Consideration of Change in Approval Status
From Full Approval to Full Approval with Warning
Valley Grande Institute in Weslaco, Texas
Vocational Nursing Education Program

Summary of Request:
Consider the proposed change in approval status for Valley Grande Institute (VGI) Vocational Nursing (VN) Education Program, in Weslaco, Texas, from Full Approval to Full Approval with Warning based upon the 2016 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate, findings in the Self-Study Report dated July 2016, and areas for improvement to align with Rule 214.

Historical Perspective:
- The VN Program at VGI has been in operation since 1992.
- VGI is accredited by the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES).
- Other healthcare programs offered by VGI include Patient Care Technician, Limited Medical Radiologic Technologist/Phlebotomy Technician, Medical Assistant, and Medical Insurance Coder & Billing Technician.
- Olivia Pena, RN, is currently serving as Interim Director for the VN program.
- The NCLEX-PN® examination pass rates for the past five years are included in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCLEX Examination Year</th>
<th>BON Approval Status</th>
<th>NCLEX-RN® Examination Pass Rate</th>
<th>Number of First Time Candidates (Passed/Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>75.36%</td>
<td>52/69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>78.18%</td>
<td>43/55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>84.91%</td>
<td>45/53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>94.44%</td>
<td>51/54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>85.25%</td>
<td>52/61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Due to the 2015 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate of 78.18%, the Program Director and faculty were required to submit a Self-Study Report (SSR) that would evaluate factors that may have contributed to the graduates’ performance on the NCLEX-PN® examination and a description of the corrective measures to be implemented.
- The faculty identified factors in the SSR that may have contributed to the decline in the pass rate and designed corrective measures to be implemented that included:
  - strengthening admission, readmission, and progression criteria;
  - mandating tutoring for at-risk students identified by grades;
  - revising faculty orientation program to prepare and support faculty;
  - planning consistency in clinical instruction;
  - providing feedback to faculty with data from faculty evaluations;
  - ensuring consistent use of policies;
- reviewing and revising entire curriculum;
- revising and consistently following grading policies; and
- reviewing and revising Total Program Evaluation Plan.

- The program has provided a response to the Board with updates of their corrective measures (See Attachment #1).

**Rationale for Recommendations:**

Rule 214.4(c)(3)(A) states: “A warning may be issued to a program when the pass rate of first-time NCLEX-RN® candidates … is less than 80% for two consecutive years…” The program had identified a number of factors that may have contributed to the pass rate and has planned corrective measures to improve student performance.

The Education Guideline for writing a Self-Study Report requires that “The effects of the corrective measures should be evaluated as a part of the Total Program Evaluation Plan.”

**Staff Recommendation:**

Move to change the approval status for the Valley Grande Institute Vocational Nursing Education Program in Weslaco, Texas, from Full Approval to Full Approval with Warning based upon the 2016 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate, findings in the 2016 Self-Study Report, and areas for improvement to align with Rule 214, and impose the conditions and requirements in the attached letter and Board Order (See Attachment #2).
Texas Board of Nursing  
333 Guadalupe  
Suite 3-460  
Austin, TX 78701-3944  

March 9, 2017  

Dear Texas Board of Nursing,  

We are writing this letter to dictate ways in which Valley Grande Institute for Academic Studies is working to improve our Vocational Nursing Program and NCLEX-PN Pass Rates. Through our self-study, we identified numerous areas for improvement. Since submitting that study to the BON, we have made continual progress towards student success. Some areas of concern we are addressing include student retention, readmits, faculty turnover, and test-taking abilities.  

It is worth noting that one cohort of students who graduated in 09/16 had a 90.9% pass rate. Because of this, we brought back this cohort’s main instructor and created a new role for her – Nursing Education Coordinator. This role’s primary focus is to improve NCLEX-PN pass rates. Other responsibilities that correlate closely to NCLEX-PN success include assisting in curriculum revision, faculty development and training, and review of resources.  

In addition to the creation of this new role, we have various initiatives we are working on to strengthen our students’ learning, and therefore, improve our NCLEX-PN test scores. We are holding weekly tutoring sessions for both our former students waiting to test/retest and our senior students who will be graduating in May. During these tutoring sessions, NCLEX-PN test-taking strategies, practice questions, and difficult content are all reviewed in-depth.  

