

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION COVID-19 EDUCATION INFORMATION: Guidance for Clinical Experiences for Academic Programs in Health Fields

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) recognizes that efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 are impacting the duration of clinical experiences for academic programs in the health fields. In response, the primary purpose of this correspondence is to provide official ODHE guidance on areas of flexibility that can be offered within our scope of authority. Please note that institutions will also need to refer to guidance and information issued by their applicable professional academic accreditor (e.g., ACEN, CCNE, COE, etc.) and approving or licensing state of Ohio agencies (e.g., Ohio Board of Nursing, Ohio Department of Health, etc.) as they determine the best course of action for their students and public health in Ohio.

ODHE does not have regulations regarding the specific minimum number of clinical hours that are expected in health care fields. During the program approval process, ODHE generally expects the institution to demonstrate that the program is in alignment with accreditation and licensure expectations for the number of clinical hours for health care programs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ODHE is offering institutions flexibility with regard to clinical hours for students whose clinical experiences have been impacted by the COVID-19 virus. ODHE understands that nurses, medical students, and other health care workers must have an appropriate level of education and clinical experience to prepare them as safe and effective health care providers. Institutions should consider, as appropriate to the discipline, alternative experiences and/or assignments and instruction sufficient to ensure that expectations and outcomes for each student's clinical experience are met. The alternatives may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- determining students have met outcomes in shortened clinical placements by evaluating progress to date;
- substituting virtual experiences/assignments that will allow students to demonstrate achievement of outcomes;
- providing simulations (online or remotely) that provide experiences for students similar to what they will encounter in the field; and/or
- delaying the end date of the term so that clinical hours may be obtained later.

In addition, because of the unique needs during this COVID-19 healthcare emergency, clinical experiences in environments other than those originally scheduled may be appropriate (for example, in respiratory therapy, radiology, occupational therapy, or physical therapy environments). ODHE knows that faculty will be thoughtful as they consider their options for clinical credit, and ultimately, the assessment of student outcomes is the responsibility of faculty at the institution. ODHE will not be reviewing each institution's plan for determining students' mastery of learning outcomes. Institutions should keep documentation on their process and be able to show that the process was consistently applied during this extraordinary situation.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at smccann@highered.ohio.gov with any questions or if you simply need some clarification.