

**Proposal to Establish a New Nursing Education Program
Rio Grande Valley College in Pharr, Texas
Associate Degree Nursing Education Program**

Summary of Request:

Consider the Rio Grande Valley College (RGVC) proposal to establish a new Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) Education Program in Pharr, Texas and the survey visit report (See Attachment #1). The final proposal was provided electronically to members of the Texas Board of Nursing (Board).

Historical Perspective:

- RGVC, a privately owned educational institution, was founded in June 2008 for the purpose of becoming the premier healthcare training institution in the Rio Grande Valley (Valley).
- RGVC is approved and regulated by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), Career Schools and Colleges. In addition, RGVC is approved by the Texas Veterans Commission, the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
- The institution is nationally accredited by the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES). RGVC recently underwent ABHES reaccreditation with zero deficiencies identified. ABHES conducted a site visit on May 7, 2013 and accreditation was renewed through 2023.
- In December 2017, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) granted RGVC a Certificate of Authorization to award associate degrees. The THECB authorization is valid through February 2023.
- In July 2009, the Board approved the establishment of a Vocational Nursing (VN) Education Program at RGVC and an initial cohort of 25 students was admitted in August 2009. The VN Program has the status of Full Approval from the Board and has produced more than 430 Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs) since its inception. The NCLEX-PN pass rates for the past five years are:
 - 2017 – 97.25% (106/109)
 - 2016 – 96.26% (103/107)
 - 2015 – 89.41% (76/85)
 - 2014 – 92.00% (46/50)
 - 2013 – 85.42% (41/48)
- RGVC currently offers the Nurse Aide Program, Medical Assistant, Pharmacy Technician, Medical Billing & Coding Specialist, Emergency Medical Technician-Basic as well as the VN Program.

- A first draft of the proposal for a new ADN Program was received in the Board office on November 1, 2017, and reviewed by Board Staff. Following Board Staff's recommendations, revised versions were received on February 13, 2018, and August 16, 2018. The proposal was deemed complete on August 20, 2018, and a site visit was conducted on September 11, 2018, by Education Consultant Beverly Skloss, MSN, RN.

Summary of Proposal:

Overview of the Proposal:

- RGVC proposes to establish a new ADN Program in Pharr, Texas that will be an LVN to ADN Transition Program to prepare graduates for Registered Nurse (RN) licensure. The proposal requests enrollment of an initial cohort of 25 students in January 2019, then an enrollment of 30 students in January 2020 with an annual enrollment of one cohort each year. Each subsequent year, the enrollment would increase by five students to reach a maximum enrollment of 40 students in one admission cohort per year.
- The ADN Program is designed to be completed in 52 weeks, scheduled in three terms or levels of 15 weeks each. Nursing courses are comprised of 36 semester credit hours (SCH), while general education courses equal 24 SCH for a total of 60 SCH for the entire program. Students must complete all general education courses prior to entering the ADN Program.
- The nursing curriculum follows a linear progression making each term a prerequisite to the next. The curriculum offers didactic, laboratory, and patient care clinical experiences each semester to integrate nursing knowledge with skills acquisition and practical application. All courses will be face-to-face.
- Clinical learning experiences will be conducted in the Valley. Clinical contracts have been secured with Mission Regional Medical Center, South Texas Health System, Doctors Hospital at Renaissance, Solara Hospital Harlingen, and Edinburg Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Rationale and Need for the Program:

- The ADN Program will be offered at the RGVC campus located at 5419 N. Cage Boulevard, Pharr, Texas 78577. The campus is easily accessible, located off Expressway 281 and N. Cage Boulevard. The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council has determined that the Valley is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. The Valley is comprised of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties that have a combined population of over 1.2 million residents.
- RGVC is located in Hidalgo County, a border county. The proposal submits that border counties are considered to have the greatest need for healthcare providers, due to the high rate of healthcare problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure as well as the lack of health care services.
- The proposal explains that with population growth comes the need for more healthcare providers, including RNs, to support new and growing healthcare organizations. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, an additional 711,900 RNs will be in demand nationally by 2020 in order to meet healthcare needs.