Furthermore, one resource we utilize at Valley Grande Institute is ATI. Our Nursing Education Coordinator has created multiple practice tests for our former students and senior students over a variety of content areas. Some of these practices are NCLEX-PN Test Plan specific. This also allows students who have failed to note their deficiencies from their NCLEX-PN test report and focus on those practice areas. The Nursing Education Coordinator also reviews each student’s individual Comprehensive ATI exam to identify areas of weakness and help cater practice exams to each student.  

As another area of improvement, we recently implemented Virtual ATI for our seniors. This resource will be used the last month of their schooling to assist each student in focusing primarily on their areas of weakness prior to testing. It will be used as graduation is approaching, and it will continue to be used after graduation as a study tool. Through monitoring their weaknesses with the help of Virtual ATI, we can also assess what courses may need altering and/or which instructors may need more guidance with their lectures.  

One area of concern is the amount of faculty turnover our school has seen. This frequent change in faculty can make it very difficult for our students to be successful, as each instructor tends to teach their courses somewhat differently. To help with this issue, we have emphasized a focus on faculty retention through professional development trainings, more-frequent faculty meetings, a quarterly “WOW Award”
recipient, and fostering a more positive work environment. We also improved our New Faculty Orientation checklist, which helps guide administrators to ensure our faculty are well-equipped before taking on their own classes. Although we did recently have to terminate one faculty member, we made every effort to assist him in the classroom, with test creation, and with learning the faculty role prior to making that final decision.

Another area in which we struggled was the lack of a permanent Vocational Nursing Director. Although one of our long-time faculty members took over as our Interim Director, the absence of a permanent individual in that role was difficult for faculty members and students. We recently hired a Vocational Nursing Director with a wealth of knowledge as both a VN faculty member and the Director of another school. He is scheduled to start at Valley Grande Institute on April 3rd.

In an effort to assist students who will be testing soon, we also started a VGI NCLEX-PN Prep Facebook group. In this group, students are encouraged to share tips for studying, what helped them study/pass, and ask questions about content that is unclear. The Nursing Education Coordinator is the supervisor of this group and posts weekly practice questions, as well as answers any questions on material/content.

After reviewing our curriculum, we realized the heavy load of our level 2 students. To help with retention and comprehension, we recently made the decision to move Maternal-Neonatal Nursing from Level 2 to Level 3 in their schedules. This minor change will be implemented starting May 2017. Our hope is that this will alleviate some of the overwhelming stress and allow students to focus equally on each course, thereby making our students more successful.

To help us determine what we have been doing well, we surveyed all of our former students from 12/15 through 09/16. The results to questions like “what do you feel helped you prepare the most for NCLEX?” were shared with our most recent grads and senior students. We have also used some of these answers to ensure we are doing our part to help each student be successful. For example, many students from the 09/16 class stated the ATI Practices that were created were very helpful. This allowed our Nursing Education Coordinator to prove that the more practice questions they receive, the higher their chances are of being successful.

We are continuing to review our curriculum and how it aligns with the NCLEX-PN Test Plan to ensure our courses are covering all pertinent information. Each cohort is being encouraged to attend tutoring in subjects and to come to faculty or administration when they have concerns. Through this, we hope to quickly be notified of any potential problems with instruction or comprehension, and we also hope to improve student retention and satisfaction.

After analyzing previous trends with our NCLEX-PN pass rates, we noticed readmitted students seemed to do poorly when compared with their classmates. Because of this, we recently restructured our readmission criteria. First, students may only be readmitted once into the program, and they must return within 8 months of their drop date. Past students were at times returning over a year later, and this caused a great issue with retention of material. Once readmitted, we are having each student test over the courses they already passed to ensure retention and comprehension. If they fail a particular course exam, they are required to complete remediation assignments in that course over the remainder of the semester. We hope
to see an improvement with how our readmitted students do on NCLEX-PN through this new policy.

After reviewing our admission criteria, we realized we may not be allowing Valley Grande Institute to pick the “cream-of-the-crop” students. We previously required a TEAS cumulative score of 50 for all applicants. Even though we may have 10 students test on any given day, only one or two would meet this minimum score criteria. After doing some TEAS review questions ourselves, we realized much of the science content is reviewed or taught in our nursing curriculum, such as Anatomy and Physiology. Our students are also, at times, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students. Therefore, they historically do not do well on the TEAS reading/writing sections. In order to prevent us from excluding potentially great nursing students based on a single test score, we have revised our admission criteria to a point system. This point system will include the cumulative TEAS score, an average interview score (based on three interviewees), points for being Valley Grande Institute alumni, and points for prior military service. After admitting our first cohort with these criteria in May 2017, we hope to see a great improvement in the quality of students selected, and therefore, an increase in our NCLEX-PN scores.

