

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

Summary of Request:

Consider the report of the November 2-4, 2022, virtual survey review of the Texas Southmost College (TSC) Vocational Nursing Education (VN) Program in Brownsville, Texas.

Historical Perspective:

- TSC was established in 1926 and operated as the Junior College of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. It was the first institution of higher education in the region and became the first accredited public junior college in Texas.
- In 1948, the institution moved to Fort Brown, a decommissioned Army installation adjacent to the downtown business district in Brownsville, one block from the Rio Grande River, where the main campus is today.
- In 1991, TSC began a partnership with the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) and officially consolidated in 1995 as UTB-TSC under the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). In 2010, the Board of Regents of the University of Texas System voted to terminate the UTB-TSC Agreement, and in 2015 TSC officially separated from UTB and re-launched as an autonomous degree-granting public community college.
- TSC received SACSCOC accreditation in 2015. TSC offers over 50 programs of study approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board leading to an associate degree or certificate.
- The college has two campuses, the Fort Brown main campus and the International Technology, Education, and Commerce Center (ITECC) building.
- The TSC VN Program is the oldest nursing program in the state of Texas. TSC initially established a Vocational Nursing (VN) Education Program in 1966 that produced large numbers of Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs) to work in the Rio Grande Valley (Valley).
- The VN program is part of the Division of Health Professions that includes Associate Degree Nursing (ADN); Emergency Medical Science; Emergency Medical Technician; Medical Laboratory Technology; Radiologic Technology; and Respiratory Care Science.
- Vaneida Soto, MSN, RN, has served as the Board approved VN Program Director since November 2020. Ms. Soto served as a VN program clinical instructor for two years prior to her appointment as the director. She has nine years of nursing experience as an RN.

- 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)
2022 (preliminary)	Full	90.91%	10/11
2021	Full	95.24%	20/21
2020	Full	78.79%	26/33
2019	Full	92.13%	24/26
2018	Full	75.86%	22/26
2017	Full	85.71%	12/14

- Due to the 2018 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate of 75.86%, 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 Program Director and faculty identified factors in the SSR and corrective measures that included:
 - Ensure student assignments are related to course objectives;
 - Revise grading policy;
 - Develop strategies for seeking student feedback;
 - Increase rigor in admission, readmission, and progression policies;
 - Recruit faculty to fill vacant positions
 - Appointment of a new program director
 - Online faculty development to include exam writing skills;
 - Revise clinical evaluation tools to include formative and summative evaluations;
 - Change clinical rotations to 75% in medical-surgical, rehabilitation and geriatrics; and
 - Improve new faculty orientation to strengthen new instructor abilities.
- After review of the SSR, Board Staff acknowledged the findings in the SSR and the plan for corrective measures.
- These efforts for improvement have been successful as evidenced by the 92.13% pass rate for 2019.
- Due to the 2020 NCLEX-PN® examination pass rate of 78.79%, the Program Director and faculty were required to submit a second Self-Study Report (SSR) in 2021 that would evaluate factors that may have contributed to the graduates' performance on the NCLEX-PN® examination and a description of the corrective measures implemented or to be implemented.
- The Program Director and faculty identified factors in the SSR and corrective measures that included:
 - Ensure student assignments are related to course objectives (same as 2019 SSR);
 - Revise grading policy (same as 2019 SSR);
 - Add content to the Leadership and Professional Development course to include and NCLEX-PN® preparation;
 - Utilize standardized exams throughout the curriculum to measure student progress and identify remediation needs; and
 - Incorporate additional virtual resources into the skills course.
- After review of the SSR, Board Staff acknowledged the findings in the SSR and the plan for corrective measures.

- These efforts for improvement have been successful as evidenced by the 95.24% pass rate for 2021.
- The 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.
- At the time of the survey visit, corrective measures still outstanding were the revision of the clinical evaluation tools and the hiring of faculty.
- The program preliminary NCLEX-PN® pass rate data for 2022 is 90.91% (10/11).

Summary of Survey Visit

Education Consultant Reviewed Documents and Video Provided Prior to Visit:

- Vision, Mission, Goals, and Values
- Faculty & Program Director Job Descriptions
- Faculty & Student Handbooks
- Syllabi for all Courses
- Clinical Evaluation Tools and Clinical Affiliation Agreements
- Total Program Evaluation Plan (TPE) and Data
- Faculty Meeting Minutes
- Program Facilities Video Tour
- List of Library/Learning Resource Center Holdings

Education Consultant Reviewed:

- 2021 Nursing Education Program Information Surveys (NEPIS)

Education Consultant:

- Held an Initial Conference and Exit Interview with Administrators

Individuals Participating in the Virtual Survey Visit:

- Administrators:
 - Dr. Jesus Roberto Rodriguez, President
 - Dr. Brian T. McCormack, Interim Vice President of Instruction
 - Dr. Gisela E. Figueroa, Vice President Finance and Administration
 - Dr. Angelica M. Fuentes, Associate Vice President of Instruction
 - Dr. David Pearse, Dean of Health Professions and Weekend College
 - Vaneida Soto, MSN, RN, VN Program Director
- VN Faculty
 - Jennifer Trevino, RN
- Four VN students: Two last semester and two first semester

Process for the Survey Visit:

Ms. Soto scheduled online meetings between Education Consultant and TSC representatives and hosted the following meetings:

- November 2, 2022, 10:00 – 11:30 p.m. - B. Skloss and V. Soto
11:45 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. - B. Skloss and Administrators
- November 3, 2022, 10:15 – 11:00 a.m. – B. Skloss and V. Soto
11:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. - B. Skloss and Students
12:00 – 1:00 p.m. - B. Skloss and Faculty

- November 4, 10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. - B. Skloss and V. Soto
11:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. – Exit Report with Administrators and Faculty

Administration:

- Administration is extremely supportive of the VN program and expressed that the nursing and health science programs are important to the college. All administrators have vast experience in administration at the college level.
- Dr. Rodriguez has extensive experience in college administration and has been at TSC for six years. He addressed concerns regarding the faculty shortage by sharing actions taken by administration and the TSC Board of Trustees in 2021 and 2022 related to faculty salaries and recruitment. Recruitment efforts have intensified, interviews were being held and the number of faculty applicants has increased.
- Administration denotes having great teamwork and spoke about their cohesiveness. Each one is made aware of occurrences in all departments due to regular meetings and continuous communication.
- Dean Pearse spoke about money obtained from grants and private donations for the health professions to upgrade the simulation laboratory and equipment.
- Vaneida Soto, MSN, RN, serves as Program Director and was approved by the Board in November 2020. Ms. Soto served as VN faculty prior to her appointment, has three years of nursing education experience and nine years as an RN. She is currently enrolled in a Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) program.
- Ms. Soto indicated she is fully supported by administration, has the authority to direct the VN program in all phases, and that she works closely with the ADN Program Director. Ms. Soto discussed the lack of qualified faculty though the program utilizes several of the ADN faculty to help with the summer semester.
- At the time of the survey visit, Ms. Soto was carrying a teaching load of 28.5 hours per week which is considered an overload. Normal faculty workload is 15 hours per week. At the time of the survey visit, Ms. Soto did not have time for most of her administrative responsibilities.
- TSC was able to quickly resort to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic to assure students were able to continue their education. STC was already automated and had the infrastructure due to hybrid classes in progress.
- Ms. Soto indicated that her goal is to increase enrollment in the VN program once qualified faculty are hired.

Faculty:

- The VN program instruction in the Spring and Fall semesters is carried out by the program director and one full-time faculty. The ADN faculty assist with VN courses during the summer semester.
- At the time of the survey visit, there were two vacant full-time faculty positions and open positions for part-time faculty. One faculty retired at the end of the Spring 2022 semester.
- Ms. Soto and Ms. Trevino work together as a team and offer a rich diversity in their educational and experiential backgrounds. Ms. Trevino's has five years of experience in nursing education and over 20 years of practice experience.
- All faculty and the director evaluate clinical agencies. The program director maintains a collaborative relationship with clinical sites.

- New faculty orientation is college wide and nursing department specific that is structured. The Nursing Faculty Handbook contains detailed information regarding the orientation.
- Full-time faculty workload is 15 contact hours of teaching per week. At the time of the survey visit, faculty were teaching an overload every semester. Faculty noted not having time to complete their job responsibilities such as program development, remediation, preparation, committee/curriculum work and evaluation.
- Faculty meetings are held at least once in the Spring and once in the Fall. Minutes of meetings are maintained with information given noted. There is limited reflection in the faculty meeting minutes that faculty members are involved in planning, evaluation, and decision-making. Discussion was held regarding the lack of faculty time to participate. Ms. Soto and Ms. Trevino verbalized that they meet on a regular basis though all meetings are not documented.
- The college assists with and supports faculty development through webinars and conferences such as attendance at the annual Texas Association of Vocational Nurse Educators Conference, and other continuing education units.
- Faculty vacancies have been an ongoing issue that began before the Covid-19 Pandemic. Dr. Rodriguez, TSC President, addressed this during the administration opening meeting.
- The Nursing Faculty handbook is detailed, well-written and includes all policies as required by Board rule 214.7.

