

**Report of Findings from a Virtual Survey Visit
Victoria College in Victoria, Texas
Vocational Nursing Education Program**

Summary of Request:

Consider the report of the virtual survey review of the Victoria College (VC) Vocational Nursing Education (VN) Program in Victoria, Texas. A virtual survey visit was conducted based upon the extensive program documents submitted to Board staff and meetings with the program director, administration, nursing faculty, and nursing students through online video conferencing November 2 - 4, 2021.

The survey was conducted as a routine visit and followed the new Education Guideline 3.2.3.b. Conducting Survey Visits during COVID-19 Pandemic.

Historical Perspective:

- VC is a public community college established in 1925 as Victoria Junior College. The VN program began offering classes in 1949 in Victoria.
- The college has campuses in Victoria, Gonzales, and Hallettsville. It is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.
- The VN program in Hallettsville was established in 1948 and was originally named the Renger Memorial Hospital School of Vocational Nursing. In 1984, the school was dedicated as the Zelda L. Allen Memorial School of Nursing and became affiliated with VC.
- The VN program in Gonzales originally started at the Warm Springs Rehabilitation Center in Ottine, Texas. This program became affiliated with VC prior to 1993. Today, the VN Program is one of several offerings at the Victoria College Gonzales Center.
- There was a nursing program extension site in Cuero that closed in August 2021. Ample notification was received by Board staff and students were notified in advance.
- The VC VN program is considered as one with Gonzales and Hallettsville designated as extension sites.
- The VN program is part of the Division of Allied Health that includes Associate Degree Nursing Education (ADN), Physical Therapy Assistant, Respiratory Therapy Assistant, and Allied Health Continuing Education.
- Darla Strother, MSN, RN, Dean of Allied Health, was approved as Program Director for the ADN and VN Education Programs by the Board in January 2013. Ms. Strother has been with the college over 19 years.
- Ms. Strother is assisted by Joyce Harper, MSN, RN, who has been the VN Program Chair since 2012 and has 27 years of experience in the VN program at the college.
- The last routine VN program survey visit was conducted in March, 2014.

- The NCLEX-PN® examination pass rates for the past five years are provided below:

NCLEX Examination Year	BON Approval Status	Pass Rates	Number of First Time Candidates (Passed/Total)
2020	Full	95.24%	40/42
2019	Full	100%	59/59
2018	Full	98.59%	70/71
2017	Full	100%	34/34
2016	Full	94.34%	50/53

Summary of Survey Visit

Education Consultant Reviewed Documents/Videos Provided Prior to Visit:

- Curriculum Plan, Philosophy/Mission, Objectives/Goals, Conceptual Framework;
- Faculty & Program Director Job Descriptions;
- Faculty & Student Handbooks;
- Syllabi for all courses;
- Clinical evaluation tools;
- Clinical Affiliation Agreements;
- Total Program Evaluation Plan (TPE) and data;
- Faculty meeting minutes.
- Faculty & Student Files
- Video tour of each campus facilities

Education Consultant Reviewed:

- 2020 Nursing Education Program Information Surveys (NEPIS)

Individuals Participating in the Virtual Survey Visit:

- Administrators:
 - Jennifer Kent, Ed.D, President
 - Cindy Buchholz, MA, Executive Vice President & Chief Academic Officer
 - Darla Strother, MSN, RN, Dean of Allied Health & Director of Nursing
 - Joyce Harper, MSN, RN, VN Department Chair
- VN Faculty
 - Deedra Lahodny, MSN, RN, Full-time Instructor
 - Tracy Lowrie, MSN, RN, Full-time Instructor
 - Karen Bauer Smith, BSN, RN, Full-time Instructor
 - Whitney Pohler, BSN, RN, Full-time Instructor
 - Amy Garvel, RN, Full-time Instructor
 - Michelle Hall, RN, Full-time Instructor
 - Patrick Thiry, RN, Full-time Instructor
 - Rebecca Barfield, BSN, RN, Part-time Instructor
 - Joseph Camacho, RN, Part-time Instructor

