

Professional Issues for Sonographers (RADY 5024): Contextual comments

Background: Where does this course sit? *Rationale for T and L arrangements.*

This course sits in the postgraduate suite of offerings in the medical sonography suite of programs and is the first course that students need to enrol into. This is a pre-req course for 30 courses in the postgrad suite of sonography programs. It is a core course for all the streams and programs within medical sonography (General, Vascular, Cardiac and Breast Imaging, and Grad Cert, Dip, Masters as well as Professional Certificate). It is offered twice a year (SP2 and SP5) and typically has anywhere between 100 to 170 students enrolled for each offering. Completion of this course is essential to progress through their degrees.

It is offered fully online, as the whole postgrad suite of sonography programs are fully online.

Opportunities:

Given the diversity of cultural and professional backgrounds and experience, there is a rich pool of diversity and experience which is leveraged to help improve cultural awareness and sensitivity as well as interprofessional learning which are critical for clinical practice.

Aim of the course: To enable students to develop the knowledge about professional issues as a sonographer, and to develop skills to enable working effectively and safely as a medical sonographer and health professional.

Course content: The course content includes medicolegal issues including mandatory reporting, quality assurance for clinical and administrative procedures, ethics and codes of professional conduct, including informed consent, practice management principles in sonography. Infection control as specific to ultrasound procedures. Occupational health and safety, ergonomics, and basic research principles including introduction to research ethics and evidence-based practice.

Rationale for assessments:

Since this is the first course in the degree, in addition to meeting the aims outlined above, assessments are used to develop the following:

1. Commence development of professional identity and belonging.
2. Set the students up for success in their chosen stream, so get them used to the various modes of online learning and various platforms required throughout their respective degrees such as eportfolios

Assessments:

1. Eportfolio:

Eportfolios are embedded throughout the program for clinical as well as academic assessments in various courses, so this eportfolio assignment requires students to develop their own eportfolio, use various features of the eportfolio to create their introductory page and develop a personal statement. In addition, they learn to develop their CV to obtain a training position for which they are provided feedback.

I use personal statement to commence their development of professional identity. Their personal statement includes a discussion of professional attributes and qualities that are required of a sonographer as per the latest Professional Competency Statement for sonographers, and reflect on their own qualities and transferable skills, and demonstrate how well they meet these required attributes. They must learn to create content within the eportfolio, upload and share documents, images and videos, and share their secret URL. This assignment has led to several industry partners offering trainee jobs to our students during the course in cases where the students haven't already obtained a training position as it helps them reflect upon and articulate their strengths to the potential employer.

2. Evidence-based practice:

This is a foundational skill for practice in medical sonography as it maximises the quality and safety of patient care. The assignment is designed to help students learn to identify a clinical problem, locate, and apply research findings to clinical practice based on evidence. The assessment is set up as a quiz with MCQs and short answers.

Students are given two research papers and must critically analyse them. The questions are designed to help them apply the various steps required for understanding and applying evidence-based practice.

3. Continuous assessments:

This includes one online learning preparedness questionnaire (through a quiz) at the beginning of the course (week 2) which helps them reflect on what skills they need / what specific supports I need to provide, to set themselves up for online learning in the beginning of the course, as well as team assessments.

The other components of continuous assessments are team assessments.

Team assessments: ensure that students work in teams (50% weighting for assessments) to learn from each other and open their minds to alternate possibilities and other ways of thinking. The teamwork experience has deliberately planned to build a sense of belonging, reduce the sense of isolation that comes with online learning and foster new professional relationships that can be continued through the program, while enabling training for multidisciplinary collaboration for excellent patient care.

I allocate team members in such a way that there is a mix of skill sets with based on their previous professional experience and degree, as well as a diversity in cultural background and gender wherever possible. Since the students in the course come from all over Australia and overseas as well, I try to ensure that at least two students within the team if not all, come from the same state so that they can meet face to face if they so desire. Team allocation is done post census date to minimise disruption that can occur with students withdrawing from the course.

Formative assessments: through module discussions on the discussion boards where case scenarios are presented on each topic, and informal feedback is provided via the discussion boards and Zoom sessions so that students progressively develop their skills.

Summative assessments:

1. **One team podcast and anonymous peer review of team members:** Teams are given the flexibility to choose their topics, as well as the flexibility to present their podcast either as an audio format or in video format. Teams have the flexibility to choose their 'audience' for the podcast as well, and they are required to present salient features on their chosen topic, along with any controversies and debates using multiple lens for that specific audience. The audience can be fellow student sonographers, qualified sonographers, other health professionals in a multidisciplinary team or the industry, or patients and their caregivers. The podcast must be of a quality that can be aired on radio or on television, and needs to demonstrate multiple perspectives such as patients' perspectives, public and private workplaces, industry etc. This enables them to delve deeply to one topic within one module, distil the information and present it within 6 to 7 minutes as a team. Formative feedback is provided through ZOOM sessions. Summative feedback provided for this assignment helps them for the next assessment which involves delving deeply and presenting team summaries on all modules.
2. **Team summaries:** This is the final assessment which is a written submission per team that comprises of 'one page per module' summary, thoughtful discussion of alternate viewpoints, as well as team collective and individual reflections on their learning and contribution as and within a team. They also reflect on the learnings they will take away from the course for application beyond the classroom into the clinical world.

Through these concerted efforts, failure rates and disengagement rates have plummeted, not through lowering of academic standards, but rather, through improved student understanding. Student learning that they can take away beyond the course, is clearly demonstrated through their reflections.

More details of the course including formative assessments are available through the course learnonline site.