

Course and Curriculum Planning: A Nursing Faculty Member Perspective

Ernie Lindain Jr

Department of Nursing: William Paterson University

NUR6050: Curriculum Development

Dr. Karen Phillips

February 16, 2025

Course and Curriculum Planning: A Nursing Faculty Member Perspective

Regarding nursing faculty leadership, I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Karen Arca-Contreras, who was generous in sharing her journey in healthcare and the intricacies of her nursing education role. This includes her experience with course and curriculum planning in the nursing paradigm. We began the interview by introducing herself and her background. Dr. Arca-Contreras has over 30 years of healthcare experience, backed by her DNP degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University and her MSN degree from The College of Staten Island. Furthermore, she also received her BSN and associate degree from The College of Staten Island during the early stages of her career. She began her career with a multitude of healthcare positions: medical-surgical nursing, oncology, staff development, nursing administration, nursing consultation, and community health. Her current position is at The College of Staten Island as an Associate Professor of Nursing, Success Coaching Program Coordinator, and Deputy Chairperson.

When I asked her about the courses she is teaching, Dr. Arca-Contreras enthusiastically expressed her passion for Leadership and Management in Nursing; NRS 411. Having experience in nursing management, she noted her passion comes from delving into nursing, leadership, and management theories concerning the care of diverse individuals, families, and communities in the practice setting. Rooted in her nursing experience, Dr. Arca-Contreras aims to utilize “conceptual themes of critical thinking, decision-making, and therapeutic nursing interventions to integrate quality improvement initiatives throughout the course.” She emphasized the strength of this course as “evidence-based practice and research findings that are examined for their relevance in refining and extending the role of a leader in professional nursing practice.” When

asked about the weaknesses when teaching this course, she stated that it is difficult to find preceptors in the clinical sites.

Regarding her favorite courses to teach, Dr. Arca-Contreras highlighted her passion for designing quality improvement programs and using leadership and management strategies to monitor the effectiveness of therapeutic nursing interventions. Stemmed from her research and publications, she conducted a study involving two different ways of teaching nursing students and how they affected their ability to make clinical decisions and participate in class (Arca-Contreras, K. M., 2021). Key points brought from the study include a flipped classroom approach and a non-traditional approach. Within the flipped approach, the students learn the study material on their own (through readings or videos) before class time is used for discussion, teamwork, and problem-solving. With the traditional approach, the instructor teaches the material in class, and the students study the material on their own afterward. The results showed that students with the flipped method have better clinical decision-making and higher participation when compared to the traditional approach. This study exemplifies Dr. Karen's devotion to evidence-based QI projects and implementing them into professional and educational nursing practice.

When asked about her experience with course planning, she emphasized "extensive" and elaborated on her role as deputy chairperson. Within this role, she said she plans course offerings each semester based on projected enrollment. Her role involves academic oversight, helping with curriculum development, faculty evaluation, and accreditation processes. A chairperson also has administrative duties, assisting with the nursing program's budgeting, policy enforcement, and strategic planning (Billings & Halstead, 2024). Along with these responsibilities, Dr. Arca-Contreras also addresses faculty concerns, participates in various committee work, and

represents the department between faculty, administration, and external organizations. I also asked her about her day-to-day operations. She noted it mainly involves overseeing the nursing department and interfacing with other departments such as I.T., registrar, HR, dean of science and technology, and provost.

When asked about what she likes about her school's curriculum, Dr. Arca-Contreras enthusiastically expressed how rigorous all her programs are: AAS, RN-BS, MS, and DNP. Billings & Halstead (2024) note that the faculty's role is to choose strategies embedded in theory and supported by evidence that will promote student engagement and translate it to high-quality nursing practice. Because The College of Staten Island exemplifies this practice, she was ecstatic to share how their curriculum exceeds New York State and national benchmarks on NCLEX and advanced certifications. According to the CSI Annual Report on AAS in Nursing (n.d.), The College of Staten Island had a passing rate of 84% in 2022, which exceeded both New York Associate/Baccalaureate nursing programs (63-66%) and all United States nursing programs (63%). The only thing she mentioned about changing her curriculum is implementing a 4-year BSN program. For now, she said The College of Staten Island is segmented into AAS and RN-BS programs.

Regarding her experiences with curriculum/program planning or related activities, Dr. Arca-Contreras stated she has served many years as a program coordinator. She has systematic plans of evaluations that change, revise, and maintain based on data. She stated that she "enjoys making a change in curriculum based on data but does not enjoy the massive data collection from all the programs." The organization that accredits her program is the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN). Recently, their curriculum obtained 8 more years of

reaccreditation for AAS, RN-BS, and MS programs. Their ACEN reaccreditation visit for their DNP program is this March.

Seeking advice for a new faculty member beginning in course and program planning, I asked Dr. Arca-Contreras how one should start. She highlighted the importance of obtaining a mentor. Another essential tool she focused on was participating in course and program planning seminars. Doing so allowed her to figure out how to measure course student learning outcomes and program learning outcomes. This allows her to “scaffold her courses from simple to complex.” As she utilized these tools more throughout her career, Dr. Arca-Contreras was able to enhance her identity as a program coordinator and deputy chairperson. Additionally, her role now as an associate professor differs from her previous role/career in management and staff development. She stated “The biggest difference is that teaching, service, and research are heavily focused. They are also the same when working with different personalities and different levels of education such as MS, DNP, and PhD.”

In summary, Dr. Arca-Contreras highlighted the most important advice she had for me pursuing a career in nursing education. She told me to publish and collaborate with other colleagues, participating in research and development projects. According to Tracy et al. (2022), the qualities of an advanced practice nurse include attention to detail, critical thinking, communication, interdisciplinary collaboration, leadership ability, and a strong commitment to continuous learning. Dr. Arca-Contreras exemplifies this through her practices by seeking out new opportunities to perfect her skill set and knowledge. Furthermore, she wanted me to work hard to achieve tenure and seek out promotional opportunities when available. Overall, I thanked Dr. Arca-Contreras for her time, and she told me to contact her if I ever needed help.

As our interview concluded, I was ecstatic with the insight she provided and her unwavering commitment and dedication to her profession. Her journey in nursing education reveals a transformative power that accompanies advanced practice nursing with her ability to make an impact on the evolving health care infrastructure. For aspiring nursing faculty members, Dr. Arca-Contreras offered valuable advice in pursuing/publishing research, leveraging clinical expertise to make informed decisions, and seeking assistance from experienced faculty members. From having an extensive educational background through her embedded roots in nursing, she is a prime example of someone deeply engaged in perfecting her health care craft.

References

Arca-Contreras, K. M., DNP, MSN. Associate Professor of Nursing (tenured), Success Coaching Program Coordinator, Deputy Chairperson. *Department of Nursing: The College of Staten Island*.

Arca-Contreras, K. M. (2021). Flipping the Classroom to Optimize Clinical Decision-Making in the Didactic Setting. *Journal of Doctoral Nursing Practice*, 14(1), 17–25.

<https://doi.org/10.1891/jdnp-d-20-00050>

Billings, D. M. & Halstead, J. A. (2024). Teaching in nursing: A guide for faculty. (7th ed.) *Elsevier*.

CSI Annual Report on AAS in Nursing. (n.d.). Retrieved February 15, 2025, from https://www.csi.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/nursing/CSI_AnnualReport_onAAS_Nursing.pdf

Tracy, M. F., Phillips, S. J., & O'Grady, E. (2022). *Hamric and Hanson's Advanced Practice Nursing* (7th ed.). Elsevier Health Sciences.