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Computers in the Faculty of Health Science -- Five Years On

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In 1989 the Faculty of Health Science at Central Queensland University committed itself to a major instructional development project for its nursing education program. Partially supported by the National Priority (Reserve) Fund (NPRF), the Faculty undertook a multi-year project to develop computer-based learning materials.

The success of that project was mixed, however by 1993 staff and students within the faculty were using computers regularly, many of the staff were involved in developing computer-based instructional materials, and some staff were using available computer-based tools to extend the scope of the standard Health Science materials developed under the project. As well, the Faculty was committed to using Faculty funds for technical support staff to maintain its computer infrastructure and to assist both staff and students in using that infrastructure.

As the CAL/CML Academic Coordinator (1993, personal communication, 23 February) indicated: "In hindsight, we've done at least two-thirds of what we started out to do--and the base is there--staff are committed to CAL. Some of them will never do any CAL development themselves, but they are all committed... "The real benefit is to the students. They are getting the benefit of the materials developed and in the pipeline... and the materials and ideas are being taken elsewhere, through consultancies, etc."

One of the authors examined the project and its management from the perspective of the project participants, identifying some of the deficiencies of the project and its management, how they were resolved, and their consequences. As the study progressed it became obvious that the participants were involved in redefining nursing education.

The other author has been employed for several years in the Faculty support role, providing hands-on formal computer training for staff and students as well as informal hands-on support to individuals, developing and testing new computer-based learning materials, and developing both multimedia and web-based materials. The authors review the original NPRF project, then explore the Faculty's continued development and use of computer-based learning materials through an examination of student and staff evaluations, personal recollections, and subsequent projects. The paper demonstrates that the NPRF project spawned a number of other computer-based developments, including the offering of health informatics degree programs at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, the development of the Faculty's current Internet site and a CD-ROM based interactive multimedia project for diabetes education, and that moderate levels of funding can maintain a computer-literate faculty which views computers as essential tools for learning.