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Why Now Is The Time for Nursing Schools to Evaluate Their EdTech Investments

An essential guide for ensuring your needs are being met

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AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR ENSURING YOUR NEEDS ARE BEING MET

As schools attempt to return to normalcy and more in-person or hybrid learning, it's an opportune time to re-evaluate the online learning investments that you made during the pandemic. These decisions were often made quickly to adapt to a rapidly evolving situation and urgent need. The technology educators turned to over the past year may not be the best resources to continue using in the future. Or you may have the right solution but haven't figured out how to maximize its effectiveness.

Major Curriculum Changes: AACN Essentials & Next Gen NCLEX™

The timing is especially ripe for nursing programs to evaluate their edtech investments because there have been major changes to curriculum and assessment. For example, there has been a significant update of the AACN Essentials. Competency expectations for graduates of baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs are now different, and the shift affects the accreditation of these institutions.

AACN has recognized that adjusting to the new AACN Essentials is a significant undertaking, saying, "this groundbreaking shift in how nurses are prepared in the U.S. will take 3 years or more to fully implement. Organizations…will need time to respond and adapt to the new Essentials, which will impact their operations." Selecting a well-aligned, high-quality edtech resource can make a major curriculum change like this much more manageable.

Another significant change coming to the world of nursing education that has implications for edtech investments is the Next Generation NCLEX (NGN). These changes, which reflect the increasing levels of decision-making and care demanded of nurses in the modern workforce, will likely take effect in 2023. This new exam will include both new and familiar question types. Institutions must evaluate the gaps in their current exam prep investments, and identify how to best support students in succeeding on the NGN.

Using Data to Evaluate Learning Resources and Technology

Evidence-based practice is the cornerstone of evaluating edtech investments in nursing education. By reviewing available data, such as usage rates, student performance, class and exam pass rates, survey data, and more, education decision-makers can develop a detailed and holistic picture to help make sound decisions.

How to Gather Input from Faculty and Students

To gauge the effectiveness and relevance of your edtech investments, frequent communication with important stakeholders is essential. Many nursing schools partnering with UWorld hold monthly curriculum meetings to discuss and evaluate their curriculum resources, discuss issues that may arise, and keep an ongoing pulse on the school's investments. These meetings include faculty, and also student attendees from each grade level at the institution, so the feedback is as diverse and complete as possible.

Another valuable source of input is student feedback from course surveys. When using this feedback to drive decision-making, make sure to look for large-scale patterns and not be swayed by individual comments, even if they are strong.

Aligning Investments with Teaching and Learning Goals

With all of the complexity involved in researching, selecting, and evaluating edtech investments, it can be easy to lose sight of the main reason for the work: supporting teaching and learning. This becomes especially critical as some research points to the fact that education technology targeted towards helping students reach specific goals may be most effective.

Demonstrating student outcomes is important for accreditation, and it is equally important to ensure edtech investments are aligned with these priorities. Selecting resources that are currently aligned with your curriculum needs, and also have a reputation for staying up-to-date on the latest developments, is essential to avoid being stuck with a resource that is obsolete or inadequate.

While curriculum and student outcomes are often uniform for a specific course or sequence of courses, instructors may take somewhat different approaches in navigating the curriculum and supporting students in meeting their goals. To that end, it's important that your edtech investments make room for different modalities of instruction and the preferred teaching styles of your instructors.

Of course, a tool or resource's alignment with learning goals is irrelevant if instructors are unable to fully take advantage of the technology's capabilities to enhance their instruction. For leaders to understand how this is working, they need to evaluate instructors and look at student feedback. (See more about this in our section on "Ease of Use" on page 6w.)

Ultimately, there should be a strong, pedagogical research basis for your edtech investments. In other words, do these tools and resources live up to the promises of their marketing?

The Importance of Versatility

The needs of an education institution are constantly changing based on trends in curriculum, student preferences, legislation and accreditation, and more. At the same time, it's important to simplify the tools and resources you use for teaching and learning as much as possible while still meeting everyone's needs. This means that the versatility of your investments is paramount.

Versatility becomes even more important for edtech products that get frequent use, such as NCLEX-prep resources. When teachers and students use multiple products to meet their needs, it is important to provide support and training across all of the solutions.

To address the importance of versatility, institutions should look for solutions that integrate and are compatible with as many of the other tools and resources currently used by teachers and students as possible.

> " *Look for solutions that **integrate** and **are compatible** with as many of the other tools and resources.*

Ease of Use for Administrators, Teachers, and Students

It's important at this point to differentiate between glitches and challenges that might come up during the initial onboarding and implementation process, as opposed to serious issues that cannot be worked out in a reasonable amount of time.

Remember that you can reach back out to the vendor when you are experiencing challenges, and they may be able to offer a workaround, a clarification, or even a complete solution for your issue.

In other cases, you may have to recognize that resistance to adopting a new resource may be coming from students who are later in their track at your school or teachers who have already used a previous resource for many years. In these cases, you may need to simply show that the majority of students or faculty would prefer moving to a different option in order to overcome these objections.

