

# Health Literacy and Health Communication for over 13,000 Global Health-related Professionals in 2014 & 2015

Denise H. Britigan<sup>1</sup>, PhD, MA, CHES ; Analisa McMillan<sup>2</sup>, MEd; Kelley, M. PhD; DeAlba, A.MD, MPH; Geistkemper, C. MPH; Wells, M, MPH; Ramesh, S.  
<sup>1</sup>Department of Health Promotion, Social and Behavioral Health, <sup>2</sup>Dean's Office, Distance Learning College of Public Health, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, Nebraska

## Background

### MOOC

This Massive Open-access Online Course (MOOC) provided a global audience access to evidence-based best practices in health communication and tools to improve the health literacy of healthcare organizations in an affordable venue.

- There is a silent epidemic of low health literacy in the U.S. and around the world according to the Institute of Medicine (IOM).<sup>1</sup>
- The lack of awareness by most professionals and policy makers of the extent and effect of low health literacy and the individual's shame associated with it keeps it even more hidden.
- In the U.S. alone, approximately 90 million adults with limited health literacy cannot fully benefit from much that the health-care system has to offer.
- Efforts to improve quality, reduce costs and health disparities cannot succeed without simultaneous improvements in health literacy.
- People who understand health instructions make fewer mistakes when they take their medicine or prepare for a medical procedure. They may also get well sooner or be able to better manage a chronic health condition.<sup>2</sup>
- Both health professionals and patients learned how to check for understanding.

### IPE

- This course provided resources and discussion opportunities which reinforced a core competency domain, Interprofessional Communication, for interprofessional collaborative practice<sup>3</sup>
- This course fulfilled an accreditation standard ("Communication with other members of healthcare team or other professionals") which is held in common across the major health science schools of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health, and Social Work.<sup>4</sup>

### Continuing Education Units

For an additional fee, the Verified Certificate Signature Track learners were also eligible to apply for the pre-approved 24 continuing education credits covering most of these disciplines.



Health Literacy and Communication for Health Professionals

In the United States, two thirds of the population read at an 8th grade reading level or below. When it comes to health information, most Americans have the ability to read and write at the fifth grade reading level. This inter-professional course aims to give health professionals the tools needed to improve upon their health literacy and communication skills.



## Learners

Over 13,000 learners representing more than 70 health-related professions from 178 countries enrolled in the 8-module course. The MOOC provided an opportunity for physicians, nurses, patients, radiologists, pharmacists and many others to engage in discussion and evaluate each other's projects.

## Course Design

The course created a global learning community of health professionals and the public from a multitude of health disciplines and patient experiences.

- Each module contained a variety of discussion opportunities to engage with peers, teaching assistants, community helpers, *Coursera* forum moderators and the instructors.
- Discussion forum where questions and prompts were designed to get students "talking". For example, students were able to view video scenarios that demonstrated communication vignettes one way followed by an improved way. They were asked to share how they think the communication in the scenario could be even more improved to increase health literacy. The discussion forum questions sparked a multitude of peer-to-peer learning transfer each week.
- The course platform design allowed efficient course navigation so that the students had more time to concentrate on learning about health literacy as opposed to figuring out how *Coursera* worked and where to find the information they needed to complete the module tasks.

### Coursera Platform Design

- Course Orientation/Start Here
- 8 Module pages containing all tasks & links to complete module
- Granular discussion board

