



School of Health Information Science

University of Victoria

OUR HISTORY AND WHERE WE ARE NOW

HISTORY

In the late seventies, Dr. William Gibson, then Chairman of the Universities Council of British Columbia, envisaged a need for a new type of professional who had the knowledge and skills to effectively introduce information technology into Canada's health care system. His vision came to fruition in 1981 when the University of Victoria inaugurated a new four-year Bachelor of Science degree program in Health Information Science. The new program was added to the University's Faculty of Human and Social Development consisting of the Schools of Child and Youth Care, Nursing, Public Administration and Social Work. For nineteen years it was unique in Canada, and it still leads the way in education in the health informatics industry.

In the fall of 1982 the initial curriculum was initiated and the first classes taught. The curriculum was based on international consultations and two different model curriculums prepared by the Association for Computing Machinery. In September 1983, the inaugural class of 15 students was admitted into the School. The May 1986 convocation saw the first group of Health Information Science students receive their degrees. In 1987, the Health Information Science program was granted "School" status. At the November 1992 convocation, the School was honoured when the University granted Dr. Roger Côté of the University of Sherbrooke an honorary Doctor of Science degree. In November, 1993 the School's first graduate student received her Master of Science degree. The University has since granted honorary Doctor of Science degrees to Dr. Vimla Patel in 1998 and Dr. Morris Collen in 2004.

MISSION

The mission of the School is to improve health care delivery systems by educating individuals to be effective developers, users and managers of health information resources; by advancing knowledge through research; and by providing a consultative service to the health care community. The School's view of health information encompasses clinical, sociological, epidemiological, administrative, legal, and economic perspectives. Health is seen from a community perspective and encompasses the full range of services including health promotion and disease prevention, home care, community health and occupational health, physicians' services, institutional acute care, rehabilitation and extended care. As health information is increasingly being processed by computers and transmitted by communications technology, the School's programs have a significant technological component.

GOALS

The School's educational goals are to prepare broadly-educated individuals with a thorough understanding of the principles of information resource management and of the complexity of the health care systems, who:

- discover and implement innovative solutions to existing and emerging problems;
- are concerned with change and the management of change, particularly as it pertains to the introduction and enhancement of information technology in organizations;
- understand the ethical and sociological implications of information technology on individuals and on organizations.

The School's research goal is to investigate how data and information are used in clinical, management and administrative decision making in health care and to explore new ways of applying information technology and information systems within health care organizations to support that process. Applied research is conducted and models are built to test fundamental hypotheses. Given the multi-disciplinary characteristics of the field, a wide variety of research modalities and methods are used.

FACULTY AND STAFF

The School's team consists of 7 full-time faculty, 2 professional, 4 administrative staff, and 30 part-time faculty. The majority of the faculty have health backgrounds, totaling 130 person-years of practicing health care experience. The School's faculty have published over 400 papers and given over 600 presentations to scientific and community groups. Two of the School's faculty were the first Canadians to be elected to the American College of Medical Informatics. All of the School's faculty serve on international professional and scientific committees and associations.

In addition to its full-time and part-time faculty, the School makes extensive use of guest lecturers; over 300 professionals from organizations in Victoria, Vancouver and across Canada have come at their own expense to participate in the School's classes.

STUDENTS

Seventy five percent of the undergraduate students come from British Columbia, ranging in age from 18 to 53; the average age upon admission has been 26 years old. In addition to recent high school graduates, over 40% have previous degrees or diplomas, and 60% have over 5 years of work experience. About 25% of the students come from health-related disciplines such as nursing, dietary, medical imaging, health records, laboratory and physiotherapy.

Since 1991, the School has graduated 8 PhD students by special arrangement and 14 MSc students from the on-campus program. Fifteen students have graduated from the new Distributed Stream Master's program. There are currently 26 MSc students in our on-campus graduate program and 3 PhD students studying by special arrangement in the School. In addition we have 55 students studying for their MSc in a Distributed Stream (on-line) Masters Program. A number of foreign students from Brazil, Germany, Mexico, United States and India have come to study in the School for periods of up to one year.

The School has a number of scholarships and bursaries which are awarded annually to outstanding students in various stages of their studies. The Barbara Thornton Memorial Award is a \$3500 award given annually to a person entering the School who has a demonstrated financial need.

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAM

The School offers a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Information Science. To complete the degree a student must complete 40 courses and 3 co-operative education work terms over a 48 -month period. In September 2000 we started accepting students directly from high school. Students with previous degrees and/or university credit are given advanced placement.

In 2003 we introduced a Combined Major in Computer Science and Health Information Science. This program is designed to appeal to those students who wish to follow a more technical career path. There is less emphasis on the administrative side of health informatics and an increased importance is placed on technical aspects.

After consultation with employers, alumni and key interest groups, the School's curriculum underwent a major revision for September 2005. As a foundation to the courses offered by the School, students take at least 7 courses from the departments of English, Mathematics, and Computer Science. They also choose 11 elective courses to complete their degree. Of the School's 22 courses, 13 are health-oriented with over 90% of their content related to health care. The health care system is studied and taught from a multi-professional perspective and all health disciplines are introduced and discussed. The remaining courses are information technology based, though each course has 10 - 70% of its content specifically related to health care.