Determining how available and helpful the support services are is also important. The quality of training and support for instructors has been linked to the impact a technology has on outcomes. Before choosing a new provider, you may want to experiment with how easy it is to get a support email answered or how possible it is to get a live person on the phone when you need one. Some companies pride themselves on making it easy to get help from a real person, while others will use a complicated maze of voice mail, email, and support chat to avoid connecting you with an employee over the phone.

Evaluating the help resources available to instructors and students is also an important aspect of support. Browse the company's website, YouTube page, or social channels. Are there easy-to-find, user-friendly, helpful resources that are likely to answer students' and teachers' most common questions?

The availability of an electronic resource, including the schedule of when updates happen, is another key consideration. Do updates take place during normal working hours? Or do they occur on nights, weekends, and holidays when students and teachers will be less likely to begin using the resources?

- **Differentiate between glitches and serious issues**

- **Give providers the opportunity to offer alternative solutions**

- **Determine if key stakeholders are happy with their current solution or just reluctant to change**

- **Evaluate all providers support services.**

Assessing Existing Investments vs. Making New Purchases: Where is the ROI?

It is best to do an edtech assessment on an annual basis. This part of the process is not shared with students. Depending on the pricing model of some resources and how you pay for resources, you may have to adjust certain fees that students are responsible for.

At the same time, it's important to maintain your fiduciary responsibility to students, and recognize when the cost of a tool or resource is not worth the benefit that it provides.

One of the most important questions for assessing the ROI of an edtech investment is: *Will the investment support accreditation?*

As faculty and administrators well know, accreditation is a top priority for a school of nursing because it drives students' decision to enroll. To maintain accreditation, schools need to demonstrate that they are driving positive outcomes for students. To support the accreditation efforts, which can be time-consuming and at times arduous, it is essential to select products that make it easy for faculty to collect data demonstrating student outcomes.

How to Know When It's Time to Make a Change

There are three main factors that will point to the need to make a change in your edtech tools and resources: **ROI, persistent pushback, and inadequate support.**

Cost should not be the only reason to eliminate an edtech tool or resource. Some educational resources do offer far more value than others, justifying the higher price. However, if the value your instructors and students get from a tool or resource is insufficient compared to others at a lower price, budgetary concerns may win out.

Additionally, some temporary mild pushback from faculty is not a reason to immediately make a switch. But if pushback persists, then it's important to listen to faculty. Students will ultimately suffer if institutions do not listen to and respond to ongoing concerns.

Thinking back to our section on ease of use, support can be the difference between a tool or resource eventually becoming used widely and it sitting on your virtual shelf. After giving faculty adequate time to adopt a tool or resource, it's important to note if their requests for help or additional information from the vendor go unheeded or replies take too long.

These all justify taking a hard look at your investment and considering alternatives.

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How Wilkes University Chose UWorld to Fill a Gap in Their Nursing Education Program Curriculum

Students in the Nursing Program at Wilkes University in Pennsylvania needed greater support in learning the content and practicing the kind of questions featured on the NCLEX. They also needed to monitor their strengths and weaknesses in an ongoing way, and to continually adjust their practice in response to that feedback.

"Students were the ones who came to us first about this resource, and that is something that doesn't happen that often," Associate Professor of Nursing Maria Grandinetti said. "The students told us, 'We have friends at different schools, and they have used this resource called UWorld.' And this is where we said, 'Okay, let's look and see if this helps them pass the NCLEX.' "

Wilkes didn't have a course specifically in their curriculum for the NCLEX RN prep, though they had one in development. This made it the perfect time to consider UWorld, in Grandinetti's opinion.

After comparing a few options, Grandinetti and her colleagues found a place for UWorld within one of their existing courses. They determined that UWorld would make it easy for faculty to watch over students' progress and determine their additional needs. Students would also be able to easily track their own progress while working through the material.

Grandinetti met with representatives from UWorld, and then discussed UWorld and other options with her colleagues, as well as students from each year of the nursing program. The school decided on UWorld and made it available to students. As we recommend here, they then collected feedback and looked at students' success on the NCLEX exam to evaluate the success of their investment.

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> *"Ever since our students have used this resource, we've had really great success. Students really like the resource. They often said that it was **the one resource that prepared them the most** for the state board of nursing testing."*
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> **Maria Grandinetti**
> Associate Professor of Nursing

CHECKLIST

Complete this checklist to help you navigate the process of evaluating your edtech investments and determining your best options moving forward.

- [ ] We've identified a gap in our curricular tools or resources based on feedback from students, faculty or both.

- [ ] With input from faculty and students, we've identified an outcome that a resource or technology would help achieve.

- [ ] Based on input from faculty and/or student suggestions, we've arranged to see multiple options from multiple solution providers.

- [ ] We've reviewed and discussed options after meeting with solution providers.

- [ ] We've connected with peers at other organizations who are already customers of our potential choices.

- [ ] We've made a selection.

- [ ] We've created a feedback system and are gathering input from faculty and students on an ongoing basis.

- [ ] We're evaluating the impact and results of our investments regularly during curricular meetings and through student feedback forms.

To learn more about how UWorld can guide your students' success from classroom to clinical, visit our website.