Students:

- The VN program admits two cohorts, a maximum of 20 per cohort, every year in the Spring and Fall semesters. At the time of the survey visit, there was a total of 26 students enrolled in the program with several of these being returning students.
- Twenty students are expected to graduate in December 2022 and 6 students will graduate in August 2023. The August 2022 cohort admitted was limited in number due to the faculty shortage.
- Student policies are written, well-defined, provided to all students during orientation and include all Board required content. Signed receipts are in each student's file.
- Students stated they enrolled in the VN program because of the program's reputation, prerequisites are not required, their passion in life to be a nurse, and being certified nurse assistants who wanted to take the next step to become a nurse.
- Students indicated the positive aspects of the program are the variety of clinical experiences, the many opportunities for learning, the structure of the program, the abundance of learning resources, and the equipment in the skills laboratory that mimic the hospital environment. The students who will graduate in December 2022 verbalized feeling ready to practice.
- Students remarked that faculty are dedicated and passionate, readily accessible, assist students to learn nursing concepts, supportive, and concerned about student success. Instructors make each student feel confident and safe prior to hands-on patient care clinical experiences.
- Students are represented on faculty committees by volunteer student representatives. The representatives report to their classmates on the work of the committees.
- Students have input into faculty evaluations, the curriculum, and clinical agencies by completing evaluations at the end of each course.

Program of Study:

- The VN program is a 12-month, full-time program consisting of three semesters, Fall, Spring, and Summer for a total of 42 semester credit hours (SCH). There are five courses in the first semester, 15 SCH; four courses in the second semester, 13 SCH; and six courses in the final semester, 14 SCH.
- There are 1518 total contact hours in the program including didactic content, laboratory hours, simulation and 480 contact hours of hands-on patient care.
- Courses are taught face-to-face on the TSC campus except for clinical learning experiences.
- All examinations are delivered via computer in a computer lab with monitoring by faculty proctors. An item analysis is conducted on each exam prior to issuing student grades.
- All students earning less than 75% must meet with their faculty advisor within 7 days of receiving their exam grade.
- The didactic curriculum for the VN program indicates leveling of nursing content, advancing in difficulty from simple to complex. The *Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECS)(2021)* are incorporated into the curriculum as evidenced in the course syllabi.
- Standardized testing is utilized throughout the program to identify student strengths and weaknesses, to assist with identifying remediation needs, and to identify any curriculum and program outcome gaps.

Clinical Learning Experiences:

- TSC has 14 active clinical contracts that include nursing care experiences in acute care, long term acute care, rehabilitation, long term care, maternal and pediatrics, skilled nursing, community primary care, mental health and hospice.
- Faculty provide supervision during clinical learning experiences. BON required faculty-to-student ratios are maintained throughout the program. Preceptors are not utilized for clinical learning experiences.
- High fidelity simulation is utilized in the second semester for advanced skills and includes multi-disciplinary simulations.
- The clinical evaluation tools include formative and summative evaluations throughout the program for clinical courses. The clinical evaluation tools do not clearly show expected progression across the curriculum, but are the same for all courses. The application of the DEC's in the course objectives is minimal. Board Staff discussed the importance of a focus on student progression based upon the DEC's competencies.

Facilities, Resources, and Services:

- The nursing programs as well as other health professions programs are housed in the TSC ITECC building.
- The VN program is equipped with resources for student success. The skills laboratory has nine beds, one exam table, seven low fidelity mannequins and two mid-fidelity mannequins for simulation enhanced learning. There are tables and chairs for 28 students. Equipment, supplies, and storage are abundant.
- The simulation laboratory is shared with the ADN program and includes eight beds, six mid-fidelity mannequins, two high fidelity mannequins, and two body interact tables. There is a control room and a pre and post debriefing room that holds up to 24 students.
- There is one large VN program classroom with modern audio-visual equipment throughout.

- One full-time administrative assistant provides support for the ADN and VN directors and faculty. Discussion was held regarding the need for adequate support for the VN program as the TSC nursing programs experience growth.
- A video tour of the ITECC Building was provided. The video included the following:
 - Lobby, with abundant seating areas
 - Nursing Classrooms
 - VN Skills Laboratory & Simulation Laboratory
 - Computer Laboratories
 - Private Offices for Director and Faculty
 - Student study areas
 - Student Lounges
 - Restaurant with tables/chairs
 - Conference Rooms
- The library resource holdings are abundant for nursing and include print books, eBooks, print journals, eJournals, and databases such as EBSCOhost and CINAHL Complete.
- The video tour provided evidence that the campus meets or exceeds the requirements of Board Rule 214.11.

Records and Reports:

- Confidential files of students and faculty are stored in a locked file in the nursing department or electronically in the institutional admissions office according to college policy.
- Minutes of faculty meetings are securely maintained in the administrative assistant's office.
- Clinical affiliation agreements are current.
- The Total Program Evaluation Plan (TPE) is well-written. Evidence of decision-making in the faculty meeting minutes is limited due to faculty and the director working overloads. Suggestions by Board staff were made to the Ms. Soto about how to documents decision-making in meetings.

