

**Report of An Abrupt Program Closure and
Current Situation for Students
Vista College in El Paso, Texas
Vocational Nursing Education Program**

Summary of Request:

Consider this report of the October 8, 2021, abrupt closure of the Vista College Vocational Nursing (VN) Education Program in El Paso, Texas.

Historical Perspective:

- Vista College (Vista) was initially accredited by the Council on Occupational Education (COE) in 1989. COE's most recent reaffirmation survey visit was conducted in Fall 2019.
- The Vista VN Education Program has been in operation since 2004. The main campus is located in El Paso with extension campuses in Beaumont and Killeen.
- Tami Little, DNP, RN, CNE, Vice President of Nursing, was the Director of Nursing at the time of the closure and had served in the position since August 2015.
- The NCLEX-PN® examination pass rates for the past five years are included in the table below:

| Examination Year | BON Approval Status | NCLEX-PN® Examination Pass Rate | Number of First Time Candidates (Passed/Total) |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 2020 | Full with Warning | 81.56% | 146/178 |
| 2019 | Full | 77.36% | 164/212 |
| 2018 | Full | 76.33% | 129/169 |
| 2017 | Full | 83.40% | 201/241 |
| 2016 | Full | 87.93% | 204/232 |

- Due to the 2018 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate of 76.33%, the Program Director and faculty were required to submit a Self-Study Report (SSR) in 2019 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 Education Consultants conducted a conference call with the Program Director and faculty members on May 15, 2019, to discuss the process of developing the SSR. A comprehensive, in-depth SSR was received in the Board office on July 19, 2019.
- The Program Director and faculty members identified multiple factors in the SSR that may have contributed to the NCLEX-PN® pass rate falling below 80% as well as corrective measures to improve success, including the following activities:
 - review and revise the readmission process;
 - timely identify at-risk students;
 - strengthen faculty onboarding;
 - implement a formalized mentoring program to pair novice faculty with experienced faculty;
 - evaluate the current curriculum to determine alignment with the NCLEX test plan;
 - develop a comprehensive simulation program;
 - secure additional clinical affiliations to ensure a variety of rich clinical learning experiences; and
 - revise clinical evaluation tools.
- At the April 2020 quarterly Board meeting, the Board voted to change the approval status of the Vista VN Education Program from Full Approval to Full Approval with Warning and issued a requirement that, in accordance with Rule 214.4(a)(3)(A), a program survey visit would be conducted by Board Staff during 2020.
- A face-to-face visit to Vista was initially planned for Fall 2020, but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A virtual program review was conducted based upon the extensive program documents submitted to Board Staff and conference calls with the Program Director, Administration, nursing faculty, and nursing students through online meetings beginning December 1, 2020, and ending December 3, 2020.
- At the time of the survey visit, the preliminary NCLEX-PN pass rate was 81.56% with 146 of 179 candidates successfully completing the licensure examination.
- The findings of the virtual survey visit were presented at the April 2021 quarterly Board meeting, with the Board voting to accept the findings of the survey visit and to change the approval status for the Vista VN Program in El Paso, Texas, from Full Approval with Warning to Full Approval.

Notification of Closure:

- On October 8, 2021, Vista abruptly closed all of its campuses and programs throughout Arkansas, New Mexico, and Texas. Vista offered a VN Education Program to students at three Texas campuses: El Paso, in both Day and Evening Tracks, Killeen, and Beaumont. In addition, a Practical Nursing (PN) Education Program was offered to students at the Las Cruces, New Mexico, campus.