### Delivery of Content

- "Chunked" video lectures
- Suggested Readings
- Web resources
- Handouts

### Module Discussion Forums

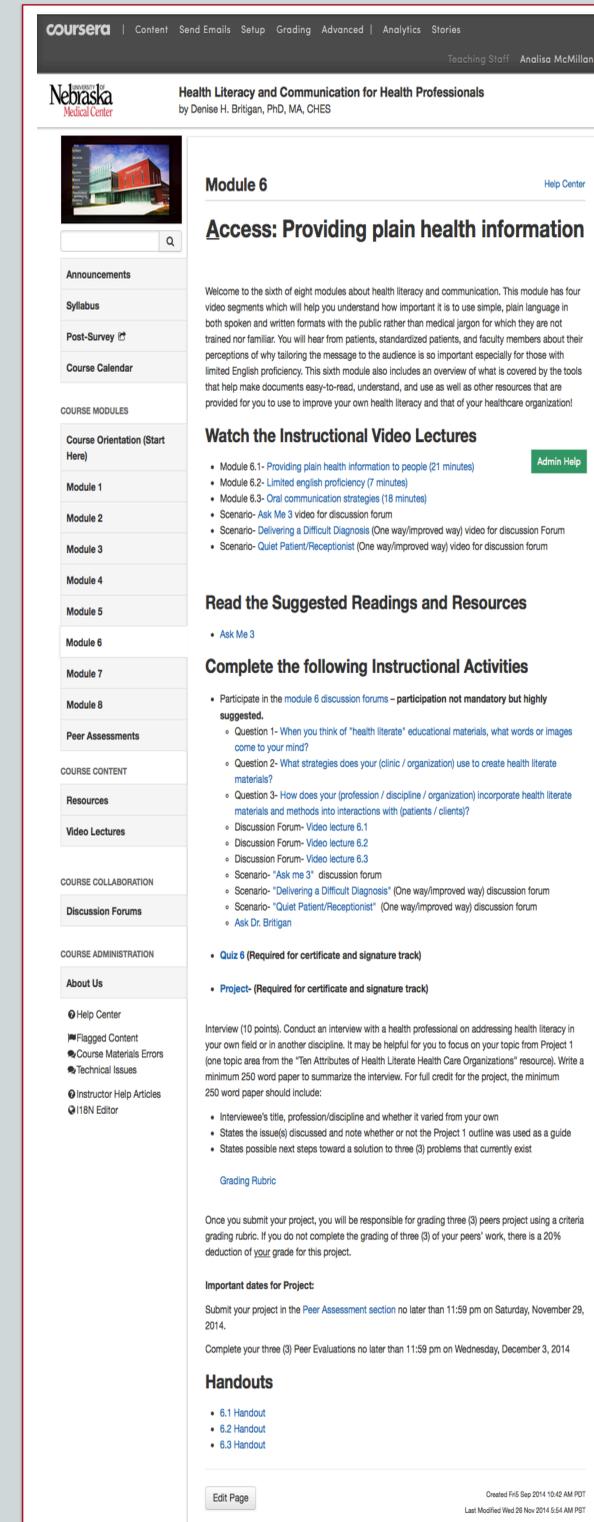
- 3-4 concept questions
- Video scenarios - one way and an improved way
- "Ask Dr. B."
- Health Literacy in the News
- Lecture video discussion/questions

### Coursera Platform Design

- Course Orientation/Start Here
- 8 Module pages containing all tasks & links to complete module
- Granular discussion board

### Assessments

- CDC Health Literacy Training
- 2 Reflection Journals
- Weekly quizzes
- 4 peer-evaluated projects
  - ◆ Outline based on one of the "Ten Attributes of Health Literate Health Care Organizations" (IOM Discussion Paper, 2012)
  - ◆ Icon Array
  - ◆ Interview
  - ◆ Infographic



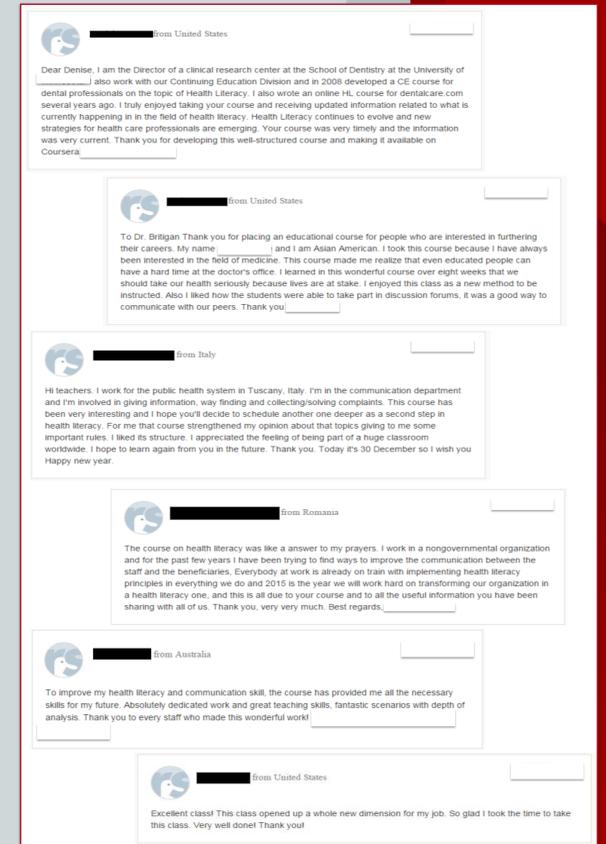
The screenshot shows the course interface on Coursera. The course title is "Health Literacy and Communication for Health Professionals" by Denise H. Britigan, PhD, MA, CHES. The current module is "Module 6: Access: Providing plain health information". The page includes a search bar, navigation links (Announcements, Syllabus, Post-Survey, Course Calendar), and a list of course modules. The main content area for Module 6 includes a welcome message, a list of video lectures (e.g., "Module 6.1- Providing plain health information to people (21 minutes)"), a section for "Watch the Instructional Video Lectures" with an "Admin Help" button, and a section for "Read the Suggested Readings and Resources" with a link to "Ask Me 3". Below that is a section for "Complete the following Instructional Activities" with a "Peer Assessments" section and a "Discussion Forums" section. The "Discussion Forums" section includes a "Quiz 6 (Required for certificate and signature track)" and a "Project- (Required for certificate and signature track)". The project description asks students to conduct an interview with a health professional and write a 250-word paper summarizing the interview. The page also includes a "Handouts" section with links to "6.1 Handout", "6.2 Handout", and "6.3 Handout".

