NURSING EDUCATION
Approval Guidelines
Guidelines for Prelicensure Nursing Program Approval

NCSBN Approval Guidelines for BONs

Scope and Purpose: The following guidelines are meant to guide:

1. BONs and other nursing regulatory bodies (NRBs) in their approval of prelicensure nursing education programs in meeting regulatory standards.
2. The collection of annual report data from prelicensure nursing education programs.
3. Site visits to nursing education programs when warning signs have been identified.

Level of Nursing Education Programs:
Prelicensure RN and PN/VN nursing education programs.

Guideline Development
An Expert Panel consisting of representatives from the BONs, the College of Nurses of Ontario, the National League for Nursing, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the Organization of Associate Degree Nursing and NCSBN staff developed the guidelines from a literature review and three landmark national studies of nursing education outcomes and metrics that were conducted and analyzed by NCSBN.
## Expert Panel

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<tr>
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<th>Title and Affiliation</th>
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The Guidelines

These guidelines have been developed at the request of nursing regulatory bodies (NRBs) who requested evidence-based criteria for the prelicensure nursing education program approval process. The guidelines are based on both quantitative and qualitative data that emerged from three groundbreaking national studies and a literature review conducted by NCSBN to learn about quality indicators of nursing education programs, as well as warning signs. These guidelines are meant to help both NRBs as well as nursing education programs. It is hoped that these will increase collaboration between regulators and educators, allow for transparency in the approval process, help NRBs avoid antitrust issues, and provide criteria which allow the NRB to intervene prior to a program falling below standards.

Definitions

1. Approval of nursing education programs – Official recognition of nursing education programs that go through a systematic approval process implemented by U.S. BONs, thus meeting regulatory standards and being able to make their students eligible to take the nursing licensure exam. In most states, the approval process will be designated as full approval when all requirements are met; conditional or probationary or other designations when some, but not all of the requirements are met; or approval removal when programs fail to correct cited deficiencies. (adapted from Spector et al., 2018)

2. Graduation rates – Number and percentage of degree-seeking students who graduate within the normal program time. (Reyna, 2010, p. 10)

3. Metrics – For the purposes of this report, those measures that are used when evaluating the outcomes, quality and warning signs of nursing programs.

4. Outcomes – The behaviors, characteristics, qualities, or attributes that learners display at the end of an educational program (Gaberson et al., 2015, p. 18).

5. Quality clinical experiences – Either in face-to-face clinical experiences or in simulation, under the oversight of an experienced clinical instructor, the intentional integration of knowledge, clinical reasoning, skilled know-how and ethical comportment across the lifespan (adapted from Benner et al., 2010).

6. Warning signs – Negative indicators when a program is beginning to fall below the standards of graduating safe and competent students.
Warning Signs

1. Complaints to BONs or other NRBs from students, faculty, clinical sites or the public.
2. Turnover of program directors; More than three directors in a five-year period.
3. Frequent faculty turnover/cuts in numbers of faculty.
4. Trend of decreasing NCLEX® pass rates.

High-Risk Programs That May Need Additional Oversight

Prelicensure programs younger than seven years.

Quality Indicators

Administrative Requirements

1. The program has criteria for admission, progression and student performance.
2. Written policies and procedures are in place and have been vetted by faculty and students.

Program Director

1. The program director of an RN program is doctorally prepared and has a degree in nursing.
2. The program director of a PN/VN program has a graduate degree and a degree in nursing.

Faculty

1. At a minimum, 35% of the total faculty (including all clinical adjunct, part-time, or other faculty) are employed at the institution as full-time faculty.
2. In RN programs, faculty hold a graduate degree.
3. In PN programs, faculty hold a BSN degree.
4. Faculty can demonstrate they have been educated in basic instruction of teaching and adult learning principles and curriculum development. This may include the following:
   a. Methods of instruction;
   b. Teaching in clinical practice settings;
   c. Teaching in simulation settings;
   d. How to conduct assessments, including test item writing; and
   e. Managing “difficult” students.
5. Faculty can demonstrate participation in continuing education related to nursing education and adult learning pedagogies.

2 Additional oversight may include progress reports every six months related to the number of students, faculty qualifications, stability of the program director, NCLEX® pass rates, in addition to the regularly collected annual reports. If there is concern, the BON may make a focused visit to the program to make recommendations.
6. The school provides substantive and periodic workshops and presentations devoted to faculty development.

7. Formal mentoring of new full-time and part-time faculty takes place by established peers.

8. Formal orientation of adjunct clinical faculty.

9. Clinical faculty have up-to-date clinical skills and have had experience in direct patient care in the past 5 years.

10. Simulation faculty are certified.

**Students**

1. The nursing program should ensure the following are in place to assist students:
   a. English as a second language assistance is provided.
   b. Assistance is available for students with learning disabilities.
   c. All students have books and resources necessary throughout the program and strategies to help students who can't afford books and resources.
   d. Remediation strategies are in place at the beginning of each course and students are aware of how to seek help. This should include processes to remediate errors and near misses in the clinical setting.