- Dr. Tami Little, Vista Vice President of Nursing, notified Board Staff in the early afternoon of Friday, October 8, 2021, that Jim Tolbert, President/CEO, resigned from his position on October 7, 2021. The Majority Owners of Prospect Partners decided to close all Vista campuses and programs on October 8, 2021. Campus leadership was advised of the sudden closure on that date and timely notified all of Vista's regulatory agencies of the intent to close the schools.
- Dr. Little advised that she and Dr. Michael Linzmaier, Senior Vice President of Academics, would be available to assist students. Dr. Little and Dr. Linzmaier sent e-mail notifications of the closure to all staff, faculty, and students on October 8, 2021.
- At the time of closure, a total of 229 VN students were enrolled in the three Texas programs. Of these, 77 students were scheduled to graduate from the VN Program in December 2021.
- On Monday, October 11, 2021, numerous, anxious former Vista VN Program students contacted the Board via telephone and e-mail communication to request further information about the status of the Vista VN Program and seek guidance about how they could continue their nursing education. In particular, the students who were less than eight weeks from completion of the VN Program were distressed.
- Resultantly, on the afternoon of Monday, October 11, 2021, Board Staff sent an e-mail communication to Vista VN Program students stating Board Staff was aware of the unexpected closure and the Board Education Team was discussing and exploring options to determine how Board Staff could assist the students in moving forward to complete their VN education. The correspondence recommended that each student individually contact other Board approved VN Programs to request consideration to be accepted as a transfer student and the e-mail included a hyperlink to these Board programs. In addition, Staff advised students to obtain their academic transcripts as soon as possible as documentation of successful completion of academic courses, both didactic and clinical, would be needed to apply to other VN Programs.
- Further, on Monday, October 11, 2021, Board Staff sent an e-mail communication to all Board approved VN Program Directors to advise them of the unexpected Vista closure. The e-mail requested that the Program Directors consider evaluating the students as transfer students and clarified: *If a transfer applicant has completed more than 50% of the VN Program curriculum at Vista, the candidate would not be calculated in the receiving school's NCLEX-PN pass rate. Conversely, if an applicant has completed less than 50% of the VN Program curriculum at Vista and completes greater than 50% of the VN Program curriculum at the receiving school, the candidate would be considered as part of the receiving school's NCLEX-PN pass rate.* This process was successfully used with other nursing education programs that underwent closure.

- Multiple telephone conferences were held with Dr. Little by the Board Education Team to explore options for the displaced Vista students.
- For several weeks after the October 8, 2021, abrupt closure of the Vista VN Program, Board Staff fielded numerous telephone calls from displaced students who were left with few alternatives to continue their nursing education.

Teach-out Program for Final Term Students:

- On October 14, 2021, Dr. Little submitted a detailed Teach-out Plan, designed specifically for the final term students, to the Education Team, who timely and carefully examined the proposal.
- Board Staff reached out to the other regulatory agencies, including the Texas Workforce Commission, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the New Mexico Board of Nursing, the Department of Education, and other accreditation agencies to discuss options for the Vista VN students. The proposed Teach-out Plan was distributed to the other agencies for their review and feedback.
- A Teach-out Program for final term students, less than eight weeks from graduation, was considered and approved by all regulators on October 28, 2021.
- The Vista VN Program Final Term cohort was comprised of 30 students who were enrolled in the Capstone Course only at the time of closure as well as 46 students who were enrolled in the Parent Child Course and the Capstone Course at the time of closure.
- The following plans for student completion of the VN Program requirements were developed by Vista and approved by Board Staff:
 - Capstone Course Only
 - Take the first Exit HESI exam
 - Participate in 4-6 weeks of remediation led by volunteer instructors
 - Take the second Exit HESI exam
 - Parent Child Course and Capstone Course
 - Provide a 6-week course led by volunteer instructors
 - Attend two 2-hour Zoom classes each week
 - Complete four hours of virtual simulation each week
 - Include the two Parent Child specialty exams within the 6-week course, using the current rubric in the syllabus to grade the HESI and add it to each student's current grade for the first seven weeks of the term to equal the student's final grade in the class.
 - Students will complete the Capstone Course as described above.