Pros and Cons of Program Review:

Pros:

Quality Indicators Recognized: (Spector et al., 2020).

1. Strong Administrative Support is evident. Administration expressed that the nursing and health science programs are important to the college. Dr. Rodriguez has extensive experience in college administration and has been at TSC for six years. Dr. McCormack, Dr. All administrators have vast experience in administration at the college level.
2. Faculty are dedicated, positive role models for students, and clinically competent as evidenced by feedback from students.
3. The curriculum is evidenced based and leveling of nursing content, advancing in difficulty from simple to complex. The *Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECS)(2021)* are incorporated into the curriculum as evidenced in the course syllabi.
4. The clinical learning opportunities are commendable for VN students, as the students are assigned direct patient care experiences in a wide variety of healthcare settings. Clinical learning experiences are abundant and offer a diversity of opportunities for hands on patient care. Quality simulation is used to augment clinical experiences
5. TSC has comprehensive student support services to assure student success.
6. The physical resources are modern, state-of-the-art, and evidence a learner-centered environment.

Cons:

1. Clinical evaluation tools do not reflect the DEC's and do not measure progression across the curriculum.
2. Faculty shortage is recognized by the program director and evidenced by one full-time faculty teaching overloads each semester.

Board Staff have considered information in the program documents, NCLEX reports, Self-Study Report, and findings from the survey visit in the following recommendation:

Staff Recommendation:

Move to accept the report of the November 2 – 4, 2022, virtual survey visit to the Texas Southmost College Vocational Nursing Education Program in Brownsville, Texas, and issue the recommendations in the attached letter (See Attachment #1).

Staff Rationale for Recommendation #1:

Rule 214.9(a)(8) states that, "The program of study shall include both didactic and clinical learning experiences and shall be: designed and implemented to prepare students to demonstrate the *Differentiated Essential Competencies of Graduates of Texas Nursing Programs Evidenced by Knowledge, Clinical Judgment and Behaviors: Vocational (VN), Diploma/Associate Degree (Diploma/ADN), Baccalaureate Degree (BSN), October 2021 (DECs); and....*"

Rule 214.9(h) states that, "Faculty shall develop and implement evaluation methods and tools to measure progression of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor achievements in course/clinical objectives, according to Board Education Guideline 3.7.3.a, Student Evaluation Method and Tools...."

During the review of the clinical evaluation tools, it was determined that the tools do not adequately reflect the DEC's and do not measure progression across the curriculum.

Recommendation #1:

It is recommended that the director and nursing faculty revise the clinical evaluation tools to more closely align with the DEC's and to measure the progression of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies. The revised clinical evaluation tools shall be submitted to Board staff no later than March 1, 2023.

Staff Rationale for Recommendation #2:

Rule 214.7(b)(1) states that, "Written policies concerning workload for the director or coordinator shall allow for sufficient time for administrative responsibilities consistent with 214.6 of this chapter (relating to Administration and Organization). Written policies for nursing faculty workload shall allow sufficient time for faculty to accomplish those activities related to the teaching-learning process."

During a discussion about the director and faculty workload, it was determined that the director and faculty are teaching overload hours every semester which does not allow sufficient time for the director to fulfill her responsibilities and does not allow faculty time to participate in curriculum development, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Dr. Rodriguez, College President, addressed concerns regarding the faculty shortage by sharing actions taken by administration and the TSC Board of Trustees in 2021 and 2022 related to faculty salaries and recruitment. Recruitment efforts have intensified, interviews were being held and the number of faculty applicants has increased.

Recommendation #2:

It is recommended that the administration evaluate the faculty shortage and continue faculty recruitment efforts. Please provide an update related to faculty recruitment efforts to Board Staff no later than March 1, 2023.

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 Regulation*, 11(2), S1-S64.

DRAFT LETTER

January 19, 2023

Vaneida Soto, RN, MSN, Program Director
Texas Southmost College
Vocational Nursing Education Program
80 Fort Brown.
Brownsville, Texas 78520-4993

Dear Ms. Soto:

At the January 19, 2023, meeting, the members of the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) considered the report of the virtual survey visit to the Texas Southmost College Vocational Nursing Education Program in Brownsville, Texas.

Based upon the review of the information, it was the decision of the Board to accept the report of the virtual survey visit conducted November 2 – 4, 2022, and impose the recommendations as indicated below:

1. It is recommended that the director and nursing faculty revise the clinical evaluation tools to more closely align with the DEC's and to measure the progression of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies. The revised clinical evaluation tools shall be submitted to Board staff no later than March 1, 2023.
2. It is recommended that the administration evaluate the faculty shortage and continue faculty recruitment efforts. Please provide an update related to faculty recruitment efforts to Board Staff no later than March 1, 2023.

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: Dr. Jesus Roberto Rodriguez, President
Dr. David Pearse, Dean of Health Professions and Weekend College