- 6 VN students

Process for the Survey Visit:

Ms. Strother scheduled online meetings between Board Staff and VC representatives and hosted the following meetings:

- **November 2, 2021 10:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. - B. Skloss, D. Strother & J. Harper**
- **November 2, 2021, 11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - B. Skloss and Administrators**
- **November 3, 2021, 11:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. - B. Skloss and Students**
- **November 3, 2021, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. - B. Skloss and Faculty**
- **November 4, 2021, 1:30 p.m. – 2:15 p.m. - B. Skloss, D. Strother & J. Harper**
- **November 4, 2021, 2:30 – 3:15 p.m. - Exit Report with Administrators, Faculty, & Students**

Administration:

- Administration is extremely supportive and understands the need for all levels of nurses in their community and surrounding areas.
- Administration indicated their intent is methodical growth of the nursing programs while maintaining excellence. Discussions are held frequently with clinical partners regarding the need for nurses.
- Darla Strother, MSN, RN, has served as the Board approved Program Director since January 2013. Ms. Strother has 24 years of nursing experience with over 19 years in nursing education at VC, four as Dean of Allied Health, eight as Director of Nursing, and 10 as an educator having taught in the ADN and VN programs. She is respected by administration, faculty, students, and the community.
- Ms. Strother indicated she is fully supported by administration and has the authority to direct the VN program in all phases. She does not carry a teaching load.
- Ms. Buchholz and Ms. Strother indicated they communicate mostly on a daily basis. Ms. Buchholz commended Ms. Strother and Ms. Harper for maintaining an excellent working relationship with clinical sites.
- Administrators identified challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic as students with parental responsibilities at home while learning online for the VN program, providing support for students struggling with mental health issues, and student basic needs issues.
- The school accessed resources to meet student needs including Covid-19 relief funds for technology support (i.e. hot spots on campus, laptops for students to checkout), and a student food pantry including curbside pick-up from the school.
- Discussion was held regarding faculty including the importance of hiring and retaining qualified faculty. Part of the discussion included faculty compensation and the need to evaluate this.

Faculty:

- The VN program instruction is carried out by eight full-time faculty on a 12-month contract and three part-time faculty. At the time of the survey visit, there was an opening for a faculty simulation specialist.

- Joyce Harper, MSN, RN, VN Department Chair, assists Ms. Strother with the VN program including coordinating the program extension site on the Hallettsville campus. Ms. Harper carries a teaching load of three contact hours per semester.
- There are currently two full-time faculty members assigned to the Hallettsville campus other than Ms. Harper.
- The program site in Victoria is coordinated by Patrick Thiry, RN, with two additional faculty in place. Part-time faculty are employed as needed for clinical experiences.
- The program extension site in Gonzales is coordinated by Karen Smith, BSN, RN. Together, Ms. Smith and another full-time faculty instruct up to thirty students. An adjunct faculty is used as needed based on student enrollment.
- Faculty members offer a rich diversity in their education and experiential backgrounds. Faculty experience in nursing education varies from less than two years to 27 years. The majority of faculty have longevity at VC.
- All faculty and the program chair are designated to evaluate clinical agencies every spring semester, to schedule clinical experiences, and to maintain a collaborative relationship with clinical sites.
- New faculty orientation is college wide and nursing department specific that is structured and individualized with experienced faculty and the department chair serving as mentors. The Nursing Faculty Handbook contains detailed information regarding the orientation.
- Faculty members are typically engaged in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation. Discussion was held with the director and faculty due to feedback from students and faculty that retention was better when medical-surgical nursing was taught in all three semesters. Faculty indicated they are evaluating the curriculum changes that were implemented.
- Faculty meetings are held once every month or two, minutes of meetings are maintained and reflect that faculty members are involved in planning and decision-making.
- Full-time faculty workload is 15 contact hours per week. 70% of full-time faculty load hours is dedicated to the teaching process including preparation, evaluation of student performance, and office hours. 20% of their time is for committee/curriculum work and other service to the college and 10% is spent on faculty development. Faculty indicated they need more time to participate in activities required of them.
- Faculty Development funding is allocated by the department for several faculty members to attend the Texas Association of Vocational Nurse Educators annual conference. Other nursing specific professional development includes webinars such as Nurse Tim, TNA, NLN, Next Generation NCLEX and others.
- Faculty are active in clinical settings by working outside of the college and consistently attending trainings at clinical facilities to learn the latest in their areas of expertise.
- The Nursing Faculty handbook is well-written, committees are well-defined and all required policies specified in Board Rule 214.7. are included.

