Course Faculty and Contact Information

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Contacting Faculty and Office Hours

For course-related questions prior to January 9, 2006, please contact Celia. For questions pertaining to the optional 5th course credit at any time, please contact Manfred. At the beginning of the course each student will be assigned to one faculty member for course teaching and evaluation purposes. All students enrolled for 5 credits of NUR 815 are assigned to Manfred.

Office hours with the course faculty are arranged via email appointment. Please do not leave telephone messages on our office telephone voice mail systems as we may not receive telephone messages in a timely fashion.

University Course Description

- **Semester:** Spring of every year
- **Credits:** Variable from 4 to 5. The 4 credit “base” course is required, and students may elect to enroll for the optional 5th credit.
- **Restrictions:** Open only to master's degree students in the College of Nursing or approval of College
- **Description:** Concepts and principles of scientific investigation, including research design, measurement, sampling, ethics, and selected analysis techniques commonly used in nursing and related health disciplines and evaluation research
Course Objectives

1. Evaluate key philosophical assumptions that guide the assessment of quality of scientific evidence;
2. Compare and contrast research designs regarding their ability to provide useful empirical evidence to inform health-related issues/problems and approaches to nursing practice;
3. Analyze the effects of different sampling approaches on obtaining useful empirical information about selected research target populations;
4. Compare and contrast different approaches to data collection and measurement, regarding their usefulness for examining theoretical concepts of research interest;
5. Evaluate the application selected epidemiologic concepts and measures to clinically-relevant research questions;
6. Analyze ethical issues pertaining to the conduct and utilization of research findings;
7. Apply program evaluation concepts in relation to clinically-relevant research questions; and,
8. Evaluate multiple roles in the conduct and utilization of research for a Master's prepared nurse.

Required Materials

1. Stommel, M., & Wills, C.E. (2004). Clinical Research: Concepts and Principles for Advanced Practice Nurses. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins. This will be the main textbook for the course. New and used copies are available for purchase, and MSU Library has a copy available for checkout.
2. Gordis, L. (2004). Epidemiology (3rd ed.). Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders. We will use this textbook for selected weeks of the course. The 2nd edition is similar to and generally substitutable for the 3rd edition of this textbook. New and used copies are available for purchase.
3. Online articles to be downloaded by the student via the MSU Library (see Appendix C for list).

Course Calendar

See Appendix D of this syllabus.

Where to Look for Course Materials

This course is offered via the University Angel online course system. To access the course web site, go to the MSU Angel home page and type in your MSU email address (part that appears before the “@msu.edu” portion of your email address) and your MSU email password. If you are registered for the course, you will see a link for the course web site on your personal home page that opens after you’ve entered your MSU address and password. If you experience any difficulties viewing the link to the NUR 815 web site on your personal home page in Angel, please contact Jennifer Kallos, Enrollment Manager & Administrative Staff Assistant for Academic Affairs, at 517.432.1172. Technical problems with use of Angel should be referred to the Angel Help Desk. The toll free Angel Help Line number is 1.800.500.1554 (North American and Hawaii), and the local campus area number is 517.355.2345.

When you click on the Lessons tab within the NUR 815 Angel web site, you will see a folder entitled Announcements at the top of the page. It is very important that you check the Announcements
folder each time you go into the course web site, and at least several times a week. The faculty will post announcements under this link on a weekly basis including faculty summary comments for each week’s Application Exercise discussion. See additional details in Appendix B on Message Board Discussion Tips and Expectations.

Each week’s course content is placed in a separate folder under the Lessons tab, labeled by the week number and dates. For example, the third week’s content is in a folder entitled, “Week #3,” and the dates for Week #3 are January 26-February 1, 2006. As shown in the illustration below, each week’s folder usually contains the following key folders: Week #__ Objectives, Week #__ Reading, Week #__ Application Exercise, and Week #__ Discussion Group Message Board for your discussion group.

**Week #3**

**Experimental Designs (January 26-February 1, 2006)**

The Objectives for each week include the key learning outcomes that you should be able to accomplish following doing that week’s course content.

The Reading folder usually contains a reading assignment for a research article that serves as the focus for that week’s application of the key concepts, as well as textbook readings for the week. Refer to Appendix C for a complete list of the articles to be used in the course this semester. All assigned articles are available online via the MSU Library online journals link. **Due to copyright law restrictions and technical reasons copies of articles cannot be posted within the course web site and stable direct links to articles cannot be accommodated within the course web site.** Students are expected to contact the Angel Help Desk for any difficulties with accessing assigned readings or other materials posted in the Angel web site.

