After taking a few years away from the corporate world to raise her three children—a son, age 7, and twin daughters, age 4—and to relocate with her family from Atlanta to Cincinnati, UC Clermont College student Priya Dayal decided she was ready to pursue a new career. Because she was interested in the medical field, and also wanted to leverage her bachelor's degree in electronics and her career expertise, she was particularly intrigued by the College's Health Information Systems program.

“No not only was the program perfect for me in terms of my background, but also because it’s completely online, it gives me a lot of flexibility,” explains Dayal.

Dayal started in Fall 2012 with a full course load, and her whole family had to adjust: “There was some juggling of schedules at first, but I’m able to make this work because my husband works from home, and our daughters are in preschool.”

And Dayal herself had to figure out how to get back into student mode. “It was hard at first—I think I work harder in this program than I did the first time I was in college!” she laughs. “I found that I did my best studying at night, after everyone went to bed so the house was quiet.”

Although she wasn’t sure what to expect from online classes, she’s been pleasantly surprised by the amount of interaction with other students and with her professors via online message boards.

“Because of my background in information systems, I didn’t find the technical part of the classes to be a challenge—but I also think someone with minimal computer experience would find the online aspect easy to navigate,” Dayal says. “Plus, the classes offer many different ways for people to learn: you can listen to a lecture podcast, or watch it as a video or a PowerPoint presentation.”

During the second semester, in Spring 2013, Dayal took advantage of the program’s flexibility by dialing back her course load to just two classes, as she anticipated needing some additional free time once her children started spring sports.

With six weeks to go until the end of the second semester, Dayal was referred by UC Clermont College Professor Karen Lankisch, PhD, RHIA for a position in Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center’s Health Information Management (HIM) department. Lankisch, as Director of the Health Information Systems Technology program, regularly receives notices from Children’s human resources department about job openings.

“Through her course work, Priya demonstrated her readiness to begin working in health information. She brought previous experience, as well as exposure to the course content, to combine the necessary skills and knowledge to begin working in the field of health information at Children’s while still working on her degree,” explains Lankisch. “An opportunity like this is a win-win for healthcare organizations and students. Students gain on the job experience and healthcare organizations gain employees with current experience and knowledge of health information.”

Because the UC Clermont Health Information System courses are entirely online, the program provides the flexibility that allows students to work at a job and to work on their degree at the same time, Lankisch continues. “This does take a self-directed student that can manage their time, job and course requirements,” she notes.

Dayal is clearly self-directed. Even with just seven months of Health Information Systems coursework under her belt, she interviewed for and was offered a temporary, full-time position in Children’s HIM department.

“They hire students just entering the field from all over the area, first as temporary employees—I think as a way to help students determine if this is an area they want to pursue,” Dayal says. “The pattern seems to be that after three months they may offer temporary employees a permanent position.”

Although she’s only been working at Children’s Hospital for two months, Dayal has already become proficient in multiple aspects within the department. She’s also directed some training and guidance for new employees.

“In my previous job I was a training manager, so I was glad to be able to use that skill set again,” she says.

She’s hopeful that the hospital will bring her onboard full time as she continues her studies. Because she’d like to be a part of the first UC Clermont Health Information Systems graduating class in Spring 2014, she’s taking one class this summer semester, and a full load again in the fall.

After graduating from UC Clermont’s program, she plans to earn her Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) certification. Her ultimate goal is to transition to UC’s Uptown Campus to complete the four-year Health Information Management Bachelor’s Degree program and earn a Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA) certification.

“I certainly wasn’t expecting to get a job in my new field so quickly,” she says. “But when the opportunity to work for Children’s came up, I couldn’t say no. I’ve always wanted to work at a hospital that cares for kids, and I’d love to stick around as long as I can. It is a great place to work and the people I work with are wonderful.”