In addition to these efforts, we understand the importance of our students being competent in each of their nursing skills. Therefore, we require they pass each skill by the 3rd attempt. If they fail on a 2nd attempt, they are provided with remediation and are placed on probation. At the end of the level, they retest for a 3rd time. At this time, if they fail the skill again, they fail the Skills course and are dismissed from the program for unsuccessful completion. This helps ensure we are producing students who are adequately trained in their skills and are encouraging students to seek assistance early-on for each difficult skill. It also allows us to better monitor our students’ abilities and individualize assistance, when needed.

Lastly, our clinical/skills instructors are coordinating more with our theory/didactic instructors. In particular, they are working cohesively to ensure the content covered in areas such as Medical-Surgical is being discussed more in-depth at clinical sites with real patient scenarios. This is helping bridge the gap between clinical and class, and it helps reinforce important didactic material in real-life scenarios.

The guidance from the Board of Nursing, especially from our primary contact, Dr. Hooper, has been insightful and greatly appreciated. As we continue on this journey of improvement, we remain open to any and all suggestions from the Board of Nursing. Thank you for taking the time to consider our input and review our letter.

Sincerely,

Mari Aviles
School Director
Valley Grande Institute Vocational Nursing
NCLEX-PN Initiatives

**2016 Actual: 75.36%**

**2017 Goal: 80%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Led By</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hired a Nursing Education Coordinator to focus on NCLEX-PN initiatives and program outcomes</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>11/1/2016</td>
<td>Rehired previous faculty member, Shelly McDonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly tutoring sessions for senior students (graduating in May) and postgrads waiting to test or retest</td>
<td>Nursing Education Coordinator</td>
<td>2/1/2017</td>
<td>Feedback from attendees states the topics covered are useful; weekly attendance is roughly 7-9 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATI Practice Tests</td>
<td>Nursing Education Coordinator</td>
<td>11/1/2016</td>
<td>Multiple codes are sent to graduates and seniors to practice various topics (content areas, NCLEX-PN areas); students are able to request personalized exams from the Nursing Education Coordinator that focus on their weaknesses or areas they are struggling with; students are consistently encouraged to review rationales and to contact the Nursing Education Coordinator if rationales/content does not make sense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive ATI Review</td>
<td>Nursing Education Coordinator</td>
<td>2/1/2017</td>
<td>Nursing Education Coordinator reviewed the ATI Comprehensive Exams from current seniors and postgrads who failed or are waiting to test in order to help them identify their weakest areas that they need to focus on; students stated this assessment of their weaknesses has been greatly helpful during their studying</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual ATI has been purchased for current seniors; it will begin 1 month prior to graduation and will extend for 1 month after graduation; it focuses on individual weaknesses and assigns a Nurse Educator to each student; when used for the full 8 weeks, Virtual ATI has a 99% pass rate. After use, we will have our current seniors evaluate how effective they feel the Virtual ATI was for them, as well as analyze the impact on NCLEX-PN scores.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less faculty turnover: WOW Award, training, staff meetings, new faculty orientation</td>
<td>Nursing Education Coordinator</td>
<td>12/1/2016</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We are having professional development/training sessions to assist staff in becoming more comfortable with their roles, along with staff meetings to keep all individuals up-to-date on changes or school improvements. We recently initiated a quarterly WOW Award to identify a staff member who has done a wonderful job keeping peers and students motivated. Our New Faculty Orientation checklist was implemented in August 2016 and has since been revised to include more information we feel would benefit newly hired faculty. Steps are in-place to assist struggling instructors through having a mentor assist them in learning our systems and having feedback provided on individual lecture styles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VGI NCLEX-PN Prep Facebook Group</td>
<td>Nursing Education Coordinator</td>
<td>2/26/2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A closed Facebook group was created for all current students (regardless of level in the program) and former students to share insight on how they studied for NCLEX. Practice questions are put up at least twice weekly by the Nursing Education Coordinator, and after a few days of collecting poll answers, the correct answers and rationale are posted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lightening the Level 2 courseload</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>5/1/2017</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PostGrad Survey</td>
<td>Nursing Education Coordinator</td>
<td>11/1/2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Review v. NCLEX Test Plan</td>
<td>Nursing Education Coordinator</td>
<td>3/1/2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readmission Changes</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>5/1/2017</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As of May 2017, our Maternal-Neonatal Nursing course will be moved from Level 2 to Level 3. After analyzing where we lose the most students (retention), we found it tends to be in Level 2 due to the heavy course load, and the most fail Maternal. Since Level 3 has previously had the least amount of hours, we will be moving Maternal-Neonatal to this level. After the first course has Maternal for their third level, we will reevaluate our retention rates, failed students in Maternal, and student satisfaction.