**Tip!** Students in prior semesters have found it very helpful to download copies of all of the articles near the beginning of the semester to the computer used for accessing Angel courses. This prevents possible delays in accessing articles later on related to any unforeseeable University computer server problems, and so forth.

The Application Exercise folder contains the focus questions for the week’s discussion, in relation to the assigned article or other exercise.

The Discussion Group Message Board for your discussion group (led by Manfred, Eileen or Celia) is where you should post your contributions for the Application Exercise being discussed in a given
week. Your postings should be put in the Message Board for whichever faculty discussion group you are assigned to. In each week’s Angel Lessons folder, you will be able to see a discussion group link for the discussion group you are assigned to. See additional details in Appendix B of this syllabus regarding Message Board Discussion Tips and Expectations.

Aside from these “standard” folders, there are also some additional folders/files in some weeks of the course, in which there are online quizzes, in-course surveys about how things are going for you so far in the course, etc.

**When to Look for Course Materials**

Thursday is considered to be the “beginning” day of each week of the course (refer to the Course Calendar in Appendix D). The materials for Weeks #1 and #2 will be accessible to you starting on Thursday, January 12th (first day of Week #1).

On Thursday, January 19th (start of Week #2), you'll be able to “look ahead” to the Week #3 materials as desired. Also, for each subsequent week of the course, you'll also be able to view the material for the next week after that, as well as to look at material for all past weeks. For example, on Thursday, January 19th, you'll be able to see materials for Week #2 (current week) and Week #3 (next week) of the course, as well as Week #1. On Thursday, January 26th, you'll be able to view materials for Week #3 (current week) and Week #4 (next week) of the course, as well as Weeks #1 and #2, and so forth.

On Thursday, March 2nd, you'll be able to view materials for Week #8. Because of the intercession of Spring Break week (March 6th-12th), your Application Exercise discussion contributions in the Message Board link for your course section will be due by Wednesday, March 15th. Week #9 of the course starts on Thursday, March 16th. Your Application Exercise comments for Week #9 will be due by Wednesday, March 22nd.

Starting on Thursday, April 6th, you will be able to view the materials for Weeks #13 and #14 of the course, which are the last two weeks of the course. This schedule allows time during the last several weeks of the semester to complete the course paper (see the Grading section of this page) and to prepare for the final exam. Please note the date for the final exam and the due date for the critique paper that are listed in the Course Calendar (Appendix D of this syllabus).

**Completing and Submitting Course Assignments**

Weekly Application Exercise discussion comments should be posted in the Message Board for your discussion group, and are due by no later than 5 pm on Wednesday (last day of the week for NUR 815, for each week of the course). For example, the activities listed for Week #1 (Self-Introduction and Application Exercise) are due by no later than the end of the day (5 pm) on Wednesday, January 18th. The assignments listed for Week #2 are due by no later than the end of the day (5 pm) on Wednesday, January 25th, and so forth. **Zero credit will be given for late Application Exercise postings.**

Course requirements for the 4-credit version of the course include the successful completion of midterm and final exams, integrative critique paper, and weekly application exercises. Students registered for the 5-credit course option will complete a data interpretation project in addition to the requirements for the 4-credit version of the course. The midterm and final exams will be completed via a proctored exam arrangement. The course paper (critique paper) is to be submitted to the faculty member for your discussion group via the course web site “drop box” located in the folder for the last
week of the course. Please do not FAX or send course papers or other materials such as exam proctoring forms by the standard postal or campus mail systems. These delivery methods have known reliability problems and the faculty may receive your materials either very late or not at all.

**Points for assignments will be distributed as follows:**

- **Proctored midterm exam** (90 minutes in length; short answer discussion format). The midterm exam counts 30% of the course grade. The midterm exam is to be taken on Wednesday, March 1, 2006.
- **Proctored final exam** (90 minutes in length; short answer discussion format). The final exam counts 35% of the course grade. The final exam is to be taken on Wednesday, April 26, 2006.
- **Integrative critique paper.** The paper counts 25% of the course grade. Additional details about the paper will be posted in the Week #14 course materials (available starting on Thursday, April 6th). This is a brief (up to 4 pages double-spaced text) paper that succinctly critiques the strengths and weaknesses of a published article that we will assign to you later on to critique. The completed course paper should be uploaded to the online course paper drop box in the Week #14 Lessons folder by no later than 5 pm on Wednesday, May 3, 2006.
- **Application Exercises.** Participation in Message Board discussions of weekly Application Exercises counts for 10% of the overall course grade, divided equally among the weeks of the course (Weeks #1–#14). Each week class participants will engage in online discussions in the Message Board links, in which that week's course content is applied to key focus questions (Application Exercises). Postings are due by no later than 5 pm on the Wednesday at the end of each week of the course. Grading will be based upon timely, high-quality participation in online discussions. Zero credit will be given for late postings. Points may be deducted from online participation for repeatedly posting “comprehensive” posts, repetition of errors that have already been clarified in the discussion by the class and/or faculty, or for otherwise consistently inadequate quality or quantity of participation (see Appendix B on Message Board Discussion Expectations for additional information).

