P4b:  Paper – Education
A Qualitative Exploration of Interprofessional Education: A Report on Student Perceptions and Experiences at Widener University

Saturday, March 13, 2010 12:00p.m. to 12:30p.m. 208/209 Hamilton Bldg

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The purpose of this presentation is to describe the findings from a qualitative exploration of student perspectives on the impact of an interprofessional learning activity designed to foster the development of skills and attitudes necessary for effective collaboration.

Possessing the skills to work effectively on interprofessional teams is an important part of providing care. Universities have the capacity to shape the thinking and practice of its graduates and in 1998, Student Interdisciplinary Day was developed as a learning experience designed to address the increasingly important need for collaboration among human service professionals.

Graduate students from clinical psychology, education, social work and physical therapy participate in an educational module that features didactic and group learning experiences designed to promote the pre-requisite skills for effective collaboration. A student-led, mock team conference provides the capstone experience that requires collaboration in developing a plan of care for a 13 year old client with a spinal cord injury. Two focus group sessions explored the perspectives and attitudes of students that arose out of participation in the interprofessional educational (IPE) experience. Each focus group consisted of 8 students with equal representation of the disciplines (n=16).

From the data, the following themes emerged: (1) the existence of professional role knowledge gaps; (2) an increased awareness of role overlap among some disciplines; (3) a new found value for the importance of collaboration; (4) an appreciation of the impact of leadership and conflict on team function; and, (5) the development of confidence in the ability to engage in collaborative practice.

The study findings reveal and reinforce the importance of including opportunities for interprofessional interaction and collaboration in the curriculum of human service professionals. The study and this presentation provide program and curricular design guidance for faculty involved in IPE.