Details of the Teach-Out Program for Final Term Students:

Program Directors from many VN Programs across Texas reached out to Board Staff to inquire how they could assist the displaced Vista VN students. The Western Technical College (WTC) in El Paso Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Brad Kuykendahl, contacted the Education Team to offer the use of that college's physical resources so that volunteer instructors from Vista could oversee administration of the standardized examinations and lead the remediation activities. WTC has a BSN Program and no VN Program, but utilization of the WTC physical facilities allowed the former Vista El Paso campus Final Term VN students to complete the Teach-Out Program. In addition, McLennan Community College in Waco assisted the former Vista College Killeen campus students and Lamar State College in Port Arthur supported the former Vista College Beaumont campus students.

- Capstone Course:
 - The Teach-out Program required students in their final term to take two standardized nursing examinations and participate in four weeks of remediation between each test. The examinations would provide each student with a benchmark of strengths and opportunities for remediation. Students would participate in group and individual remediation activities to improve their level of competency and preparation for the NCLEX-PN examination and nursing practice. All remediation activities would be facilitated via Zoom and Elsevier's HESI testing and remediation portal.
 - Grades for the course will be assigned based on student achievement on the standardized nursing examinations. The purpose of the Teach-out Program was to promote student success and preparation for nursing practice. Therefore, any student who fully participated in the Capstone portion of the Teach-out Program would be granted an Affidavit of Graduation.
- Parent Child Nursing Course:
 - Students taking the Parent Child Nursing Course along with the Capstone Course would be required to complete 24 hours of lecture and 24 hours of virtual clinical simulation. Lectures were facilitated in a synchronous online Zoom classroom by volunteer instructors. Virtual clinical simulation was provided by volunteer clinical instructors and Elsevier's Simulation Learning System.
- Testing Centers:
 - Students enrolled in the El Paso Vista VN Program campus would be able to complete the Teach-out Program requirements at the WTC campus in El Paso.

- Students enrolled in the Killeen Vista VN Program campus would be able to complete the Teach-out Program requirements at the McLennan Community College campus in Waco.
- Students in the Beaumont Vista VN Program campus would be able to complete the Teach-out Program requirements at the Lamar State College – Port Arthur campus in Port Arthur.
- Volunteer Nursing Instructors:
 - Former Vista VN Program faculty members from each of the three Texas locations volunteered to continue to instruct students at the identified campuses: WTC, McLennan Community College, and Lamar State College – Port Arthur. Faculty donated their time to provide proctoring, teaching, guiding virtual clinical experiences, and remediation sessions.
- Program Costs:
 - Due to volunteers and partnerships with external organizations, the VN Program students were not charged any fees. All coursework was facilitated by volunteer instructors using free Zoom accounts. The three identified programs hosted the standardized examinations at no cost, and offered additional classroom and computer laboratory access if needed to successfully implement the Teach-out Program. Vista administrators volunteered their time to process final grades, graduate students, and provide students with diplomas and transcripts upon successful completion of the Teach-out Program.
- Las Cruces, New Mexico Vista PN Program
 - Forty students were enrolled in the PN Program in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Of these, eight students were scheduled to graduate in December 2021. The Las Cruces PN Program was comprised of the same curriculum, policies, and resources as the Vista VN Program in Texas.
 - Vista submitted a formal request for permission for the eligible PN Program students to participate in the approved Teach-out Program for Vista’s VN students in Texas. The Las Cruces PN students would be held to the same standards as the Texas VN students in the Teach-out Program. Upon successful completion of all requirements, the candidates would receive a diploma from the Vista VN Program in El Paso and then receive an AOG to be considered eligible to take the licensure examination under the Vista NCSBN program code.