**Grading Timeframe and Scale**

Grades will be posted electronically by within two (2) weeks of the assignment due date, but usually much sooner. The following grading scale is used in this course:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>93-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>86-92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>80-85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>75-79%</td>
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<td>65-69%</td>
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<td>60-64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>&lt; 60%</td>
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**Attendance/Participation Policy**

Unless otherwise negotiated with the faculty member for your class section, weekly discussion contributions and other course assignments are expected to be posted/turned in by the pre-established due dates/times. Exceptions for exams and other assignment due dates/times are typically made only for emergency situations. Assignments submitted late without prior approval of the faculty will receive zero credit. **Individual special needs for course exams or other assignments must be discussed with the faculty member for your discussion group by no later than the end of the first week of classes, Friday, January 13, 2006.**

**Midterm and Final Exam Proctoring Arrangements**

The Midterm and Final exams must be taken via an in-person proctored exam arrangement. The Midterm Exam will occur on Wednesday, March 1st, and the Final Exam will occur on Wednesday, April 26th. There are two types of proctored exam arrangements that can be made per the preference of the individual student:

1. **Option 1:** The course faculty will reserve a room on campus for students who wish to take their exams on campus. The option of an on-campus faculty-proctored exam is most often favored by students who are geographically nearby to campus. **Advance notification of the course faculty is required if you wish to come to campus to take your midterm and/or final exams** (refer to dates in the course Calendar). Exams will be available only for those students who have provided the required advance notification of intent to take course exams on campus. Information about the location(s) and time(s) of exams will be posted in the Announcements folder near the beginning of the semester.

2. **Option 2:** The student may arrange an individually-proctored exam. This option is most often favored by students who are geographically at distance from campus or who prefer for other reasons not to take their course exams on campus. The student identifies a suitable exam proctor at a convenient location (usually geographically nearby to where the student lives), and completes and submits the exam proctoring agreement form to the faculty member for their NUR 815 discussion group. A copy of the exam proctoring form is included in Appendix A of this syllabus. The exam proctor must sign and date the completed form, which should also indicate the specific times on March 1st (Midterm exam) and April 26th (Final exam) that the student has arranged to take exams. **The form must be fully completed, signed by the proctor, and submitted by the due date (see course Calendar) in order to be accepted by the NUR 815 faculty as a valid agreement for a proctored exam.** If this requirement is not met per the stipulations in the NUR 815 course syllabus, the student will be ineligible to take the exam. Students are responsible for checking with their proctors and the faculty to confirm in advance the exam dates/times and that completed proctoring forms have been received.

**Optional Self-Assessment Activities (Not Graded)**

Each week of the course has an optional Self-Assessment Exercise that is included at the bottom of each week’s required Application Exercise. The Self-Assessment Exercises usually include online quizzes that you may find useful to complete to assess your understanding of a given week’s key concepts. In addition, several weeks of the course (Weeks #2, #5, and #11) include short multiple choice online quizzes. This second type of self-assessment quiz includes some relatively more challenging multiple choice type questions that are intended to assess the depth of understanding of the
key concepts. For both types of self-assessment activities, clicking the “submit” button at the bottom of the page once the activity is completed will display written feedback about answers.

**Tip!** Students in prior semesters have found the weekly self-assessment activities very useful to check understanding of key concepts. They recommend doing them each week. The faculty agree and also encourage the asking additional questions as necessary to clarify understanding of the concepts.

**Academic Integrity Policy**

Breaches of academic integrity standards (such as unauthorized collaboration with others on an exam or the course paper) will result in zero credit for the affected assignments. Assignments submitted for a grade are expected to be fully the work of individual students. Refer also to College of Nursing policies included in the MSN Student Handbook.