**Curriculum and Clinical Experiences**

1. 50% or more of clinical experience in each clinical course is direct care with patients.
2. Variety of clinical settings with diverse patients.
3. Opportunities for quality and safety education integrated into the curriculum, including delegating effectively, emergency procedures, interprofessional communication and time management.
4. Systematic evaluation plan of the curriculum is in place.

**Teaching and Learning Resources**

1. The simulation lab is accredited.
2. Students have access to a library, technology and other resources.
3. Programs are able to assess students with learning disabilities and tailor the curriculum to meet their needs.
## Evidence Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warning Signs</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Complaints to BONs or other NRBs from students, faculty, clinical sites</td>
<td>1. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.</td>
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<tr>
<td>or public.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Turnover of program directors; More than three directors in a five-year</td>
<td>2. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study; Quantitative</td>
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<tr>
<td>period.</td>
<td>5-Year Annual Report Study.</td>
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<td>3. Frequent faculty turnover/cuts in numbers of faculty.</td>
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<td><strong>Administrative Requirements</strong></td>
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<td>1. The program can provide evidence that their admission, progression and</td>
<td>1. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study</td>
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<td>student performance standards are based on data.</td>
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<td>2. Policies and procedures are in place, based on data that have been vetted</td>
<td>2. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study</td>
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<td>by faculty and students.</td>
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3 Additional oversight may include progress reports every six months related to the number of students, faculty qualifications, stability of the director, NCLEX® pass rates, in addition to the regularly collected annual reports. If there is concern, the BON may make a focused visit to the program to make recommendations.
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<td>1. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study</td>
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<td>2. Literature, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study</td>
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### Evidence Table (continued)

| 5. | Faculty can demonstrate participation in continuing education related to nursing education and adult learning pedagogies. |
| 6. | The school provides substantive and periodic workshops and presentations devoted to faculty development. |
| 7. | Formal mentoring of new full-time and part-time faculty takes place by established peers. |
| 8. | Formal orientation of adjunct clinical faculty. |
| 9. | Clinical faculty have up-to-date clinical skills and have had experience in direct patient care in the past 5 years. |
| 10. | Simulation faculty are certified. |
| 5. | Literature, Qualitative 5-year Site Visit Study |
| 6. | Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study |
| 7. | Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study |
| 8. | Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study |
| 9. | Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study |
| 10. | Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study |

### Students

| 1. | The nursing program should ensure the following are in place to assist students: |
| 2. | a. English as a second language assistance is provided. |
| 3. | b. Assistance is available for students with learning disabilities. |
| 4. | c. All students have books and resources necessary throughout the program and strategies to help students who can’t afford books and resources. |
| 5. | d. Remediation strategies are in place at the beginning of each course and students are aware of how to seek help. This should include processes to remediate errors and near misses in the clinical setting. |
| 1. | Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study |

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### Evidence Table (continued)

**Curriculum and Clinical Experiences**

1. 50% or more of clinical experience in each clinical course is direct care with patients.
   - 1. Literature, Delphi.
2. Variety of clinical settings with diverse patients.
   - 2. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.
3. Opportunities for quality and safety education integrated into the curriculum, including delegating effectively, emergency procedures, interprofessional communication and time management.
   - 3. Literature, Delphi.
4. Systematic evaluation plan of the curriculum is in place.
   - 4. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.

**Teaching and Learning Resources**

1. The simulation lab is accredited.
   - 1. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.
2. Students have access to a library, technology and other resources.
   - 2. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.
3. Programs are able to assess students with learning disabilities and tailor the curriculum to meet their needs.
   - 3. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.
References


Appendix A

Additional Resources

Site Visit Template

**Use of the Site Visit Template:** This template was developed based on the qualitative five-year site visit study that NCSBN conducted, looking at programs that were not fully approved by BONs. Each of the items below were found to be lacking in those programs not meeting regulatory standards. Nursing regulatory bodies (NRBs) could use this template as a guide when making a focused site visit. NRBs may choose to adapt this template to customize it to their particular needs.