- Data presented in the proposal indicate that the nursing shortage in the Valley is as severe, if not greater than the rest of the United States. The job openings and nursing shortage of the Valley continue to grow as the population increases. TWC projections identify 160 Annual Job Openings due to growth and 115 Annual Job Openings due to replacements to total 275 Annual Average Job Openings for nurses.
- RGVC surveyed approximately 150 currently enrolled students as well as alumni from the RGVC VN Education Program. Responses from students and alumni indicated 95% of the respondents were interested in attending an ADN Program.
- To determine the potential job opening for RNs, RGVC distributed surveys to potential employers. Response data identified 95% of employers need to hire RNs.
- Two LVN to RN Education Programs, Texas State Technical College (TSTC) in Harlingen and South Texas College (STC) in McAllen, are located in the Valley. Recently approved by the Board, TSTC has an annual enrollment of 30 students and would not be able to meet the need in the Valley to timely educate a large number of RNs. Data presented in the proposal state that STC has 350 students in the LVN to RN Program and unable to accommodate 250 qualified applicants during the last academic year.
- Letters of endorsement for the ADN Program were provided by community leaders and healthcare facility administrators. RGVC is in partnership with the Region One Education Service Center through *Project Health Education And Leadership For All*, a five-year proposed grant funded by the US Department of Education. The grant will assist in the education of students in pursuit of health related occupations. RGVC is one of four higher education institutions included in the grant.

Administration and Organization:

- Lan-Rod Investments, LLC dba RGVC, is owned by Annabelle P. Rodriguez, EdD, CEO/School Director, and Roel Landa, Director of Operations. The proposal sets forth that RGVC is in a sound financial position to begin the ADN Program and a budget has been developed for 2018-2019. The owners are committed to providing appropriate funds to ensure the program's success. Once approved, the program will be tuition-dependent. Monies have been allocated to hire a Director of Nursing and faculty members. The skills lab is already in existence with five hospital beds. Additional monies are budgeted to purchase equipment, supplies, textbooks, and journals for library resources for RN nursing students.
- The proposed ADN Program has the full support and approval of the RGVC's Advisory Board, as well as college administration. The stated goal is to prepare students to achieve entry-level competency for the transition into professional nursing practice as a provider of safe, high quality patient-centered care, an effective member of the health care team, and member of the nursing profession whose practice demonstrates the Texas Board of Nursing *Differentiated Essential Competencies* (2011) of graduates.
- An objective of the college is to provide society and the Valley with graduates of healthcare programs in career fields that are in demand. The ADN Program will provide additional professional nursing graduates educational preparation to care for the citizens of the Valley at a time when the demand for RNs is increasing.

- The daily operation and management of the ADN Program at RGVC is the responsibility of the Director of Nursing. Faculty and staff will report to the Director of Nursing who will report directly to the Chief Executive Officer/School Director.
- Karen Neighbors, MSN, RN, proposed director, meets the qualifications of Board Rule 215.6 to assume administrative leadership. Ms. Neighbors has 38 years of professional nursing experience, with 32 years devoted to nursing education. Ms. Neighbors was appointed May 2, 2018 to serve as director of the RGVC VN Education Program.

Availability of Faculty and Clinical Sites:

- One faculty member, Ruben Pena, MSN, RN, has been hired. Mr. Pena has served as didactic and clinical faculty in the RGVC VN Program since 2014. A second faculty member for the ADN Program has also been hired.
- Faculty projections for the first and second years of operation include one Program Director and two full-time faculty members. During the third year of operation, the number of faculty will be increased to two full-time and two part-time members.
- RGVC plans to recruit faculty through social media, online services, and local newspaper advertising. In addition, faculty members from other local colleges and universities have expressed an interest in serving as adjunct faculty for RGVC.
- Letters from nursing administration at all clinical facilities were submitted to the college stating the number of students that they currently have at their facility, what type of student they will allow, and how the proposed ADN Program students would affect the clinical rotations that already exist. The clinical coordinator is the person who currently manages student placement for the program and will address requests for clinical placements, mindful not to displace any students currently using the facility or unit.
- Clinical contracts have been secured with Mission Regional Medical Center, South Texas Health System, Doctors Hospital at Renaissance, Solara Hospital Harlingen, and Edinburg Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Students:

- The proposed admission pattern would allow RGVC to initially enroll one cohort of 25 students in January 2019, then enroll 30 students in January 2020. Each subsequent year, the enrollment would increase by five students to reach a maximum enrollment of 40 students per year.
- RGVC student recruitment plans will focus on multiple areas to target prospective students, including graduates of the RGVC VN Program as well as other VN Programs in the surrounding communities. This strategy would diversify the nursing population, and increase visibility of college and career opportunities for many minority and underserved students wishing to further their education.
- RGVC will appoint a marketing team member as a recruitment coordinator for the nursing school and launch a recruitment drive within the South Texas counties of Hidalgo, Starr, Willacy, Cameron, Brooks, Zapata, and Jim Hogg. Many students have contacted the institution expressing an interest in attending the ADN Program.