**Optional 5th Credit for NUR 815**

Students who wish to enroll for an optional 5th credit of NUR 815 should contact Manfred via email by no later than the end of the second week of classes (January 20th, 2006). Students who are enrolled for a 5th credit will complete a supervised data interpretation project to be arranged with Manfred. Grading of the 5th credit will be incorporated as part of the integrative critique paper assignment. Enrollment for the optional 5th credit is especially encouraged for students who are:

- Enrolled in the “fast track” MSU College of Nursing PhD program, or considering doctoral study in the near future;
- Involved/planning to be involved in clinical practice or other professional activities which require skills in assembling and analyzing small-scale clinical data sets; and/or,
- Otherwise strongly interested in additional experience interpreting research results.
Appendix A: College of Nursing Proctor Guidelines and Form

Michigan State University
Academic Evaluation and Assessment
Examination Proctor Guidelines

Students may take examinations off campus as long as security measures for administering the test are strictly maintained before, during and after testing. Off campus examinees should be tested under the same circumstances as their peers on campus to ensure the academic integrity of the examination. The student is responsible for selecting a qualified proctor.

**Appropriate Proctors**
- Faculty members
- Retired faculty members
- Professional educators (superintendent or principal)
- Human resource professionals
- Librarians
- Military officers
- Pastors
- County Extension Educators

**Inappropriate Proctors**
- High school students
- College peers
- Relatives
- Co-workers
- Neighbors

The examination should be administered in a quiet, well-lighted office or classroom setting conducive to concentration. Exam administration in private homes is not appropriate.

**Proctor Responsibilities**
- Store the exam in a secure location where it cannot be accessed by other students.
- Check student photo ID to ensure the examinee is actually the right person.
- Ensure no copies of the exam are made.
- **Students taking midterm or final exams for NUR 815 may access any course-related materials while taking the exam, such as textbooks, web site printouts, notes, etc.**
- Time the test and stop the examinee after time has been expended.
- Note any testing irregularities on a separate sheet.
- Secure the exam until mailing.
- Ship completed test to designated address within 4 hours of test completion. Use traceable shipping procedures (UPS, FedEx, etc.), or scan and email the completed exam to the faculty member for the student’s course section (see details at end of proctoring agreement form). You may assess student for cost of shipping. If a fee is charged for exam supervision, request payment from the student at the time of testing. MSU will not pay proctor fees.

MSU reserves the right to verify proctor qualifications, require additional evidence of eligibility or select a different proctor. The Proctor Agreement may be terminated for any cause by the proctor, student or MSU upon written notification to all parties.
Michigan State University  
Academic Evaluation and Assessment  
Examination Proctor Agreement Form

Thank you for your willingness to proctor an examination for an MSU student. Please review the Examination Proctor Guidelines attached. If you meet the qualifications and are willing to assume the responsibilities, please sign and submit this agreement form.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Student PID #</th>
<th>Course</th>
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Proctor name____________________________________________________________

Signature ______________________________________ Date ____________________

Title____________________________________________________________________

Employer_______________________________________________________________

Business Address ________________________________________________________

City, State, Zip Code _____________________________________________________

Phone_________________Fax_____________________E-mail___________________

Testing Location_________________________________________________________

Testing Date and Time________________________ (MUST BE INDICATED TO BE VALID)

Please return Examination Proctor Agreement Form to the course faculty member for the student’s section of enrollment in NUR 815 (obtain the faculty mailing address from the student). Ship completed test to designated address within 4 hours of test completion. Use traceable shipping procedures (UPS, FedEx, etc.). You may assess the student for cost of shipping. The student’s completed exam may also be scanned and emailed to the faculty member for their course section.

The use of standard postal mail or FAX may result in considerable delays/loss of exam materials. Please do NOT forward materials via standard postal mail or FAX.
Appendix B: Message Board Discussion Tips and Expectations

Each week, there will be focus questions to discuss in the online Message Board for that week, in the form of weekly “Application Exercises.” Most weeks we will ask you to read an article and to discuss key questions about the article in the Message Board for your course section, as relevant to that week’s course content. You should also do the assigned reading in the textbook(s) and any other information we’ve posted for you in the Lessons folder that week, before reading the assigned article for a given week.

Throughout each week’s discussion, faculty will follow your conversations closely on a daily basis (Monday-Friday), and will contribute to the discussion from time to time, to assist in your learning. Following each week’s discussion, some summary comments (Discussion Synthesis) about that week’s discussion will be posted in the Announcements folder under the Lessons tab. From time to time, faculty may post impromptu comments or questions in the Message Board discussions, whenever it seems useful to do so for discussion purposes. Most often, we post something in the class discussion once every other day or so during the week. If you would like the course faculty to be sure to address a question you have as part of that week’s discussion, you should address your question to the faculty member by name; e.g., “Celia (or Eileen, or Manfred), could you comment on….”