Date of Site Visit ____________________________

Name of Education Consultant ____________________________

Name of Program ____________________________

Address of Program ____________________________

Director of Program ____________________________

Contact Information of Director ____________________________

NCLEX® Program Code ____________________________

**Program**

1. Current approval status ____________________________
2. Age of program ____________________________
3. Ownership of program (for-profit; nonprofit; public) ____________________________
4. Trend of Program's NCLEX® Pass rates for Three Years
   - Current Year ____________________________
   - Year 2 ____________________________
   - Year 3 ____________________________

**Administration**

5. Written policies and procedures are available to faculty and students. Yes/No/Comments
6. There is evident student and faculty input into policies and procedures. Yes/No/Comments
7. Record keeping is in place for faculty credentials, course evaluations, student records. Yes/No/Comments
8. Quality improvement strategies are in place, particularly related to student outcomes and course evaluations. Yes/No/Comments
9. Students have the educational materials (books, uniforms, software, internet access, syllabi, etc.) they need to be successful. Yes/No/Comments
10. Data is used to set admission, progression and student performance. Yes/No/Comments
   (Below are some key areas to check)
   a. Student socioeconomic status.
   b. English as a second language.
   c. Presence of children under 18 years of age in the home.
   d. Need to work while attending program.
   e. Program admission, such as GPA, SAT®/ACT®, secondary education.
   f. Remediation programs, including remediation for clinical errors/near misses, are in place.
   g. Program progression (GPA standards, minimum course grades, pass/fail, etc.).

**Program Director**

11. How many directors has the program had in the past five years (including interim directors)? __________
12. Is the director in charge of other allied health and/or vocational programs? Yes/No
13. If the answer to #12 is yes, is there an assistant director for managing the day-to-day operations of the
    nursing program? Yes/No
    Explain ____________________________________________________________________________
14. What is the highest academic degree of the program director? ___________________________________
15. Is the program director a nurse? Yes/No

**Faculty**

16. Total number of faculty (including full-time, part-time, adjunct clinical faculty each academic cycle, etc.) is __________
17. Number of full-time faculty ______________
18. Credentials of faculty (provide separately)
19. Faculty have a basic knowledge of pedagogical methods Yes/No Comments
20. Workload for faculty is reasonable (average number of courses taught in an academic year) __________
    Yes/No Comments
21. All faculty teaching in clinical experiences have performed direct patient care in the last 5 years. Yes/No Comments
22. Formal orientation plan for new full-time/part-time faculty is in place. Yes/No
    Explain ____________________________________________________________________________
23. Formal orientation plan for adjunct faculty is in place. Yes/No
    Explain ____________________________________________________________________________
24. There is administrative support for ongoing faculty development. Yes/No
    Explain ____________________________________________________________________________
25. All faculty who teach simulation are certified. Yes/No
26. Faculty have control over the curriculum. Yes/No
    Explain ____________________________________________________________________________
27. Full-time faculty turnover during the past academic year was ____________________________

Students

28. English as a second language assistance is provided on an ongoing basis, when appropriate. Yes/No Comments

29. Resources are available for student learning disabilities. Yes/No Comments

30. Throughout the program books and resources are provided. Yes/No Comments
   a. When students can’t afford books and other required resources, strategies are in place to help them.

31. Remediation strategies are in place so that students are aware of how to seek help. Yes/No Comments
   a. Remediation strategies include errors/near misses made in clinical experiences.

Curriculum and Clinical Experiences

32. 50% or more of clinical experiences in each course are with direct care with patients. Yes/No

33. Variety of clinical settings with diverse patients. Yes/No Comment

34. Opportunities in clinical experiences for promoting safety and quality. Yes/No Comment
   Evidence-based examples include:
   a. Delegation
   b. Emergency procedures
   c. Interprofessional communication
   d. Time management

Teaching and Learning Resources

35. The simulation lab is accredited. Yes/No
   a. Simulation lab in working order with up-to-date equipment. Yes/No Comment

36. Syllabi are consistent in their design and with internal policies. Yes/No Comment
   a. Course descriptions match the course content and expected outcomes. Yes/No Comment

37. Physical instructional resources are adequate. Yes/No
   a. Full- and part-time faculty have private office space for student meetings. Yes/No Comment
   b. Adjunct faculty have the ability to reserve conference rooms to meet with students. Yes/No. Comment
Appendix B

Additional Resources

Annual Report Core Data Template

Name of Program ________________________________
Address of Program ________________________________
Person Completing Form ________________________________
Phone # of Person Completing Form ________________________________
NCLEX® Program Code ________________________________

Program

1. Is the program nationally nursing accredited? Yes No

2. What is the program’s current approval status?
   □ Full Approval
   □ Conditional/Probationary Approval
   □ Non-Approved

3. What best describes the program’s geographic location?
   □ Urban
   □ Suburban
   □ Rural
   □ Not Applicable

4. What is the institutional ownership?
   □ Public
   □ Private Not for Profit
   □ Private for Profit

5. What is the program type?
   □ Licensed Practical Nurse/Licensed Vocational Nurse
   □ Diploma
   □ Registered Nurse – Associates
   □ Registered Nurse – Bachelors
   □ Master’s Entry

