

ARIZONA STATE BOARD OF NURSING

POSITION PAPER ON CONCURRENT ACCREDITATION/APPROVAL SITE VISITS

(Adopted by the Board on 5/25/2011)

Background

The Arizona State Board of Nursing (Board) is the legally authorized entity in Arizona to set standards for nursing education programs (ARS § 1606 (B)(1)). The Board is also required to recognize national nursing accrediting bodies. Under A.R.S. § 32-1644 (C), the Board has limited authority over nursing programs accredited by national nursing accrediting agencies recognized by the Board (NLNAC, CCNE). That authority may only be exercised if the Board receives a complaint, the program falls below Board standards in rule, or the program's accreditation is lost or has lapsed.

In order to exercise appropriate and minimal effective regulation of nationally accredited programs and to determine whether the program conforms to regulatory standards as required in A.R.S. § 32-1644 (C), the Board engages in concurrent accreditation/approval site visits with the national nursing accrediting agency. The Board uses the same self-study provided to the accrediting agency as the basis for the visit. The Board also investigates any program that is the subject of a complaint related to violation of a rule or that falls below NCLEX passing standards.

Differences and Similarities

Goals of Approval/Accreditation

Boards of nursing and accrediting bodies have different missions and expectations of nursing programs. An accrediting agency's mission and purpose is to promote sound educational practices. The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) describes its role as "serving the public interest by assessing and identifying programs that engage in effective educational practices" (CCNE, 2010). The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) "supports the interests of nursing education, nursing practice, and the public by the functions of accreditation." NLNAC further recognizes a regulatory role in its statement that, "the monitoring of certificate, diploma, and degree offerings is tied closely to state examination and licensing rules, and to the oversight of preparation for work in the profession" (NLNAC, 2010). Accreditation processes are voluntary and fees are collected to support the accrediting agency. Nursing accrediting agencies evaluate a program's adherence to standards as an indication of the quality of a nursing program by reviewing the program's self assessment, expected outcomes and plans for improvement. The minimum or initial accreditation period is 5 years, with a typical period for re-accreditation of 8-10 years.

In contrast, the Arizona State Board of Nursing has the overarching mission of protection of the public health, safety and welfare through the regulation of licensees, certificate holders and nursing education programs. Part of accomplishing this mission is the statutory authority and responsibility to set minimum standards for nursing education in rule (A.R.S. §32-1606 (B)(1)) as well as recognize national accrediting agencies. All nursing programs are given an opportunity to provide input into the regulatory standards and consequently held to the same

standards. In order to recognize nationally accredited programs, the approval period set by the Board is matched to the accreditation approval period. The self-study prepared for the accreditation visit is accepted in lieu of a self study based on Board rules. Nationally accredited programs are not re-evaluated until the next scheduled accreditation site visit if no deficiencies are found or complaints are received. However, it is rare that a program does not have at least one potential deficiency on reaccreditation. Many of these deficiencies are minor and readily rectified. Once potential or actual deficiencies are resolved, programs are not routinely revisited until the next scheduled accreditation site visit.

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (2004) notes that Board approval is a mandatory process related to permission for a nursing program to operate by meeting essential educational standards. Accreditation in most jurisdictions remains voluntary and focuses on program excellence. Approval processes are generally carried out by governmental agencies while accreditation is conducted by private agencies with peer reviewers.

Standards

Consistent with its mission, Board regulations focus on safety indicators and practices of a nursing program. There are many areas of mutual interest such as: evidence of an effective evaluation plan, sufficient authority vested in the nursing program administrator, utilization of qualified faculty and sufficient resources to operate the program. Consistent with its mission, the Board has additional regulations requiring programs to evaluate protection of patient safety as part of the evaluation plan and implement policies to ensure both students and faculty are physically and mentally able to provide safe nursing care. There are differing standards for curriculum in that the Board requires evidence of level objectives and measurable learning outcomes for each class session whereas the accrediting standards lack this specificity. Additional standards of accrediting bodies that are not addressed in Board rules include opportunities for students and faculty to participate in campus governance, the integration of liberal education, provision of original transcripts of faculty, security of student documents and student loan default rates. Some standards, while similar to those of accrediting bodies, are interpreted and enforced differently. For example, despite having standards related to clinical activities, NLNAC accredits one program that has no instructed clinical practice.