Faculty will generally not be online during evening or weekend hours. In general we will try to respond to specific questions by within 48 hours of when questions are posted. Occasionally one or the other faculty member will be traveling out of town during the course of the semester. If one of us is gone for 48 hours or longer and offline during that time, we will post an announcement in the course web site in advance of our absence to let you know when that will happen, and the other faculty member will cover the class discussion during that time if the absence from the web site will be more than a few days.

Keep in mind that the Message Board discussions are supposed to simulate a “back and forth” conversation between a group of people, in which everyone has a turn to talk, and the talk should be balanced in terms of how much each person contributes. Think about how you would interact with others at a social event, or in an in-person classroom setting. With in-person interactions, people take turns exchanging relatively brief statements about a topic of interest. Thoughtful dialog that is balanced regarding individual contributions, and in which people carefully listen to each other, increases the likelihood that both individual and group-level understanding of the course content will be enhanced. This type of dialog also conveys respect for the contributions of classmates, which fosters openness in sharing of ideas/insights among class participants.

With these overall thoughts about group discussion in mind, here are some more specific thoughts about things that are helpful/less helpful during weekly online discussions:

- Always post your responses as a “reply” within the question/thread of conversation you are addressing. Posting a “new” post to the Message Board itself, instead of an individual question/response within it, results in “extraneous” posts that are missed by others or result in confusion about what question/response is being addressed.

- Avoid posting “comprehensive” answers to each of the Application Exercise questions in a single posting. Comprehensive postings are analogous to dominating an in-person
conversation in a classroom, and tend to “shut down” the conversation and frustrate colleagues, because others entering the discussion afterwards feel that everything has “already been said.” As a general guideline, any one posting should usually be no more than a brief 3-5 sentences paragraph, addressing only an aspect or two of the ongoing conversation. Some of the better Message Board discussions have involved people posting just a sentence or two in response to classmates, but carrying on a dialog back and forth with each other online for an hour or so.

- **Be aware of communication challenges that are somewhat unique to online learning formats, and treat others as you would like to be treated.** Message Boards do have some unique challenges in regard to adequacy of communication. One of the most common issues is that rapid back-and-forth discussion does not occur as it does in an in-person interaction. Thus, more time is needed for typing in, reviewing, and responding to comments. A second issue is that there is a substantially greater potential for people to misunderstand each other’s intentions, when they are communicating without the benefit of visual and auditory cues to the feelings of others. For example, writing in ALL CAPS or with many !!!!!!s can appear to others that they are being “shouted at,” even if that is not at all what the communicator intended. Also, comments that are intended to be humorous or playful can often be interpreted as personal attacks (online “flaming”). Individual conflicts are best handled in a non-public forum (the Message Board is a very, very public forum, which may quickly turn a minor conflict into something more major). We also emphasize that the Message Board links are not to used as a “complaint board” to address personal questions, concerns, frustrations, etc. to the faculty (please use our individual email addresses for those kinds of issues). The overall key point about communication in the web site is that each person should take good care to think carefully about how others will perceive what is (or isn’t) intended in a Message Board posting—and then exercise prudent discretion on that basis. Think about how you would like to be treated by others, and then treat others as you yourself would like to be treated.

- **The Message Boards are “owned” by the student class members.** Sometimes the faculty will post more comprehensive comments (a “mini lecture” of sorts), related to clarifying the course content, and also with the goal of fostering the discussion/raising additional questions about the course content. During the weeks that more challenging content is presented, the faculty will tend to be more active in the online discussions throughout the week. But in general the faculty are also quite mindful of not participating too much at any one time, so that everyone in the class has the opportunity to make a contribution to the discussion. The Message Board discussions are intended to be for the benefit of class (not faculty) discussions.

- **Quality and timeliness of participation are important.** It’s important that each class member participates enough in the discussion, at a level that fosters both individual learning, as well as helping the learning of others. It’s helpful to review the discussion postings at least several times throughout the week, and to contribute perhaps two or three brief postings over the course of the week, related to the ongoing discussion. For example, repeatedly posting last-minute discussion comments on Wednesday afternoons that repeat the discussion posted earlier or that include statements such as, “I agree, and don’t really have anything else to add to the discussion,” or, “Sorry, I’m always coming in late, and I’m late again this week,” may result in the loss of discussion participation points. It is not unusual that a subset of the class ends up routinely being the first into the Message Board each week, to post comments about the Application Exercise. We would like to ask each person to make a mindful effort to be early into the Message Board discussions, at least some of the time. If everyone makes an effort this
way, no one person should feel that they are carrying the load each week, of getting the discussion started. There is also risk of losing participation credit for routinely being late in the week to post comments in the discussion.

