



ELLEN BRANDAU

AHEAD OF THE CURVE IN HEALTHCARE

When Ellen Brandau decided to complete her Bachelor of Liberal Studies (BLS) from the University of Iowa, she had no idea how much an online learning experience would prepare her for her next career opportunity. But that's just what happened.

Brandau, both a NIACC and University of Iowa alumnus, has worked at Mayo Clinic since 2002. Brandau started as a medical transcriptionist in 2002, began teleworking from home in 2006, and was promoted to education/quality assurance specialist in 2015. In her current position, she supports the health documentation specialists and providers by reviewing their work to ensure quality, promote professional development and provide training.

"I review documents every month to provide feedback and ongoing education to the healthcare documentation specialists in our department," says Brandau. "This includes keeping our specialists up to date through orientation, training and maintenance of curriculum and reference guides."

Working in a team-centered environment provides for informal learning and information-sharing. "This is the best team I have ever been a part of and is completely collaborative," Brandau explains. "We all have our own way of handling things and we each have unique strengths."

The Healthcare Documentation Specialist program at Mayo Clinic is unique. In the last year, they have been able to recruit nationwide because most of the training provided for documentation specialists is online and at a distance. New hires from across the country come to a one week orientation on campus in Rochester, Minnesota, then return home to set up

their teleworking equipment. Additional training occurs in a group setting using virtual technology to link students in a real-time group setting. Brandau is part of a team of 14 healthcare professionals who typically trains one group of up to nine students each month.

The field of medical transcription is changing rapidly making ongoing education essential. Brandau has earned the designation Certified Healthcare Documentation Specialist (CHDS) from the Association for Healthcare Documentation Integrity (AHD). Today, everything the physician dictates is turned into speech recognized text before the transcriptionist gets the recording. Brandau calls the process *making sense of word salad* because the focus is now on correcting and finding errors within the dictated text.

When Brandau decided to complete a bachelor's degree, an online degree was a necessity. She had her home for sale and wasn't sure if it would sell quickly enough for her to start college. After reviewing her options, she chose the Bachelor of Liberal Arts from the University of Iowa and completed her degree in 2012. She received her Associate of Arts degree from NIACC in 2010.

According to Brandau, "The BLS program allowed me to take courses that fit my interests and my developing career. I was able to continue working while I earned my degree. The majority of my classes were in reading and writing. All of the course work further developed my analytical skills, and developing those skills has helped the trajectory of my career."

While Brandau has never been in the exact learning position that Mayo trainees find themselves in, her online

education utilizing technology-based tools allows her to quickly troubleshoot problems in the virtual classroom. She can analyze the possibilities and quickly find a solution.

The University of Iowa offers a number of transfer degree programs online. These completion degree programs are designed for working adults just like Ellen Brandau, balancing professional growth and busy lives. For more information about online degree and certificate programs, visit distance.uiowa.edu.

"The BLS program allowed me to take courses that fit my interests and my developing career."