Program of Study:

- The conceptual framework is an outgrowth of the RGVC philosophy and reflects the faculty's educational beliefs associated with nursing student development. The framework relies on components of the National League for Nursing Education Competencies Model and integrates concepts from the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses knowledge, skills, and attitude competencies for nursing graduates. The framework provides guidance to curriculum development, management, outcomes identification and evaluation, and focuses on the developmental needs of students while responding to dynamic patient needs in multiple healthcare settings.
- The philosophy and conceptual framework of the nursing program guide the curriculum, founded on principles of adult and collaborative learning. The curriculum was developed by faculty and driven by the RGVC mission, core values, and philosophy.
- The ADN Program is comprised of 24 SCH of general education courses and 36 SCH of nursing courses for a total of 60 SCH. The program, consisting of face-to-face courses, will be presented over three levels. Each level is made up of four professional nursing courses. The curriculum follows a linear progression and can be completed in 12 months of full-time study.
- The organization and sequencing of the program of study allows the student to learn the role of the professional nurse, gradually increasing the depth and breadth of knowledge, skills, and competencies to ensure graduates are capable of delivering safe, complex professional nursing care to patients. The major threads that flow through the curriculum are: ADN roles, holistic health, cultural diversity, and collaboration.
- A variety of teaching strategies will be employed including: role play, discussion, case study, simulation laboratory, and application with real patients in the clinical setting. Post-clinical conferences help students to share and explore situations they experienced, thus students are able to learn from not only the classroom, but each other.
- RGVC has committed to an articulation agreement with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, a four-year institution, to ensure a seamless transfer of academic credit for students desiring to pursue a Baccalaureate Degree in Nursing.

Facilities, Resources, and Services:

- All facilities for the ADN Program are in place as construction for the new campus was completed in October 2017. The college has 15 classrooms, equipped with computers, internet access, telephones, desks, and chairs. Two of the classrooms are dedicated to the ADN Program, with 30 seats in one classroom and 40 seats in the other.
- The 1683 square foot Nursing Skills Lab can accommodate approximately 30 students at once. Currently, five patient beds are in the lab with plans to add two more beds during the next budget year. Moderate and low fidelity mannequins are available for student learning.
- The Virtual Library provides four large screen units for student interaction, while the Computer Lab contains 40 computers for student use. The Learning Resource Center offers library software that will allow student access to journals, books, and databases within the building.

- The survey visit indicated that the requirements of Board Rule 215.11 regarding facilities, resources, and services are completely addressed in all categories.

Total Program Evaluation Plan:

- A comprehensive written plan for systematic evaluation of the total program has been developed. The Total Program Evaluation (TPE) Plan is an internal quality assessment tool used for evaluating the program and designing strategies to improve performance within the institution.
- The evaluation criteria consist of retention, student and employer surveys, employment statistics, graduation, and licensure rates. The nursing faculty and administration will develop action plans, timelines, and data collection analysis based on the findings to meet the program goals and objections.
- The program's TPE Plan is well-developed and provides measurable benchmarks of achievement. Detailed indicators of academic effectiveness and ADN student learning outcomes are presented in the proposal. All required elements of Board Rule 215.13 are fully addressed.

Rationale for Recommendation:

Pros:

- Ms. Karen Neighbors, MSN, RN, the proposed ADN Program Director, meets all requirements of Board Rule 215.6 to assume the leadership position. Ms. Neighbors is an experienced and accomplished nurse educator.
- The administration has committed the resources to the implementation and maintenance of the new ADN Program.
- RGVC has experience operating a successful VN Education Program.

Cons:

- None identified.

Staff Recommendation:

Move to grant initial approval to Rio Grande Valley College to establish a new Associate Degree Nursing Education Program in Pharr, Texas, and impose the conditions/requirements in the attached Board Order (See Attachment #2).

