL Instant Messenger
2001-2003	Increasing delivery via WebCT Distance education students in 3 cities TTVN (Trans-Texas Videoconference Network) PDA Loans (Handspring Visor Pro)

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Evaluation

- Mid-course evaluations
- Formal TAMU evaluations
  - 11 Likert scale questions
    - 1 = disagreement, 5 = agreement
    - Open-ended questions
      - What did you like best?
      - What did you like least?
      - What would improve the course?

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Evaluation

- For all questions, all years, average >4.0
- Written comments
  - "Make this class mandatory"
  - "Instructors were fantastic"
- Critical comments
  - "4-hour block of time"
  - Specific assignments

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Evaluation

- Most appreciated
  - Searching skills
  - Systematically appraising research
  - In-person contact
  - PDA exercises
- Least popular
  - GIS (frustrating)
  - Legislative information

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Lessons Learned

- Coordinate online and in-person content
- Promote public health and libraries outside their respective fields
- Involve colleagues
- Refine exercises annually
- Create a backup
- Dedicate personnel time

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Contact Information

Will Olmstadt, will.olmstadt@utsouthwestern.edu

Gale Hannigan, g-hannigan@tamu.edu

Joe Williams, JoeW@tamu.edu

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