Follow-up

Most concurrently conducted Board approval/accreditation visits result in reports that cite similar areas of strength and/or concern. Following the visit, the Board provides opportunities for the programs to correct any errors of fact and remedy any potential deficiencies. Beyond that, it is current Board practice to allow previously approved programs 6-8 months without formal notice to remedy potential deficiencies. During this time Board staff is available, without cost to the program, to provide consultation, program education and verify compliance. The predominant mechanism whereby accrediting bodies monitor compliance is self reports by programs usually within two years. On rare occasions, the accrediting agency will re-visit the program to verify compliance. If the program only is deficient in a few areas, no follow-up report or visit is required by the accrediting agency.

Site visitors

Accrediting agencies rely on volunteer site visitors to make determinations of compliance with standards. Although all trained in a similar manner, results of program review vary depending on the site visit team interpretation of the standards. For example, eight formerly consolidated programs were visited within 6 months of each other. All 8 self studies were similar and areas of deficiency were nearly identical across programs, however the results and recommendations from site visitors differed for each program. Dedicated Board staff, thoroughly versed on regulation, concurrently reviewed the programs and found 2 common potential deficiencies of all 8 programs. These deficiencies were remedied by the programs within the 6 month time-frame allotted by the Board.

Findings

The dissemination of the findings differs between the Board and the accrediting agency. The Board's actions are formal and available to the public. The public is informed on the Board's website when a school is issued a formal notice of deficiency or discipline. When a program has been granted a period to correct potential deficiencies, that information is noted in the Board minutes and available to the public. In contrast, the results of an accreditation survey are confidential and not available to the public or governmental agencies.

Board Position

It is important for the Board to collaborate with accreditation bodies to support safe and effective preparation of nurses (NCSBN, 2004). The Arizona State Board of Nursing is strongly committed to the approval process as an integral yet separate part of the accreditation review to ensure that a nationally accredited nursing program is maintaining standards. Most Arizona programs view the current oversight provided by the Board as appropriate. The Commitment to Ongoing Regulatory Excellence (CORE) project under the direction of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing provides nursing regulatory boards with data from both internal and external stakeholders to identify best practices and use benchmarking strategies for Boards of Nursing. Arizona specific data from the 2007 report that AZ nursing programs rated the effectiveness of Board functions in the area of promotion of quality in nursing programs and responsiveness to innovation in education as very effective (all were above 3.5 on a 4.0 scale). The helpfulness of the Board on educational issues was also rated highly (3.8 of a possible 4.0). 84% of program respondents rated the Board as having adequate regulation of nursing programs with 10% of respondents opining that the Board over-regulated nursing programs and 5% thought the Board under regulated nursing programs. (Randolph, 2009).

The Board is committed to supporting programs to achieve their outcomes while ensuring public safety to students and consumers of healthcare.

- **Resources:** With local follow-up and monitoring by the Board of Nursing, many programs are able to secure additional essential resources such as private faculty offices, support personnel and additional faculty to enhance program integrity and positive program outcomes. Board staff can better direct educational offerings to all programs that address common deficiencies. For example, when deficiencies were noted in

curriculum development, Board staff provided free workshops for faculty in rural programs; at the most recent Statewide Educator's Meeting; a featured speaker presented information on effective evaluation plans.

- **Consultation:** Board staff may be consulted at any time in the process at no charge regarding any potential deficiencies or questions related to the site visit.
- **Background Information:** If requested, Board staff can provide site visitors with an overall history of the program and the Arizona environment as it relates to nursing education including issues such as faculty and clinical availability.
- **Efficiency:** In using the single accreditation self study rather than two separate self studies, the program conserves time and resources.
- **Mutual Learning:** Board staff, site visitors and program leaders learn from each other regarding best practices and innovative methods, differing state regulations, and alternate practices—all programs in the state benefit from the dissemination of this knowledge by Board staff.

The Board of Nursing endorses concurrent site visits as the best process to support quality of educational programs and protect the health, safety and welfare of the public while minimizing disruption and costs to educational programs. Board staff will continue to seek innovations to streamline the accreditation/approval process so that Arizona's nursing education practices are evidence-based indicators of excellence.

Innovations to improve the process of concurrent visits include:

- Increased communication with program administration regarding the goals and requirements for the visit, especially if there has been a recent change in nursing program administrator
- Explore opportunities with national accreditation teams to divide workload and share results

References

Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). (2010). *CCNE accreditation*. Retrieved from <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Accreditation/index.htm>

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