To assist our current and future students with great study techniques, we surveyed our last 4 cohorts of graduates to find out what they did to study for NCLEX, what they found most/least helpful, and what resources they used most. These answers have been shared as part of a PowerPoint with seniors, and it will continue being shared with each senior class. Data will continue being collected within 6 months of each class graduating/testing.

We are reviewing our curriculum versus the 2017 NCLEX-PN Test Plan to identify any possible deficiencies.

We have revised our readmission policy to mandate students return within 8 months of dropping or they will have to restart the program. We are also testing students over courses they previously passed. If they fail these exams, they will have to do remediation work throughout the semester. This is due to our analysis of readmitted students doing more poorly on NCLEX. Some of these factors seem to include poor retention of previously mastered material. Since our next levels start again in May 2017, this is when these changes will begin.
Our next cohort is admitted in May 2017. Part of our admission changes include dismissing the minimum TEAS requirement score and weighing more points on various interview questions. In the past, we have accepted anyone who makes a minimum of a 50 on their TEAS exam since we have not had a large pool of qualified applicants. After taking some of the TEAS questions ourselves, we realized we may be excluding potentially great applicants. Therefore, we will focus more heavily on the interview, and we will rely on a point system to admit students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admission Criteria</th>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>5/1/2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills Lab Attempts</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>1/1/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class v. Clinical Coordination</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>2/21/2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To ensure our students are competent in their nursing skills, we require they pass each skill within 3 attempts. If they fail on the 3rd attempt, they will fail Skills & therefore be dismissed from the program. After a second failed attempt, remediation is provided, and students are placed on academic probation.

Theory and skills/clinical faculty are working more closely to ensure what is covered during didactic lectures is reinforced during clinical using real scenarios.
Draft Letter

April 24, 2017

Olivia Pena, RN, Interim Director
Vocational Nursing Education Program
Valley Grande Institute
345 S. Texas Boulevard
Weslaco, Texas 78596-6018

Dear Ms. Pena:

At the April 20-21, 2017 meeting, members of the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) discussed the approval status for the Valley Grande Institute Vocational Nursing Education Program in Weslaco, Texas, based upon the 2016 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate, findings in the 2016 Self-Study Report, and areas for improvement to align with Rule 214.

Based upon the discussion and review of information, it was the decision of the Board to change the approval status for the Valley Grande Institute Vocational Nursing Education Program in Weslaco, Texas, from Full Approval to Full Approval with Warning and impose the conditions and requirements in the attached letter and Board Order.

If you have any questions or if we may be of any assistance, please contact Board Staff at Janice.hooper@bon.texas.gov or 512-305-6814.

Sincerely,

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

Copy: Mari Aviles, President
Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools
Texas Workforce Commission
BEFORE THE TEXAS BOARD OF NURSING

*******************************
ORDER OF THE BOARD

In the Matter of
Valley Grande Institute
Vocational Nursing Education Program
In Weslaco, Texas

A public meeting of the Texas Board of Nursing, hereinafter referred to as the Board, was held on April 20, 2017, 333 Guadalupe, Tower II, Room 225, Austin, Texas, to consider the approval status of the Valley Grande Institute Vocational Nursing Education Program in Weslaco, Texas, pursuant to Section 301.157, Texas Occupations Code and 22 Tex. Admin. Code Chapter 214, based upon the NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate for 2016, findings in the Self-Study Report, and areas for improvement to align with Rule 214.

After review and due consideration of the materials presented by Staff and filed by the Valley Grande Institute Degree Nursing Education Program in Weslaco, Texas, the Board hereby CHANGES the approval status for the Valley Grande Institute Vocational Nursing Education Program in Weslaco, Texas from FULL APPROVAL to FULL APPROVAL WITH WARNING and imposes the following conditions/requirements:

1. In accordance with Rule 214.4(a)(3)(A), a program survey visit will be conducted by Board Staff during 2017.

2. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the corrective measures outlined in the 2016 Self-Study Report is to be submitted by the program to Board Staff no later than September 1, 2017, per Education Guideline 3.2.1.a.

Entered this 20th day of April, 2017

___________________________________
Katherine A. Thomas, MN, RN, FAAN
Executive Director
On Behalf of the Texas Board of Nursing