Students:

- At the time of the survey visit, there were 74 students enrolled in the program, 41 in Victoria, 18 in Hallettsville, and 15 in Gonzales. The current cohort is scheduled to graduate in December 2021.
- The VN program admits one cohort per year every January. 90 students are selected, 40 for Victoria, 30 for Gonzales, and 20 for Hallettsville.
- Admissions occurring in the summer or fall semester include students who were unsuccessful in prior semesters.
- Student policies are written, well-defined, provided to all students during orientation and include all Board required content.
- Students stated they enrolled in the VN program due to working as a certified nursing assistant and the desire to be a nurse; many family members are nurses; exposure to the medical field from a young age (mother worked for a physician); and the love for a well-known children's hospital.
- Students stated that faculty are always supportive, caring, accommodating, patient, incredible instructors, and available with an open-door policy. Instructors are able to dissect information in a way that students are able to understand.
- Students cited challenges as the abundance of clinical paperwork, learning different ways to perform skills and correlating this to exams, and medical-surgical nursing in two semesters. They did clarify that the clinical paperwork is very helpful for learning. In addition, the students understand that exam information is obtained from didactic content. Their evaluation of medical-surgical nursing is that it would be best taught over all three semesters.
- The majority of the students plan to attend the VC ADN program and indicate they feel it will be an easy transition. Several had applied and most plan to obtain at least a bachelor's degree in nursing with a few working towards a masters.
- Students have input into faculty evaluations, the curriculum, and clinical agencies by completing evaluations at the end of each course and participation in the Student-Faculty Liaison Council.
- Student's cited that clinical rotations are a good variety with instructors and preceptors. They feel that more simulation would be helpful, especially for patient scenarios that may not arise while in school. They verbalized feeling prepared to enter practice.

Program of Study:

- The VN education program is a 12-month full-time program consisting of three semesters for a total of 41 semester credit hours (SCH). There are 14 SCH in semester I, 11 SCH in semester II, and 16 SCH in semester III.
- The course delivery is a hybrid online model with Anatomy & Physiology, Medical-Surgical Nursing I and II, Maternal-Neonatal Nursing, and skills laboratories delivered in-person.
- Online courses are mostly synchronous with one online course offering an asynchronous option.

- There is one clinical course per semester. 56% of clinical experience hours are hands-on patient care at affiliating agencies with 44% of clinical experience hours consisting of simulation laboratory, computer activities, and nursing skills laboratory.
- All three program sites operate using the same curriculum as well as the same test banks.
- Exams are administered online utilizing a web-based on-demand, secure, proctoring service. Final exams are online and proctored at the student's assigned campus.
- The block curriculum for the VN program indicates leveling of nursing content, advancing in difficulty from simple to complex.
- The *Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECS)(2010)* are incorporated into the curriculum as evidenced in the syllabi and crosswalk document received by Board staff. The director, faculty and program chair are in the process of incorporating the updated *DECS (2021)* into the curriculum that will be implemented in Spring 2022.
- Standardized testing is utilized throughout the curriculum to assess student progression and the need for remediation. Faculty are involved in tutoring and remediation.
- Testing policies are in place that specify the process for inter-rater reliability on clinical evaluations, test blueprints, and test item analyses.
- Course alternatives for three of the VN courses are included in the curriculum that allows for seamless mobility to the LVN-to-ADN program at the college.
- Major curriculum changes were submitted to Board staff in 2019 for 2020 curriculum changes and again in 2021 for 2022 changes. The evaluation process of these changes is ongoing.