- **Consider Live Chat links for “live” discussion.** As the time draws nearer for the major course exams, you may find it helpful to use the Live Chat links under the In Touch tab, to review key content in live time with classmates and the faculty (arranged by students as desired with each other and the faculty). The Live Chat comments are “logged” (saved) in the web site so that you can refer back to them later on as desired.

- **The faculty will take into account both the quantity and quality of your Message Board contributions, in determining course grades.** Although the 10% allocated in the grade for weekly discussion participation is a small portion of the overall course grade, often the Message Board participation credit can “tip” a course grade for better or worse. Needless to say, it’s relatively easy to gain the full credit for participation by being sure that you have posted some commentary each week of the course.

- **Your postings should reflect that you have reviewed what others have mentioned already.** When you first enter the web site, along with reading the Announcements, you should also review the Message Board postings for your discussion group for that week, to see what new comments have been entered since you were last in the course web site. When we note that your postings should reflect that you’ve reviewed what others have already mentioned, this doesn’t mean repeating what various others have said, or simply indicating that you “agree” with what others have posted. Instead, what you post should reflect you that you have read and thought about the contributions of others who have posted before you. This means that most of your “communication time” in this course will be spent reading what others have written, versus a much smaller amount of time spent posting your commentary in the web site. For example, suppose that there has been discussion of a confusing concept, which a classmate has helpfully clarified in the discussion. Postings done after this point should reflect an overall knowledge of the group progress, which is also evidence that you have been following the group conversation; e.g., a new posting might thank a colleague for clarifying a difficult concept, or extend the discussion. For example, the new posting might start with something of the form, “The last two postings really cleared up the distinction between content and construct validity. But I’m still not fully clear on the difference between discriminant and convergent validity. Can anyone provide some thoughts here about how to tell these two concepts apart?”

- **Whenever possible, try to explicitly link your posting content to at least the last several postings that have appeared in the discussion area.** For example, suppose that several people have agreed already that the design used in a research article is not an experimental design. The next person entering the discussion should carry the discussion to the next step/question; e.g., in this example, by posting an idea about what type of design was used, such as quasi-experimental or observational. For example, someone might post something of this form, “Well, I agree with Mary and Todd that the design isn’t a true experimental design. I was thinking that the design could be quasi-experimental, because there was an intervention controlled by the researchers, and there were comparison groups and control of extraneous variables, but they just didn’t randomly assign people to the study groups. Am I on track with this?” If you are the first person to post, you could start by addressing just the first question, the next person might respond to your comments and also post something about the second
question, and so forth. If you are relatively late to the discussion, you can also try to expand the discussion by introducing a new question for discussion, or by applying the content to a “real life” situation in your clinical practice.

Some Additional Thoughts and Suggestions for Making the Most of Online Learning

- **NUR 815 is usually challenging but not impossible to do well.** NUR 815 is probably one of the most academically challenging courses you will take in the MSN program. We believe that you are fully capable of learning challenging course content, and we will do everything possible to support your learning process. Although NUR 815 is an intellectually challenging course that will take substantial learning effort for most people, it is extremely rare that people do not receive a passing grade the first time they take the course. Nonetheless, we would like to provide some commentary here about certain things that we’ve had the opportunity to observe, over many years of teaching this course in various formats (including the past 8+ years in a fully online format).

- **A fully web-based course has the potential for both benefits and liabilities for learning.** Potential benefits include the flexibility of the learning mode and greater depth of personal learning. But the relative flexibility also requires careful planning of your weekly schedule, allowing for the up to 16 hours of concentrated work each week that the course may take (~ 4 hours for each credit of the course). Depending upon your individual learning needs, additional time beyond 16 hours may be needed for the course.

- **Online courses are not for everyone.** We assume that you have freely chosen to enroll in this course which is a fully online course. However, if you are concerned about your ability to learn in an online format, it is important that you contact us for assistance with learning strategies as soon as you recognize this concern.