**TEXAS BOARD OF NURSING
SURVEY VISIT PROGRAM REPORT
Professional Nursing Education Program**

NAME OF NURSING PROGRAM: Rio Grande Valley College (RGVC) Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) Education Program

PROPOSED DIRECTOR: Karen Neighbors, MSN, RN

REASON FOR SURVEY: New Proposal

DATE: September 11, 2018

SURVEY VISITOR: Beverly Skloss, MSN, RN

In this report the nursing program met standards and criteria unless otherwise indicated by narrative. Narrative in the Evidence column documents findings of pertinent data, outstanding performance, or deficiencies. Narrative in the Comments column includes recommendations or requirements to be met based on analysis of the survey visit.

| STANDARD/CRITERIA | EVIDENCE | COMMENTS |
|--|--|---------------------|
| §214.11 Facilities, Resources, and Services | | |
| <p>(a) The controlling agency/governing institution shall be responsible for providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) educational facilities, (2) resources, and (3) services which support the effective development and implementation of the nursing educational program. | <p>Rio Grande Valley College (RGVC) is housed in a one story, 42,000 square-foot building, located at 5419 Cage Blvd in Pharr, Texas</p> <p>The proposed ADN Program building contains 15 classrooms, a computer lab, a student resource center, offices, storage space, and a private office for the director of nursing, one for the assistant director of nursing and one for the administrative assistant. The faculty and staff area has restricted access exclusively available to faculty and staff who have been assigned a magnetic identification badge.</p> <p>The RGVC campus has appropriate classroom and academic support space for the proposed ADN education program, with a total of 15 classrooms, one designated ADN program classroom, capacity 35, with 13 additional regular classrooms, available as needed, and one large auditorium style classroom for multi-purpose use.</p> <p>The administration of RGVC has supported the development of the new program.</p> <p>The Assistant Director of Nursing, faculty, and staff are available as resources for student academic advising and counseling. School administrators are available to confer and assist faculty at any time.</p> | <p>Criteria Met</p> |

| STANDARD/CRITERIA | EVIDENCE | COMMENTS |
|--|--|--------------|
| | <p>There are two skills laboratories, one large size and one medium size, that provide ample space for instruction. A special task training room, also set-up with physician office exam tables, is available, and fully stocked with IV therapy equipment.</p> <p>The school is in an easily accessible Pharr (McAllen/Edinburg) location. The facility has adequate space for the projected number of 20 students and is adequately equipped. Ample parking is adjacent to the building.</p> | |
| <p>(b) An appropriately equipped skills laboratory shall be provided to accommodate the maximum number of students allowed for the program.</p> <p>(1) The laboratory shall be equipped with hot and cold running water.</p> <p>(2) The laboratory shall have adequate storage for equipment and supplies.</p> | <p>The large skills laboratory has five patient beds, with five low to mid fidelity manikins, that can be separated by curtains to create a nursing ward. There is a functional nursing station with storage space, a linen cart, storage area, and two sinks with hot and cold running water along two walls.</p> <p>There are two sinks and a separate sink for eye washing in the medium size lab. Ample storage space is available which provides space for equipment and supplies.</p> <p>The skills laboratories are utilized by several allied health programs and laboratory time is scheduled by a designated lab coordinator.</p> | Criteria Met |
| <p>(c) The dean/director and faculty shall have adequate secretarial and clerical assistance to meet the needs of the program.</p> | <p>There will be one full-time administrative assistant shared for the ADN and Vocational Nursing program.</p> | Criteria Met |
| <p>(d) The physical facilities shall be adequate to meet the needs of the program in relation to the size of the faculty and the student body.</p> <p>(1) The dean/director shall have a private office.</p> <p>(2) Faculty offices shall be conveniently located and adequate in number and size to provide faculty with privacy for conferences with students and uninterrupted work.</p> <p>(3) Space for clerical staff, records, files, and equipment shall be adequate.</p> <p>(4) There shall be mechanisms which provide for the security of sensitive materials, such as examinations and health records.</p> <p>(5) Classrooms, laboratories, and conference rooms shall be conducive to learning and adequate in number, size, and type for the number of students and the educational purposes for which the rooms are used.</p> | <p>The Program Director has a large, modern, spacious private office in the nursing department. The Program Director's office and instructor office space are conveniently located.</p> <p>The faculty office room is large, modern, has cubicles for each instructor and is conducive for faculty to work uninterrupted. One private conference room and two private offices are available for faculty to visit privately with students.</p> <p>RGVC keeps student records and reports in the registrar's office. The records are securely maintained and protected against damage or loss.</p> <p>Each classroom at RGVC has the latest technology tools including a Smartboard, computer, internet, projector, and individual student charging docks. The large laboratory also houses a Smartboard for faculty use.</p> <p>A separate virtual simulation laboratory includes four fully interactive 80-inch monitors. A trained coordinator is in charge of virtual case scenarios with students. The resource center houses a viewing monitor for student peer analysis and debriefing.</p> | Criteria Met |

