NURSING EDUCATION
Approval Guidelines

NCSBN
Leading Regulatory Excellence

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

Maryann Alexander, PhD, FAAN
Chief Officer, Nursing Regulation, NCSBN

Donna Meyer, MSN, ANEF, FAADN, FAAN
CEO, Organization of Associate Degree Nursing

Janice Brewington, PhD, RN, FAAN
Director, Center for Transformational Leadership, Chief Program Officer, National League for Nursing

Bibi Schultz, MSN, RN, CNE
Director of Education
Missouri State Board of Nursing

Rebecca Fotsch, JD
Director, State Advocacy and Legislative Affairs, NCSBN

Anne Marie Shin RN, MN, MSc (QIPS)
Manager, Education Program, College of Nurses of Ontario

Janice I. Hooper, PhD, RN, FRE, CNE, FAAN, ANEF
Nursing Consultant for Education, Texas Board of Nursing

Josephine H. Silvestre, MSN, RN
Senior Associate, Regulatory Innovations, NCSBN

Nicole Livanos, JD
Senior Associate, State Advocacy and Legislative Affairs, NCSBN

Nancy Spector, PhD, RN, FAAN
Director, Regulatory Innovations, NCSBN

Elizabeth Lund, MSN, RN
Executive Director, NCSBN Board of Directors, Tennessee Board of Nursing

Joan Stanley, CRNP, FAAN, FAANP
Chief Academic Officer, American Association of Colleges of Nursing

Brendan Martin, PhD
Associate Director, Research, NCSBN

Crystal Tillman, DNP, RN, CPNP, PMHNP-BC, FRE
Director of Education and Practice, North Carolina Board of Nursing

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[1] 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, Oermann, & Sellenbarger, 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, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 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[2]

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.

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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

Warning Signs	Evidence
1. Complaints to BONs or other NRBs from students, faculty, clinical sites or public.	1. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.
2. Turnover of program directors; More than three directors in a five-year period.	2. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study; Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study.
3. Frequent faculty turnover/cuts in numbers of faculty.	3. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study.
4. Trend of decreasing NCLEX® pass rates.	4. Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study.

High-Risk Programs That May Need Additional Oversight[3]	Evidence
Prelicensure programs younger than seven years.	Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study; Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study.

Quality Indicators.	Evidence
Administrative Requirements	
1. The program can provide evidence that their admission, progression and student performance standards are based on data.	1. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study
2. Policies and procedures are in place, based on data that have been vetted by faculty and students.	2. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study

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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.

Evidence Table (continued)

Program Director

1. The program director of an RN program is doctorally prepared and has a degree in nursing.	1. Literature, Qualitative 5- Year Site Visit Study, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study
2. The program director of a PN/VN program has a graduate degree and a degree in nursing.	2. Literature, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study

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.	1. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study.
2. In RN programs, faculty hold a graduate degree.	2. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study.
3. In PN programs, faculty hold a BSN degree.	3. Literature, Quantitative 5-Year Annual Report Study.
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:	4. Literature, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.

    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.

Evidence Table (continued)

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

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.	1. Literature, Delphi, Qualitative 5-Year Site Visit Study.

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

Benner, P., Sutphen, M., Leonard, V., & Day, L. (2010). *Educating nurses: A call for radical transformation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gaberson, K.B., Oermann, M.H., & Shellenbarger, T. (2015). *Clinical teaching strategies in nursing* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

Reyna, R. (2010). Complete to compete: Common college completion metrics. *National Governors Association Chair's Initiative* (June 2010).

Spector, N., Hooper, J. I., Silvestre, J., & Qian, H. (2018). Board of nursing approval of registered nursing education programs. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*, 8(4), 22-29.

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

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 [Q2]   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]