

**Consideration of Report of a Routine Survey Visit to
 Fortis College in Houston, Texas
 Vocational Nursing Education Program**

Summary of Request:

Consider the findings in the focused survey visit to Fortis College Vocational Nursing (VN) Education Program in Houston, Texas, that was placed on Conditional Approval status at the April 2013 Board meeting. The survey visit was conducted by Beverly Skloss, MSN, RN, Contract Program Evaluator.

Historical Perspective:

- Fortis College VN Program received initial approval at the October 2008 Board meeting and is licensed by The Texas Workforce Commission.
- They have had four (4) years of NCLEX-PN® examination pass rates since they began operation.

Examination Year	BON Approval Status	NCLEX-PN® Examination Pass Rate	Number of First Time Candidates (Passed/Total)
2013	Conditional Approval based upon three years pass rates below 80%	58.75%	47/80
2012	Full with Warning based upon two years pass rates below 80%	76.47%	26/34
2011	Full Approval based upon the 2010 pass rate	72.22% (Self-Study was required)	13/18
2010	Initial	81.25%	13/16

- The Fortis College VN program director submitted a Self-Study Report in 2012 in response to the 2011 72.22% NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate as required by §214.4(c)(2)(B).
- Program weaknesses identified in the 2012 Self-Study Report were:
 - student/applicant selection process that does not include nursing program input;
 - business model that does not facilitate authorizing the program director to direct the program in all its aspects;
 - turnover in program director, national faculty development director, regional dean, and faculty; and
 - lack of program authority for student admission, progression, and dismissal.
- A plan with corrective measures and quality improvement strategies outlined in the Self-Study Report included:
 - removing restrictions from Nursing Admissions and Progression Committee;
 - changing faculty orientation process toward a more nursing education focus;
 - employing an administrative assistant;
 - appointing an academic coach for each cohort of students;
 - eliminating director teaching responsibilities to allow time to implement corrective measures and;
 - using a national recruiter to expedite hiring of faculty.

- On the 2013 NEPIS, the program reported an enrollment of one hundred twelve (112) students with eighty-five graduates (85) for the 2012-2013 academic year.
- The program has three (3) full-time faculty and two (2) part-time faculty (at the time of the survey visit).
- Dr. Mekonnen Birru was appointed Director for the VN program in November 2013. He taught in the program prior to being appointed as Director.
- Enrollment as of September 9, 2014 was sixty-nine (69) students: twenty-one (21) in level two, twenty-two (22) in level three, and twenty-six (26) in level four. The last cohort admitted was in January 2014.
- The program has been restricted in admitting new students after the approval status was changed to Conditional.
- Fortis College is located in a totally renovated new building on a new campus.
- Fortis College is under the auspices of Education Affiliates of Baltimore, Maryland.

Pros and Cons Identified during the Survey Visit: (See Attachment #1):

Pros:

- The Fortis College new facility includes state of the industry classrooms, upgraded laboratories, and a new, large simulation center.
- The VN Program Director is respected by administration, faculty, and students. His time is devoted to administration of the program with no teaching responsibilities.
- Administration expressed full support for the VN program and a strong desire to continue fulfilling the need for nurses in the area.
- The Program Director stated that he is supported by administration and is allowed to direct the program in all aspects.
- Students expressed satisfaction with the program.
- Full-time faculty has varied teaching experience in nursing programs.
- The program of study incorporates creative methods for course delivery including time for student remediation.
- All clinical learning experiences are faculty supervised with hands on direct-patient care and use of preceptors in clinical settings.
- The program utilizes simulation to prepare students for clinical practice and for remediation.
- VN graduates are able to obtain employment in long term care agencies, clinics and some acute care hospitals.
- Administration, Program Director, and faculty have implemented corrective measures as
- identified in their self-study report by making necessary changes to the program of study in order to promote learner success.

Cons:

- For the past two (2) years the program has experienced turnover in leadership and faculty.
- The drop in pass rates is attributed to lack of rigor in the admissions and readmission policies, the condition of school facilities, lack of faculty teaching experience, and lack of rigor in testing student knowledge.

Rationales for Staff Recommendation:

The program has made many changes to improve the quality of the teaching environment and resources, and is waiting to see if the changes affect the pass rate. The findings from the survey visit demonstrate the measures that have been taken. The NCLEX examination year for VN programs ends December 31, 2014.

Staff Recommendation:

Move to accept the report of the survey visit to Fortis College in Houston, Texas, as indicated in the attached letter (See Attachment #2).

**Summary of Survey Visit
Fortis College in Houston, Texas
Vocational Nursing Education Program**

Purpose of Survey visit: Board Order – Program on Conditional Approval

Date of Visit: September 9, 2014

Board Representative Conducting Visit: Beverly Skloss, MSN, RN, Contract Program Evaluator

Program Evaluator met with:

- Sidney R. Carey, Fortis College Campus President
- MeKonnen H. Birru, PhD, RN, Program Director
- Gloria King-Hoff, RN, MSN, Faculty
- Jill Seltzer, Administrative Assistant to Program Director
- Five (5) VN students

Program Evaluator:

- Reviewed the curriculum and all syllabi;
- Reviewed the Student Handbook and Faculty Handbook;
- Reviewed exams, assignments, and clinical evaluation tools;
- Reviewed clinical affiliation agreements;
- Interviewed five (5) students;
- Toured facilities housing the nursing program;
- Held initial conference with director and administration;
- Met with faculty member;
- Reviewed records and documents including: student and faculty files, minutes of faculty meetings, and the Total Program Evaluation (TPE) Plan; and
- Conducted exit interview with director and administration.