| STANDARD/CRITERIA | EVIDENCE | COMMENTS |
|---|--|--------------|
| <p>(6) Teaching aids shall be provided to meet the objectives/outcomes of the program.</p> <p>(7) Adequate restrooms and lounges shall be provided convenient to the classroom.</p> | <p>The classrooms and laboratories are modern, spacious, adequate in size, and conducive to learning; conference rooms are conveniently located. One large faculty and staff conference room is available.</p> <p>Appropriate medical equipment and supplies are on hand or have been ordered.</p> <p>There are four sets of men's and women's restrooms conveniently located throughout the building. One set of restrooms is in the secured faculty/staff area. All restrooms meet ADA standards.</p> <p>One large student lounge is available for students on campus and equipped with a vending machine, microwaves, a coffee machine, and drinking water. There is one large wall with a painted mural signifying learning and the Rio Grande Valley culture.</p> <p>The building is ADA compliant with adequate handicapped parking spaces for visitors, faculty, and prospective student use.</p> | |
| <p>(e) The learning resources, library, and departmental holdings shall be current, use contemporary technology appropriate for the level of the curriculum, and be sufficient for the size of the student body and the needs of the faculty.</p> <p>(1) Provisions shall be made for accessibility, availability, and timely delivery of information resources.</p> <p>(2) Facilities and policies shall promote effective use, i.e. environment, accessibility, and hours of operation.</p> | <p>RGVC has a computer laboratory for student use with 40 computers available and more personal computers on order. A learning resource center on campus is available to students and equipped with 16 cubicles for student use, as well as, a copier, Smartboard, Wi-Fi access and three private study rooms with Smartboards.</p> <p>RGVC has library resource software that will be utilized in the learning resource center for student access. These resources will allow student access to journals, books, and databases within the building.</p> <p>Library holdings include a subscription to EBSCO which includes the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) Plus with Full-Text. CINAHL provides indexing for 5,000 journals from the fields of nursing and allied health. The database contains more than 4.8 million records dating back to 1937.</p> <p>Hours of operation are: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 7:30 am to 9:30 pm; Wednesday and Friday from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm; and Saturdays from 8 am to 5 pm.</p> | Criteria Met |

Pros and Cons from Survey Visit:

Pros:

- Facilities, resources, and services are adequate to meet the needs of the proposed ADN Program.

Cons:

- None identified.

DRAFT LETTER

October 29, 2018

Karen Neighbors, MSN, RN
Director of Nursing
Rio Grande Valley College
5419 N. Cage Boulevard
Pharr, Texas 78577

Dear Ms. Neighbors:

At the October 25-26, 2018 meeting, members of the Texas Board of Nursing discussed the Rio Grande Valley College Proposal to Establish a New Associate Degree Nursing Education Program in Pharr, Texas, and the report of the September 11, 2018 survey visit. The Board wishes to thank you and Dr. Annabelle Rodriguez for being present to answer questions. Based upon the discussion and review of documents, it was the decision of the Board to grant initial approval to Rio Grande Valley College to establish a new Associate Degree Nursing Education Program in Pharr, Texas, and impose the conditions and requirements in the attached Board Order.

We wish you success with the program. If you have questions, or if we may be of assistance, please contact Board Staff at beverly.skloss@bon.texas.gov or 512-318-3219.

Sincerely,

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

Copy: Dr. Annabelle Rodriguez, President
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools

BEFORE THE TEXAS BOARD OF NURSING

ORDER OF THE BOARD

In the Matter of
Rio Grande Valley College
Associate Degree Nursing Education Program
In Pharr, Texas

A public meeting of the Texas Board of Nursing, hereinafter referred to as the Board, was held on October 25, 2018, 333 Guadalupe, Tower II, Room 225, Austin, Texas, to consider the Rio Grande Valley College proposal to establish a new Associate Degree Nursing Education Program in Pharr, Texas, based upon the review of the proposal and survey visit report, pursuant to Section 301.157, Texas Occupations Code and 22 Tex. Admin. Code Chapter 215.

After review and due consideration of the filed materials, as well as the presentation by the representatives from Rio Grande Valley College in Pharr, Texas, and other interested parties, if any, the Board hereby grants INITIAL APPROVAL of the Rio Grande Valley College Associate Degree Nursing Education Program in Pharr, Texas and imposes the following conditions and requirements:

1. The program shall not admit more than one (1) cohort of twenty-five (25) students in January 2019, one (1) cohort of thirty (30) students in January 2020, then increasing enrollment by five (5) students to reach a maximum enrollment of forty (40) students in one (1) admission cohort per year until the program achieves Full Approval from the Board.

Entered this 25th day of October, 2018

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