Clinical Learning Experiences:

- VC has nine active clinical contracts that include nursing care experiences in medical-surgical, gerontology, rehabilitation, skilled nursing, maternal-child, and pediatrics. The clinical facilities are located in Victoria, Cuero, Columbus, Gonzales, Hallettsville, Schulenburg and Yoakum.
- Students practice in the skills lab and demonstrate basic competency prior to providing hands-on care in the clinical setting. The cohort that graduated in December 2020 had less hands-on patient care experiences than usual due to the Covid-19 pandemic and clinical facilities not allowing students.
- The clinical evaluation tools include formative and summative evaluations throughout the program. These are progressive, based upon course content, and incorporate the DECs.
- Students receive a clinical evaluation on a weekly basis each semester and a final evaluation at the end of each course. Clinical performance evaluations are based on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory rating instead of a numerical grade.
- If student clinical weaknesses are identified, faculty provides extra time in the skills lab with practice activities in order to attain student success.
- Faculty provide supervision during the majority of clinical learning experiences. BON required faculty-to-student ratios are maintained throughout the program. Preceptors are utilized for some experiences and all policies required are in place.
- At the time of the survey visit, the long term care facilities were opening to students with a mostly preceptor model of clinical supervision.

Facilities, Resources, and Services:

- The VN Director's (Dean) private office is located on the Victoria campus. Each faculty member and the department secretary have private offices near the classroom and skills laboratories.
- The VC library resources include a variety of reference resources available online to the VN students including common nursing data bases.
- The skills lab in Victoria is shared with the other allied health programs. Times are coordinated to ensure that the student objectives are met. There are 41 beds, six simulation rooms, seven high fidelity mannequins and numerous low to moderate fidelity simulators.
- The skills laboratory at the Hallettsville extension site has eight beds and one simulation room. There are two high fidelity mannequins, five moderate fidelity and two low fidelity mannequins.
- The Gonzales Center skills laboratory contains two simulation rooms, 10 hospital beds, and a high fidelity birthing simulator. Each simulation room contains a high fidelity mannequin. The remaining beds contain low to moderate fidelity mannequins.
- A wide variety of support services are offered on the campuses including supporting learning and student counseling.
- A video tour of the facilities at all three sites was guided by faculty. The main areas viewed by Board Staff included:
 - Program Director's private office;
 - Program Chair's private office, individual faculty offices and a shared faculty office in Hallettsville;
 - Study rooms/areas with laptop computer hook-ups, tables, chairs, and whiteboards;
 - Conference Room;
 - Spacious classrooms including one large auditorium style;
 - Large, fully equipped skills and simulation laboratories with abundant storage;
 - Student lounge areas throughout;
 - ADA restrooms; and a
 - Computer laboratory.

Records and Reports:

- All student files, current and graduates, are stored and retained electronically on a secured college site.
- Official student academic records are maintained on campus in the office of the Registrar according to college policy.
- Minutes of faculty meetings are maintained electronically.
- Clinical affiliation agreements are current.
- The Total Program Evaluation Plan (TPE) is used for decision-making as evidenced in faculty meeting minutes and documentation on the TPE.

Strengths and Concerns of Program Review:

Strengths:

- Victoria College provides resources, facilities, and an organizational structure that facilitate success in the nursing programs.
- Quality Indicators (Spector et. al., 2020) were identified during the review of documents and virtual visit interview as indicated below:

Quality Indicator	Findings from Survey Visit
Institutional administrative support of the nursing program	Administration expressed their support and understanding of the need for all levels of nurses in their community. Dr. Kent indicated the intent to methodically grow the nursing programs while maintaining excellence.
Consistent leadership in the nursing program.	Ms. Strother and Ms. Harper have longevity at Victoria College (VC). They both taught in the nursing programs at VC prior to entering their leadership roles.
Consistent full-time faculty as opposed to reliance on adjunct faculty.	The majority of faculty members had been at Victoria College from 6 to 27 years. Faculty tend to begin with VC as adjunct, join the full time faculty, and remain employees.
Faculty with current clinical competence	Faculty have years of nursing practice in various specialties and all are involved in teaching skills laboratories. Several faculty work in facilities as needed and attend annual clinical competency days at these facilities.
Clinical experiences with actual patients that prepare students for the reality of clinical practice.	VN students indicated they felt prepared to enter practice since they experienced hands-on patient care in a variety of settings.
Administrative support for ongoing faculty development.	Faculty Development consists of institution wide workshops related to the teaching learning process and campus safety. Funds are available each year for several faculty to attend the annual conference of the Texas Association of Vocational Nurse Educators.
Evidence-based curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills	The incorporation of the updated <i>Differentiated Essential Competencies (2021)</i> into the curriculum is in progress and will be implemented in Spring 2022.
Opportunities for a variety of clinical experiences with diverse populations	VC has longevity as part of the local communities that has resulted in strong relationships with clinical facilities in Victoria and the surrounding areas.
Quality simulation	There is a simulation laboratory with modern equipment on all three campuses. The Associate Degree Nursing program is accredited and utilizes these laboratories as well.

A systematic process to address and remediate student practice errors	Staff are in place to assist with remediation and learning.
Consistent NCLEX pass rates above the requirement	See table presenting the past five years of pass rates.
Comprehensive student support services especially services to assist at-risk students	In addition to tutoring and remediation by faculty, a wide variety of student services are offered on the college campuses.
Ongoing systematic evaluation of the nursing program	The Total Program Evaluation Plan (TPE) is used for decision-making as evidenced in faculty meeting minutes and documentation on the TPE. Faculty were able to articulate their participation in the evaluation process.
Faculty are able to role model professional behaviors	Students indicated that faculty are patient, always supportive, caring, accommodating, and patient. This behavior was evident during the student interview with Board staff.

Spector, N., Silvestre, J., Alexander, M., Martin, B., Hooper, J. I., Squires, A., & Ojemeni, M. (2020). NCSBN regulatory guidelines and evidence-based quality indicators for nursing Education programs. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 11(2), S2-S64.

Concerns:

- The concerns are the same ones common to most VN programs: maintaining hands-on clinical practice in health care settings and the growing faculty shortage.

Staff Recommendation:

Move to accept the report of the findings from the virtual survey visit to Victoria College VN Program in Victoria, Texas, and issue the following recommendation.

Staff Rationale for Recommendation #1:

Education Rule 214.6(d) states, “Salaries shall be adequate to recruit, employ, and retain sufficient qualified nursing faculty members with the expertise necessary for students to meet program goals.” Discussion was held on the Regulatory Quality Indicators (Spector et. al., 2020) related to the importance of retaining and hiring qualified faculty.

Recommendation #1:

It is recommended that the administration and dean/program director evaluate the adequacy of retention and hiring strategies for qualified faculty to determine if any changes are warranted. Please provide a response to Board Staff no later than March 1, 2022.

DRAFT LETTER

January 20, 2022

Darla Strother, MSN, RN,
Dean of Allied Health
Victoria College, Vocational Nursing
2200 East Red River Street
Victoria, Texas 77971

Dear Ms. Strother:

At the January 20, 2022 meeting, the members of the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) considered the report of the virtual survey visit to the Victoria College Vocational Nursing Education Program in Victoria, Texas. It was the decision of the Board to accept the report of the virtual survey visit conducted on November 2 – 4, 2021 and issue the following recommendation:

1. It is recommended that the administration and dean/program director evaluate the adequacy of retention and hiring strategies for qualified faculty to determine if any changes are warranted. Please provide a response to Board Staff no later than March 1, 2022.

A Recommendation is a suggestion based upon program assessment indirectly related to the rules to which a program must respond but in a method of their choosing.

If you have any questions, or if we may be of any 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: Jennifer Kent, Ed.D, President
Cindy Buchholz, MA, Executive Vice President & Chief Academic Officer