Evolution of the PATH: Supporting Distance Learning
University of Massachusetts Lowell, School of Nursing and Library

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Introduction
PATH is an acronym for Preparation, Academics, Transitions and Helpful Resources. The guide was developed in accordance with the goals and objectives of the DNPs Caring for the Underserved Grant (HRSA funded), specifically goals related to recruitment and retention. The PATH module was designed to help the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) students with the back-to-school transition and attract prospective students to the program. Within the guide, there are a variety of resources ranging from information on UML email and Blackboard access to academic writing resources and statistics tutorials. After analyzing our cohorts of students, we realized that the module serves a third purpose and that is providing support to distance learners. All of the DNP courses are hybrid or online which means they are not on campus frequently or at least not during times when support is available. As a result, PATH has become one way to provide resources and tutorials that students can access when they are off campus.

Our Students and Their Needs
DNP Student Characteristics:
• Professionals coming back to school after long hiatuses
• Practice full-time as Advanced Practice Nurses/NPs while taking classes
• Often need support during off-hours
Their needs:
• Transition from writing patient notes and informal writing to academic and formal writing
• Learn how to use research tools because these tools have changed since the students were last in school
• Need assistance with technology, such as Blackboard, MS Power Point, MS Excel and statistical software

Filling a Need – Using LibGuides
LibGuides is a software traditionally used to create research guides for courses. The library currently uses LibGuides to connect students to research and library resources for specific courses. The tool is:
• User friendly tool that is easy to create and change
• Embed links, videos, and more
• Organization flexible
• Usage statistics
• Collect important resources in one spot
We have leveraged the technology to build a new kind of program level resource by focusing on the needs of the student and going beyond a specific class.

PATH Usage Between August 2011 and September 2013
Usage peaks at the beginning of each semester when the guide is highly promoted to incoming and potential students.

Homepage of PATH Guide
Welcome
Welcome to this online guide! The University of Massachusetts HRSA grant program “DNPs Caring for the Underserved after Health Reform” provided funding to develop this guide.
We call this the PATH to success. Each of four modules will provide links to websites, books and other documents. What does PATH mean?
P = Preparation. A module designed to help the new entering graduate student with applications and skills necessary to navigate the first few months of school
• Communication tools, tutorials on Email access, ISIS, Blackboard
• Financial aid, graduate school grants and scholarships
• Parking and other campus information
• Health and Professional documentation needed for clinical coursework
A= Academics. A module with many components that addresses the resources needed to succeed academically
• Library Services, Research guides, RefWorks and other bibliographic resources
• Links to Databases that will assist with coursework and other projects
• Self Tutorials for MS office applications (WORD, EXCEL, ACCESS)
• Writing for professional publications
T = Transitions. A module that will help to university and other resources to assist you in your transition to graduate school
• Healthy living, Recreational resources at UML, Health and Mental health services
• Time management
• Social media resources, Graduate Student Organization (SSO)
H= Helpful Resources. A module that will contain various resources not listed above:
• Statistics overview, books and internet resources to help understand statistics
• Cultural competency resources
• Professional organizations and conferences
• How to create professional posters for presentations and dissemination of research/project

What Does the Data Tells Us?
• Students use PATH more frequently when it is promoted
• Need to continue and increase promotion of the guide
• It easier for the students to get access to important campus tools
• Need to promote lesser used, valuable resources such as research, writing and quantitative statistical resources
• Need qualitative research on the use of the guide and value of content
• We are reaching our goal to support the program level needs of graduate students

Future of the Guide
• Develop more videos to help with research and writing support utilizing Echo360 and Blackboard tools
• Add qualitative research resources
• Replace generic software tutorials with videos and tutorials that focus on our specific needs and usage of these tools
• Utilize Library’s Sales Force tool to communicate updates, changes, and new content to students
• Bring model to other College of Health Sciences departments and programs
• Exercise Physiology and Community Health & Sustainability have PATH guides in place and being developed in Fall 2013 semester
• Student survey and interviews to better identify what they need and use on the guide

Visit PATH: http://libguides.uml.edu/dnp
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