- **Your attitude to learning in general and the course in particular matter a lot to how you do.** We do believe that a large portion of the ability to learn does derive from the attitude that each individual brings to the learning experience. Our own mothers also told us when we were young, “Attitude is everything,” and we have taken that very much to heart in our own lives and careers. Motivation and effort are the most important elements of our own career success. We strongly believe (and make that assumption for the purposes of teaching this course) that 90+ percent of success in endeavors is related to effort and motivation to learn, as opposed to inherent ability to learn research concepts, or a match of a course format with an individual’s preferred learning style.

- **It’s important to keep up with the course each week.** Aside from considerations of an appropriate personal attitude and effort, a single most important thing to do to foster being successful in this course is to reliably keep up with the course content each week (preferably working a week ahead at a time), and to contact others right away if you feel you are not understanding what you need to.

- **Before you do the Application Exercise for a given week, you should do all of the readings.** Pay particular attention to headers and tables in the texts, as these are usually overall organizers for the key concepts and principles that should be understood at an adequate level of depth/breadth.
• **Reading in graduate school should be expected to be much more challenging than college.** This “more challenging” aspect is along multiple dimensions: amount of content, level of abstraction and complexity, and assumption of a basic background in clinical nursing and health care. This means that if you are a first year graduate student, you are likely to experience at least some anxiety, as you negotiate a steep “learning curve.” This course does have a very steep learning curve, especially prior to the Midterm exam. During the last month or so of the course, though, just about the time that some Spring flowers are appearing in the southern Michigan area, you’ll notice that the course load “lets up” to a noticeable extent, just when you’re in need of the time to write your course paper and review systematically for the final exam. Due to the nature of the content, like the course faculty, it’s likely that you’ll find that you have to read an article or the textbook several times before understanding all of the key ideas.

• **Read for understanding and the “big picture.”** We also recommend that you do your assigned reading strategically. This means that you should read to understand the key concepts and principles of nursing research and program evaluation, as opposed to memorization of details. If you feel that you're becoming lost in the details, it may be helpful to make an outline of the main headers and concepts for a book chapter or article on a piece of paper, jotting down a sentence or two about each concept/header for which reading is done. Especially when doing a fair amount of reading in one sitting, it's often helpful to take notes and draw diagrams about what you're trying to understand from the reading. The Message Boards are also good places to post questions about concepts that are confusing to you; e.g., “I'm not sure what was meant by....,” or, “Can you clarify...”

• **The course exams will focus on your ability to apply the key concepts.** For example, for a course exam, we’re likely to ask you to recommend and justify a specific type of research design for addressing a certain nursing research question we pose as part of a real-life clinical practice scenario. Likewise, most exam items will require that you’re able to analyze a realistic, novel clinical situation based on the key concepts you’re learning, in order to select the best response for a given item. None of the exam items rely upon memorization of definitions, formulas, etc. You will not be expected to perform mathematical calculations on the course exams. When taking exams in this course, you may refer to any of the materials from the course (online postings, textbooks, notes). In prior semesters, study groups have often developed summary sheets for key concepts, such as types of research designs, definitions of key concepts, etc., for reference during quizzes/exams. This can be very useful for “jogging” your memory about something; e.g., the distinction between types of reliability in measurement, etc. However, while very useful for reference and systematically reviewing the course content, summary sheets and other course materials will not be sufficient for success on the quizzes and exams in this course, which test your ability to apply your knowledge of key concepts to realistic clinical and research situations.

• **Ask questions early and often.** In effect, many people who take this course find that they are actually learning a new language. In this context, we expect that learning the course content will occur gradually, and you should feel free to ask as many questions as you need to (and as many times as you need to) about what isn’t yet fully clear. We’re glad to repeat things multiple times and in multiple ways to help clarify the content. That’s what we’re paid to do for a living, and we take great pleasure in helping you to be successful in learning.
• **Plan for some inevitable “glitches” with online learning.** As most of you have already experienced in graduate school or elsewhere, some computer problems are inevitable, and often not foreseeable or preventable. To deal with unexpected technical difficulties, it is recommended that you do your work for each week of the course as early on in the week as possible.

• **Form study groups for learning and support.** Students in prior semesters have often found it very helpful to form study groups, to discuss the course content by telephone or in person. This is a key strategy for successful learning that the faculty strongly recommend to you. Meeting on a regular basis with at least some other students who are taking the course with you is a relatively best way to enhance your understanding of the content. It’s best to form study groups very early in the semester, by within a week or two of starting the semester, even if you feel that things are going well.

