

**Poster Session I**  
**#10**

**Evaluating Program Learning Outcomes In RN-BSN Students Through Portfolio Development**

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**Background:** Faculty in a RN-BSN Program designed courses in portfolio development as a mechanism to both foster self-assessment and to evaluate the program outcomes of critical thinking, communication and professionalism. In June 2002 the portfolio courses were initiated and a pilot study was begun to evaluate their effectiveness.

**Purpose:** The purposes of this study were to describe and to evaluate the program learning outcomes of RN-BSN students within one nursing program through portfolio development.

**Theoretical Framework:** Adult learning theory and Paul's critical thinking theory were used as the foundations of the portfolio courses that focused on promoting RN-BSN students' critical thinking skills, communication skills, and personal and professional growth. Beginning courses presented Paul's (1993) critical thinking theory, reflective thinking and writing, basic computer skills, and self-assessment skills. The final portfolio assignment was the mechanism for measuring the learning outcomes of the program.

**Methods:** An action research approach was used to track the feasibility of the portfolio process and the reactions of both students and faculty for the first year 2002-2003. Critical thinking was measured with a semantic differential scale based on Paul's basic universal intellectual standards. Communication skills and personal and professional growth were measured through a content analysis of students' work. Outcome data were reported in the aggregate. Outcome results were trended over a five year period. The study was continued through August 2008.

**Conclusions and Implications:** Data from the pilot study validated the use of student portfolio development as a mechanism for improving students' critical thinking skills. It also documented an increased sense of professionalism and awareness of professional responsibility. Strong critical thinking skills, the ability to communicate clearly and persuasively and internalization of professional responsibility are necessary components of advocacy and political activism. Thus the graduate possesses the tools to make a positive impact on the healthcare system.