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Nursing Education Programs Approval/Accreditation Basics

Board Approval

The Arizona State Board of Nursing requires that all nursing programs be approved by the Board before offering the program. There are 2 types of Board approval: provisional approval and full approval.

Provisional approval is the term used for the approval granted to a new nursing program. There are two steps in the application process for provisional approval: proposal approval where the program must establish the need for the program and demonstrate that it has the resources to operate the program and the actual provisional approval application where the program must demonstrate compliance with all Board regulations. A program holding provisional approval may apply for full approval upon graduation of the first class. A program must apply for full approval within 2 years after the first class graduates and takes the NCLEX exam. If the program fails to meet the requirements for full approval, Board may extend the period of provisional approval.

Full approval is that status awarded to established programs that meet the standards of the Board. The standards of the Board for nursing programs are contained in the Rules of the Board, Article 2 which can be accessed on the Board website: www.azbn.gov under Resources/Nurse Practice Act.

Notice of Deficiency

The Board website may indicate that a program is under a “notice of deficiency”. A notice of deficiency is an official action of the Board indicating that a program that has failed to meet one or more standards of the Board. The Board may grant up to 18 months to correct the deficiency. Occasionally, if a program is making substantial progress toward remedying the deficiency, the Board will extend this time frame. Information related to the notice of deficiency is public and available upon request. If a program is currently under a notice of deficiency, it will be noted in the Board’s list of approved programs available on the Board’s website under resources/Educational Resources. Failure to correct a deficiency in the time-frame allotted may result in revocation of approval or a restriction on admissions to the program.

Other Actions

Nursing programs in Arizona are also subject to other disciplinary actions such as decree of censure, civil penalty, probation, suspension and revocation. Occasionally a program repeatedly violates one or more rules of the Board and is placed on probation or ordered to pay a civil penalty. The Board may also issue a non-disciplinary “letter of concern” to a program for infractions that do not rise to the level of Board action but are of concern to the Board.

Accreditation

While the Board **approves** programs, schools offering programs are also **accredited** and the nursing program may hold additional accreditation. There are two basic types of accreditation, institutional accreditation and program accreditation. The Board requires schools offering nursing programs to hold institutional accreditation, but many nursing programs also hold program accreditation. The purpose of requiring accreditation is to ensure that the education provided by the institution meets acceptable levels of quality. Accrediting agencies are private entities however the U.S. Department of Education maintains a list of recognized accrediting agencies on their website www.ed.gov. A school may claim to be accredited, but the accreditation must be recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to meet Board standards.

Institutional Accreditation

There are also two types of institutional accreditation, regional and national. Regional accreditation for Arizona schools is provided by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Higher Learning Commission. Regional accreditation is sought by both private and public full service colleges and universities. Examples of schools in Arizona that hold regional accreditation are: Arizona State University, University of Arizona, Grand Canyon University, Everest College, Scottsdale Community College, and Northland Pioneer College. All public and most full-service private colleges and universities hold this type of accreditation. Although transfer of credits is always the sole prerogative of the recipient institution, academic credits are more easily transferred between regionally accredited institutions.

National accreditation is a type of accreditation geared toward private and specialized career schools. Some agencies that provide national accreditation of colleges that have nursing programs in Arizona are: Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT), Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) and the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES). Examples of schools in Arizona that hold national accreditation are: Apollo College, International Institute of the Americas and Pima Medical Institute. Generally speaking, unless a specific articulation agreement exists, academic credits earned at these schools are difficult to transfer to a regionally accredited institution.

Program Accreditation

In addition to institutional accreditation, a program within an institution may also be accredited. Although the Board does not require nursing programs to be accredited, it does recognize nursing program accreditation. While many RN programs hold this type of accreditation, there are no accredited LPN programs in Arizona. There are 2 agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for the purposes of accrediting pre-licensure nursing programs.

The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) accredits nursing programs at the baccalaureate and graduate degree level. The maximum accreditation period is 10 years. Examples of programs in Arizona accredited by CCNE are: University of Arizona, Grand Canyon University, Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University and University of Phoenix.

The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) accredits all types of nursing programs. Examples of RN programs that hold NLNAC accreditation are: Maricopa Community College District Nursing Program, Cochise College, Mohave Community College, Pima Community College, Central Arizona College, Yavapai College and Arizona Western College. Chamberlain College nursing program holds both NLNAC and CCNE accreditation. The maximum period of NLNAC accreditation is 8 years.

There are other specialized nursing accrediting bodies for advanced practice nursing programs such as the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Education Programs and the American College of Nurse Midwives Accrediting Commission. All advanced practice nursing programs in Arizona must be accredited. In Arizona, all nurse practitioner programs are accredited by CCNE.

The Board indicates in its list of approved programs which nursing programs are accredited and the institutional accrediting body.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

So a school can be accredited and meet Board standards but not have nursing program accreditation and the credits would not necessarily transfer? Yes, this is true. Students need to carefully weigh their educational choices, keeping their long-term career goals in mind when selecting a nursing program. While all approved programs are acceptable for preparing entry-level nurses, some may offer an advantage if the student will later seek an advanced degree.

In addition to accreditation, what other factors should a prospective student consider?

The prospective student should research the program's pass rate on the licensing exam (NCLEX). For programs in Arizona, these are posted on the Board website with both the quarterly pass rates and the yearly pass rates for the past 5 years. There is always some fluctuation in pass rates but the minimum acceptable pass rate is currently 75%. Other factors to consider are cost of the program, availability of financial aid, support for students, hours of class/clinical, location, number of master's and doctorate faculty, clinical faculty ratios (1 to 10 is the minimum), graduation rate, and availability of clinical sites that offer a rich variety of acute and chronic patient care experiences in all areas of nursing: medical surgical, pediatric, psych-mental health and maternity. (Note: LPN programs are not required to have a psych-mental health experience) These questions may be asked of programs during informational meetings and interviews. Also you may wish to ask prospective employers which programs they would recommend.