

Approval/Accreditation Basics

Board Approval

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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, 1) proposal approval where the program must establish the need for the program and demonstrate that it has the resources to open a nursing program and 2) provisional approval where the program must demonstrate compliance or the ability to comply with all Board regulations. A program holding provisional approval is visited by the Board approximately 1 year after accepting students to determine if they are actually meeting rule requirements. The program may apply for full approval upon graduation of the first class. The program must apply for full approval within 2 years after the first class graduates. 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.

Accreditation

While the Board **approves** nursing programs, schools offering programs are also required to be **institutionally accredited** and the nursing program may hold voluntary **program accreditation**. The Board requires schools offering nursing programs to hold institutional accreditation that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The purpose of requiring institutional accreditation is to ensure that the education provided by the institution meets acceptable levels of quality. The DOE maintains a list of recognized accrediting agencies on their website www.ed.gov.

Institutional Accreditation

There are also two types of institutional accreditation, regional and national. Regional accreditation for Arizona schools is provided by Higher Learning Commission. Regional accreditation is sought by both private and public full service colleges and universities. All public and most full-service private colleges and universities hold this type of accreditation (e.g. Phoenix College, Arizona State University, Grand Canyon University).

*Formerly known as the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC)

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 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). Generally speaking, unless a specific articulation agreement exists, academic credits earned at schools with this type of accreditation are difficult to transfer both between nationally accredited schools and to a regionally accredited school.

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, as of the date of this report. 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

The **Accrediting Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN)** * accredits all types of nursing programs. The maximum period of ACEN 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, those with regional or program accreditation 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?

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The prospective student should research the program's pass rate on the licensing exam (NCLEX) and on-time graduation rates. For programs in Arizona, NCLEX pass rates 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% for a single year or below 80% for two consecutive years. For example a program would meet the minimum if it posted 76% pass in 2013 and 81% pass in 2014.

On-time graduation rates will be posted on the Board's website in the future. The minimum on-time graduation rate is 45% for each graduating cohort of students (e.g. 40 students admitted in 2010; 20 graduate in 2012; 10 are lagging and 10 dropped=50% on time graduation). Low on-time graduation rates may be due to a variety of factors including failure to implement a comprehensive curriculum, acceptance of students who do not possess basic reading and math competencies, personal issues of students, lack of support for students, or cheating by groups of students.

Other factors to consider are cost of the program, availability of financial aid, support for students, hours of class/clinical, number of master's and doctorate faculty, clinical faculty ratios (1 to 10 is the minimum), simulation experiences available, 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 and former students for recommendations.