Summary of Findings:

Administration

- Administration indicated the nursing program fulfills a continued need in the local community and has a higher status than other education units in the college when it comes to financial resources.
- Dr. MeKonnen H. Birru has been the Program Director since November, 2013 and is an experienced educator. He feels supported by administration and has the authority and autonomy to direct the program in all aspects.
- Dr. Birru's time is devoted to program administration with no teaching responsibilities.
- Clear channels of communication between the director and administration were evident.
- Dr. Birru indicated he has a wealth of support from Mr. Carey and Mr. Carey indicated they have strong support from the rest of the College Administration.

Program of Study:

- The program of study is designed to be completed in twelve months with four (4) levels.
- The program is comprised of 1412 clock hours: 572 didactic hours and 840 clinical hours.
- The program of study is well organized and includes all Board required content.
- The organization of the curriculum is based upon simple to complex levels and designed to ensure students are competent in skills prior to entering the clinical setting.
- The Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECS) (2010) have been fully incorporated into the curriculum.

- Standardized testing is consistently used throughout the program for admission, progression, remediation, and readiness for the NCLEX-PN examination.
- An effective process for testing and testing analysis is consistently being used.
- The process for remediation and strengthening of testing rigor is consistently being used.
- There is a solid plan in place to increase the rigor of admissions if the program is allowed to admit students again.

Faculty:

- Three (3) full-time faculty and two (2) part-time faculty teach in the program.
- Faculty reported they have support from the program director and administration.
- Faculty expressed their workload is manageable and they have time to serve on assigned committees.
- Faculty policies are well-written and in place per BON requirement.
- Faculty has regular meetings with minutes available.
- There is adequate non-teaching time for faculty development and faculty expressed they have plenty of opportunities.
- Each faculty has a professional development plan on file for the year with documented training on teaching, testing and content areas.
- Faculty turnover has decreased with new experienced faculty hired.

Students:

- The program admitted the last cohort in January 2014.
- At the time of the survey visit, sixty-nine (69) students were in the program.
- Students reported they enrolled in the VN program because of the desire to become a nurse and availability of enrollment placements.
- Students agreed the program of study is preparing them well for clinical practice and they cited hands-on learning experiences as being the most rewarding part of the program.
- Student policies are well-defined, written, and available to students. Students interviewed expressed they feel the policies are consistently applied.
- Five (5) students were available for interview and all expressed the desire to become a Registered Nurse (RN) later in their career.
- Students expressed satisfaction with the program and the knowledge of the instructors.

Clinical Learning Experiences:

- Skills lab and simulation lab activities are also utilized.
- Faculty provides supervision during all clinical learning experiences and maintains BON required ratios.
- Clinical preceptors are utilized and guidelines are well written.
- Clinical learning experiences are scheduled to correlate with didactic content.
- Criteria for selecting clinical agencies are well-defined.
- The clinical evaluation tools are based upon course content and indicate progression in the level of expectations.
- Clinical tools are used throughout the program, including formative and summative evaluations.
- Student expectations are detailed and clear.

Facilities, Resources, and Services:

- A full array of student services is offered on site.
- Four (4) modern, spacious classrooms with new audiovisual equipment and furniture are dedicated to the VN program and conducive to learning.
- Computer labs are available in the nursing building and students have twenty-four hour access to online resources.
- There is ample parking available in front of the building and adjacent to the program building.

- Skills and simulation labs are new with state of the art equipment and resources.
- Media equipment is available for every classroom.
- The program director is provided with a fully furnished private office. Faculty share offices with each having their own cubicle space. Private rooms are available for student conferences.
- The program has full-time clerical and secretarial support.
- The program director and faculty agreed that resources are more than adequate to meet all teaching needs.
- The new facilities include restrooms, faculty and student lounges, break areas, and study areas.

Records and Reports:

- Faculty files provide evidence of faculty qualifications, responsibilities, and faculty evaluations.
- The program has a Total Program Evaluation (TPE) Plan that is used for decision making.
- Meeting minutes consistently reflect implementation of the TPE.
- Student files contain all documents required by Rule 214.
- Clinical affiliation agreements are up to date.
- Storage of files meets the requirement of Rule 214.

Future Plans:

- Increase rigor of admission policies with a maximum of thirty (30) per cohort.
- Change program from twelve (12) months to fifteen (15) months in length.

DRAFT LETTER

January 22, 2015

MeKonnen H. Birru, PhD, RN, Program Director
Vocational Nursing Education Program
Fortis College
1201 W. Oaks Mall
Houston, TX

Dear Dr. Birru,

At the January 22, 2015 meeting, the members of the Texas Board of Nursing considered the report of the September 9, 2014 survey visit to Fortis College in Houston, Texas, Vocational Nursing Education Program. It was the decision of the Board to accept the report of the survey visit.

If you have any questions or if we may be of assistance, please contact board staff at gayle.varnell@bon.texas.gov or (512) 621-5179.

Sincerely,

Katherine A. Thomas, MN, RN, FAAN
Executive Director

Copy: Sidney R. Carey, Campus President, Fortis College