Implications for Students:

- At the time of closure, a total of 229 VN students were enrolled in the three Texas programs. Of these, 77 students were scheduled to graduate from the program in December 2021.
- At the time of closure, no academic provisions by Vista were made for students.
- Information about the breakdown of students indicated the following enrollments:

| Location | Number of Students – <u>not</u> including prospective December 2021 Graduates |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| El Paso - Day | 42 enrolled |
| El Paso - Evening | 44 enrolled |
| Killeen | 42 enrolled |
| Beaumont | 24 enrolled |
| Total | 152 enrolled |

- Numbers of students who expected to graduate in December 2021 are identified below:

| Location | Prospective December 2021 Graduates |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| El Paso - Day | 24 |
| El Paso - Evening | 16 |
| Killeen | 19 |
| Beaumont | 18 |
| Total | 77 |

- Board Staff participated in many conference calls with representatives from other regulatory agencies in an effort to consider and provide Vista nursing students an avenue to complete their VN education. A number of Texas VN Programs considered accepting Vista VN students into their programs as transfer students if possible.
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were posted on the Board website and articulated the possible challenges students could experience as they attempt to transfer their Vista VN Program academic credits. The FAQs set forth that the receiving school may conduct a targeted assessment to ensure the transfer applicant has the knowledge, skills, and abilities to enter the program at an intermediate or advanced level. The receiving VN Program would then decide whether to accept or not accept an applicant's academic credits.

- Public junior colleges or community colleges are obligated to follow applicable state laws as well as adhere to their college policies when admitting students. All programs are required to comply with their specific rules, regulations, and policies. Therefore, transfer options for the Vista VN Program students could be limited.
- Also presented in this FAQ section on the Board website were hyperlinks to information about federal student loans. Repayment of federal loans as well as exhaustion of available resources was a major concern of the displaced VN students.
- Dr. Tami Little has continued to be readily available to the Education Team and has timely responded since October 8, 2021, to communicate with Board Staff in efforts to consider and develop pathways for the former VN Program students.

Staff Recommendation:

Move to accept the report of the abrupt program closure following the October 8, 2021, closure of the Vista College Vocational Nursing Education Program in El Paso, Texas, as noted in the attached letter and Board Order (See Attachment #1).

DRAFT LETTER

January 20, 2022

Tami Little, DNP, RN, CNE, Vice President of Nursing
Vocational Nursing Education Program
Vista College
5919 BrookHollow
El Paso, TX 79925

Dear Dr. Little:

At the January 20, 2022, meeting, the members of the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) considered the report of the October 8, 2021, abrupt closure of the Vista College VN Program in El Paso, Texas.

Based upon the discussion and review of information, it was the decision of the Board to accept the report of the October 8, 2021, abrupt closure of the Vista College Vocational Nursing Education Program in El Paso, Texas. Board Staff wish to thank you, Dr. Michael Linzmaier, and the volunteer nursing instructors, former Vista College Vocational Nursing Education Program faculty, for your ongoing efforts to ensure that Final Term students were provided an opportunity to complete the Teach-Out Program.

If you have any questions or if we may offer assistance, please contact Board Staff at Virginia.ayars@bon.texas.gov or (512) 305-7660.

Sincerely,

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

Copy: Dr. Michael Linzmaier, Senior Vice President of Academics, Vista College
Texas Workforce Commission
Commission on Education

BEFORE THE TEXAS BOARD

ORDER OF THE BOARD

In the Matter of
Vista College
Vocational Nursing Education Program
In El Paso, Texas

A public meeting of the Texas Board of Nursing, hereinafter referred to as the Board, was held on January 20, 2022, 333 Guadalupe, Tower II, Room 225, Austin, Texas to consider the voluntary closure of the Vista College Vocational Nursing Education Program in El Paso, Texas, based upon the October 8, 2021, notification from Vista College of the intent to voluntarily close all Vista College programs.

After review and due consideration of the filed materials, and other interested parties, if any, the Board hereby ACCEPTS the voluntary closure of the Vista College Vocational Nursing Education Program in El Paso, Texas, and imposes the following condition/requirement:

1. The program may not reapply for approval of a new proposal for a nursing education program until at least twelve (12) months from the date of this order have elapsed.

Entered this 20th day of January, 2022

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