• **Assertiveness is an essential skill in learning.** Assertiveness skills are quite important to successfully navigating graduate school, but especially so in an online course format, in which you will have limited (if any) in-person interactions with the faculty. **If you find yourself experiencing academic difficulty in this course, contact the faculty member for your discussion group as soon as you recognize this—please do not put off talking to us until it is too late!** For more significant types of academic difficulties, it’s generally much too late to contact us for the first time for an in-person or telephone appointment within a week or so of a major course exam. We may or may not be able to accommodate an in-person appointment or telephone consultation on short notice, especially within the week prior to a major exam. It’s also very important to avoid convincing yourself (before talking to us) that talking with the faculty will do no good, or that you should not talk to us if you’re not 100% clear what you should be asking, etc. We can often provide significant help with these kinds of issues, on the basis of even a short phone consultation. But we are substantially unable to help unless the student themselves is willing to be helped, which also includes making a significant commitment to trying strategies we suggest for remediation of any academic difficulties.
Appendix C. Articles for Discussion for Weekly Application Exercises

All articles are available online via the MSU Libraries online journals web site. Students are expected to use the MSU Library web site to download articles. Due to copyright law restrictions and technical reasons copies of articles cannot be posted within the course web site and stable direct links to articles cannot be accommodated within the course web site. Students are expected to contact the Angel Help Desk for any difficulties with accessing assigned readings or other materials posted in the Angel web site. For off campus access to article, you must configure your computer to use the MSU Proxy server (see http://www.lib.msu.edu/proxy/) and also have a current version of Adobe Acrobat reader software on the computer you're using for viewing *.pdf files (this free software can be downloaded free of charge at www.adobe.com). All technical questions including questions about accessing online articles via the library should be referred to the MSU Angel Help Desk at 1.800.500.1554 (toll free line for North America and Hawaii) or 517.355.2345 (local area phone number).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Online Article for Application Exercise</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>No new article to download—we’ll be discussing the course content with reference to the articles already reviewed for Weeks #1-#9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>(none)</td>
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</tbody>
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### Appendix D. NUR 815 Course Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of the Course</th>
<th>Course Activities, Due Dates, and Other Reminders</th>
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</table>
| **Week #1**        | • January 9<sup>th</sup> - MSU classes begin. NUR 815 course web site opens at 7 am.  
• January 12<sup>th</sup> - start NUR 815 Week #1  
• January 13<sup>th</sup> - deadline to let faculty know of any special individual needs  
• January 16<sup>th</sup> – Martin Luther King Day (University open; no classes)  
• January 18<sup>th</sup> - Week #1 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #2**        | • January 19<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #2  
• January 20<sup>th</sup> – deadline to notify Manfred of intention to take 5<sup>th</sup> course credit  
• January 25<sup>th</sup> – Week #2 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #3**        | • January 26<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #3  
• February 1<sup>st</sup> - Week #3 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #4**        | • February 2<sup>nd</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #4  
• February 3<sup>rd</sup> – End of tuition refund period for Spring 2006  
• February 8<sup>th</sup> – Week #4 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #5**        | • February 9<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #5  
• February 15<sup>th</sup> - Week #5 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #6**        | • February 16<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #6  
• February 22<sup>nd</sup> - Week #6 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #7**        | • February 23<sup>rd</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #7  
• March 1<sup>st</sup> - Week #7 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm. March 1<sup>st</sup> is also the Middle of the Semester and the date of the NUR 815 Midterm Exam.  
• Spring Break week, March 6-12<sup>th</sup> |
| **Week #8**        | • March 2<sup>nd</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #8  
• March 15<sup>th</sup> - Week #8 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #9**        | • March 16<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #9  
• March 22<sup>nd</sup> - Week #9 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #10**       | • March 23<sup>rd</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #10  
• March 29<sup>th</sup> - Week #10 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #11**       | • March 30<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #11  
• April 5<sup>th</sup> - Week #11 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #12**       | • April 6<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #12. You will now be able to view the course content for Weeks #13 and #14.  
• April 12<sup>th</sup> – Week #12 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #13**       | • April 13<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #13  
• April 19<sup>th</sup> – Week #13 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm |
| **Week #14**       | • April 20<sup>th</sup> – start NUR 815 Week #14  
• April 26<sup>th</sup> - Week #14 Application Exercise posting due by 5 pm  
• April 28<sup>th</sup> – last day of Spring 2006 MSU classes  
• May 1<sup>st</sup>-<sup>5</sup>th: MSU Spring 2006 final exam week  
• May 3<sup>rd</sup> – NUR 815 critique paper due to course paper drop box by 5 pm  
• May 9<sup>th</sup> – NUR 815 course web site closes at 5 pm |