6. In what year was the program founded? ________ [Numeric response field]

7. Does the program have any satellite sites? Yes [Q8] No [Skip to Q9]

8. [If yes to Q7] How many total sites, including the home site, does the program have? ________ [Numeric response field]
9. What types of learning modalities does the program offer?
   - In-Person Only [Skip to Q11]
   - Online Only [Skip to Q11]
   - Hybrid

10. What proportion of your program is online? [Sliding scale proportion]

11. What best describes the program’s academic schedule?
   - Quarters
   - Trimesters
   - Semesters
   - Other

12. Does the program administer a formal student orientation process?  
    Yes  No

13. Does the program offer English as a second language services for non-native English speakers?  
    Yes  No

14. Does the program offer disability support services?  
    Yes  No

15. Does the program offer support services to help low socioeconomic students access available resources (e.g. peer mentoring services, tuition assistance, work study program, etc.)?  
    Yes  No

16. Does the program have a formal remediation process in place for students having trouble?  
    Yes  No

17. Does the program have a formal remediation process in place for students who commit errors/near misses in their clinical experiences?  
    Yes  No

18. Has the nursing program experienced major organizational changes over the past year (such as collapsing programs)?  
    Yes [Q19]  No [Skip to Q20]

19. What major organizational changes have the nursing program experienced in the past year?
   - New Director
   - New Assistant/Associate Director
   - Staff Layoff
   - Faculty Layoff
   - Change in University Leadership (e.g. Provost or President)
   - Collapsing programs
   - Economic efficiencies
   - Other

20. What is the total number of clinical experience hours? [Numeric response field]

21. How many hours do students spend in direct client care? [Numeric response field]

22. How many hours do students spend in simulation? [Numeric response field]

23. How many hours do students spend in skills lab? [Numeric response field]

Simulation Data
24. Does the program offer simulated clinical experience?  
    Yes [Q25]  No [Skip to Q27]

25. [If yes to Q24] Are simulation faculty certified?  
    Yes  No

26. [If yes to Q24] Is the simulation lab accredited?  
    Yes  No
Program Director Data

27. Is the program director a nurse?
   Yes [Q28]  No [Skip to Q29]

28. [If yes to Q27] What is the program director’s highest nursing degree achieved?
   □ Diploma
   □ ADN
   □ BSN
   □ MSN
   □ MS
   □ DNP
   □ PhD
   □ Other__________________

29. What is the program director’s highest non-nursing degree achieved?
   □ Associates
   □ Bachelors
   □ MEd
   □ Other Master’s
   □ EdD
   □ Other Doctoral
   □ Other__________________

30. In the past year, how many directors, including interim directors, has the program had?
   __________ [Numeric response field]

31. Does the program director hold a joint allied health appointment?  Yes  No

32. Does the program have an assistant/associate director?  Yes  No

33. Does the program director have administrative support?  Yes  No

Faculty Data

34. How many full-time faculty are there?  __________ [Numeric response field]

35. How many clinical adjunct faculty are there?  __________ [Numeric response field]

36. How many part-time faculty are there?  __________ [Numeric response field]

37. How many of the full-time faculty are graduate educated?
   □ MSN __________ [Numeric response field]
   □ MS __________ [Numeric response field]
   □ Other Masters __________ [Numeric response field]
   □ DNP __________ [Numeric response field]
   □ PhD __________ [Numeric response field]
   □ Other Doctoral __________ [Numeric response field]

38. What is the student to faculty ratio for didactic/theory courses?  __________ [Numeric response field]

39. What is the student to clinical faculty ratio?  __________ [Numeric response field]
40. Does the program offer formal orientation for new adjunct clinical faculty?  Yes  No
41. Does the program offer formal orientation for new part-time faculty?  Yes  No
42. Does the program offer formal orientation for new full-time faculty?  Yes  No
43. Does the program offer formal mentoring for new full-time faculty?  Yes  No

**Student Data**

44. How many students are enrolled in the nursing program as of the beginning of the current academic year?  
   [Numeric response field]
45. What is the maximum nursing enrollment capacity?  
   [Numeric response field]
46. What is your attrition rate?
47. What is the average age of a student enrolled in the program as of the beginning of the current academic year? [Instructions: Round to the nearest integer]
   [Numeric sliding scale]
48. Please provide a detailed breakdown of the racial composition of the students currently enrolled in the program.
   - American Indian or Alaska Native [Proportion response field]
   - Asian [Proportion response field]
   - Black or African American [Proportion response field]
   - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander [Proportion response field]
   - White [Proportion response field]
   - Multi-Racial [Proportion response field]
   - Other [Proportion response field]
49. Please provide a detailed breakdown of the ethnic composition of the students currently enrolled in the program.
   - Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin [Proportion response field]
   - Non-Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin [Proportion response field]
50. Please provide a detailed breakdown by student sex.
   - Female [Numeric response field]
   - Male [Numeric response field]
   - Other [Numeric response field]