## Lessons Learned

- Provide clear directions for uploading projects and make sure the format matches the platform requirements
- Review the components to make sure that everything is working
- Provide examples of projects for students to model.
- Provide grading rubrics that are clear and have enough details
- Award participation points to ensure that the discussion forum peer-to-peer learning is incorporated by all of the learners
- Design quizzes with language that is unambiguous and answers that are in any order
- A schedule (matrix) for the Community Teaching Assistants had assigned discussion forums which allowed for exposure to all aspects of the course

### References

- <sup>1</sup>Institute of Medicine (IOM) Health Literacy: Prescription to End Confusion
- <sup>2</sup>National Patient Safety Foundation
- <sup>3</sup>Interprofessional Education Collaborative report of 2011
- <sup>4</sup>Willgerodt, MA & Danielson, J. University of Washington. IPE presentation on 2/12/15



The screenshot shows several student feedback comments. One comment from the United States says: "Dear Denise, I am the Director of a clinical research center at the School of Dentistry at the University of Nebraska Medical Center... I also work with our Continuing Education Division and in 2008 developed a CE course for dental professionals on the topic of Health Literacy. I also wrote an online HL course for dentists.com several years ago. I truly enjoyed taking your course and receiving updated information related to what is currently happening in the field of health literacy. Health Literacy continues to evolve and new strategies for health care professionals are emerging. Your course was very timely and the information was very current. Thank you for developing this well-structured course and making it available on Coursera." Another comment from the United States says: "To Dr. Britigan Thank you for placing an educational course for people who are interested in furthering their careers. My name is [redacted] and I am Asian American. I took this course because I have always been interested in the field of medicine. This course made me realize that even educated people can have a hard time at the doctor's office. I learned in this wonderful course over eight weeks that we should take our health seriously because lives are at stake. I enjoyed this class as a new method to be instructed. Also I liked how the students were able to take part in discussion forums, it was a good way to communicate with our peers. Thank you!" A comment from Italy says: "Hi teachers, I work for the public health system in Tuscany, Italy. I'm in the communication department and I'm involved in going into communities, way finding and collecting/looking complaints. This course has been very interesting and I hope you'll decide to schedule another one deeper as a second step in health literacy. For me that course strengthened my opinion about that topics giving to me some important rules. I liked its structure. I appreciated the feeling of being part of a huge classroom worldwide. I hope to learn again from you in the future. Thank you. Today it's 30 December so I wish you Happy new year." A comment from Romania says: "The course on health literacy was like an answer to my prayers. I work in a nongovernmental organization and for the past few years I have been trying to find ways to improve the communication between the staff and the beneficiaries. Everybody at work is already on train with implementing health literacy principles in everything we do and 2015 is the year we will work hard on transforming our organization in a health literacy one, and this is all due to your course and to all the useful information you have been sharing with all of us. Thank you, very very much. Best regards." A comment from Australia says: "To improve my health literacy and communication skill, the course has provided me all the necessary skills for my future. Absolutely dedicated work and great teaching skills, fantastic scenarios with depth of analysis. Thank you to every staff who made this wonderful work!" A comment from the United States says: "Excellent class! This class opened up a whole new dimension for my job. So glad I took the time to take this class. Very well done! Thank you!"

The project was funded by the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and University of Nebraska Online Worldwide. Significant in-kind support was provided by the College of Public Health, Karen Honeycutt, Janice Tompkins, Ade Adelusi, Lei Yu, Laura Purcell, Abbey Gregg, Alison Clevette, and Mindy Owen, Lei Yu, Marilyn Sitorius, Katherine Kotas, Mariam Taiwo, Narda Ligotti, Sara Goomis, and Elizabeth Penner. For more information, contact Denise H. Britigan, denise.britigan@unmc.edu