Health Information Science students complete three 4-month Co-operative Education work terms where they are employed full-time in informatics positions in the public or private sector. Co-operative Education formally integrates academic studies on campus with related work experience in industry, business and government. As a result, co-op students receive a superior, well-rounded education; employers have a cost-effective means of completing special projects and evaluating prospective permanent employees; the University receives valuable feedback on the quality and relevance of its programs.

Health care administrators and providers are now realizing that efficiency of health care services and the efficacy of health care delivery can be improved by implementing appropriate data and information management systems.

Virtually 100% of the graduates are employed in rewarding positions directly related to their Health Information Science degree.

Since 1983, over 400 different employers have hired Health Information Science students to fill over 2250 work term positions across Canada and around the world. These work term placements have been in government ministries, community health agencies, hospitals, extended care facilities, computer hardware and software companies, private laboratories and non-profit agencies. A few of the organizations that have hired the School's graduates are: Alberta Health, BC Ministry of Health, Calgary Health Region, Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), Canadian Medical Association (CMA), Coopers & Lybrand, Chilliwack General Hospital, Ernst & Young Management Consultants, Sierra Consultants Ltd., SYSTEM-PRO (Indonesia), Bowne Internet Solutions (formerly Sitewerks Inc.) Seattle, Stevenson Kellogg, University Health Network (formerly The Toronto Hospital), and Vancouver Hospital and Health Services Centre,

In addition, the School has had tremendous success placing students overseas. India, Australia, U.S.A., Scotland, Sweden, Germany, Hungary, and Switzerland are some of the countries where Health Information Science students have had co-op work term experience. This broad international recognition and support of the School is highly valued in providing quality learning experiences for students.

GRADUATE STUDIES

The School formalized its MSc program in 2003. Work is now underway to establish a formal PhD program. In addition, it was recognized there is a known demand for a professionally-oriented program which would be primarily course-based and would lend itself to distance education. In January 2005 we started a Distributed Stream MSc two year program. Health and information technology (IT) professionals with two or more years of relevant work experience who wish to become health informatics (HI) specialists are eligible to apply for admission into the program. Candidates are required to have a Bachelor's degree and may include such health professionals as physicians, nurses, therapists and laboratory technologists, as well as IT professionals working in the health sector. Those with a Bachelor's degree in a non-health or non-IT related field wishing to enter the program are required to take additional courses from the program or elsewhere depending on prior education and experience.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

In addition to teaching and research, the School provides resources and expertise to the community across Canada through faculty consultations. It also fosters interaction with health professionals by providing a neutral forum, particularly through colloquia devoted to issues in health care delivery.

Annually since 1985, the Partnership in Productivity Colloquium has brought together senior corporate and hospital executives, physicians and Ministers of Health to discuss the issues and trends facing Canada's health care industry. Between 1986 – 2000, the School, the Canadian Public Health Association and the BC Ministry of Health co-sponsored a biannual conference on "Information Technology in Community Health" (ITCH) to identify the impact of information technology on public and community health. It attracted medical health officers, information systems and community health professionals from Canada and many other countries. This conference was resurrected as Information Technology and Communications in Health (ITCH) in February 2007 and again in February 2009. Delegates came from across Canada as well as Australia, Austria, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, and the USA. The next conference will take place in February 2011.

In May 1989, the School, assisted by 80 volunteers from the University and the community, organized a very successful International Symposium on Medical Informatics and Education for over 350 delegates from 23 countries.

AFFILIATIONS

The School has excellent working relationships with numerous organizations through co-op work terms, guest lecturing, site visits, committee participation, and collaborative research. From the inception of the program, the British Columbia Ministry of Health and the Capital Health Region (now Vancouver Island Health Authority) have actively supported the School; senior staff from the organizations has been involved in teaching each year. The Ministry is the School's largest co-op student and graduate employer.

In March 1997, the School signed a formal affiliation agreement with The Toronto Hospital. This agreement provides a framework for collaborative efforts that will benefit the School's students and faculty as well as the staff of the hospital. This agreement was renewed under the new University Health Network in 2001. At about the same time, former President Strong concluded an agreement with the National Yang Ming University, Taipei, Taiwan, on behalf of the School. Under this agreement, the two institutions have agreed to engage in collaborative educational, research and professional activities including developing of research proposals, exchanging faculty, staff and students, and providing access to training and research facilities. In April 1998 a similar agreement was established with the Universidade Federal Do Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, Brazil. In 2008, the School signed a Memorandum of Understanding with City University, in London, UK.

ALUMNI

As of May 2009, the School has 561 alumni, 75% of whom are working in British Columbia. The remainder are primarily in Alberta and Ontario; 5% are working outside of Canada. Forty percent of the alumni work in management consulting firms, software houses, or computer hardware firms; 40% work in government departments and community health agencies; 20% percent work in hospitals and extended care facilities. They work as systems/project analysts, health information systems consultants, research assistants, planning analysts, system support staff, trainers/developers and client account representatives. Some are already in senior management positions. Over 15% of the School's alumni have already completed or are completing a graduate degree in Canadian and American universities in areas such as Public Administration, Epidemiology, Environmental Health, Medicine, and Business Administration to name a few.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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