

TEXAS BOARD OF NURSING
3.7.4.a. Education Guideline
The Use of Standardized Examinations in Nursing Education Programs
Revised: 09/28/2017

Many vocational and professional nursing education programs have incorporated the use of standardized examinations into the curriculum in various ways. Though the Texas Board of Nursing has no purview over a nursing program's decisions to utilize standardized examinations, Board Staff respond to numerous reports and questions from students, parents, and policy-makers about the use of standardized examinations, especially when they are used as a graduation requirement.

During 2017 Board Staff met with three vendors to clarify the intended purposes for standardized examinations and to assist nursing programs in their use. All agreed Standardized Examinations are one of many measures of program quality.

Suggested purposes for nursing programs to use standardized examinations include:

- an assessment tool of potential or enrolled students providing:
 - data serving as one component of the admission criteria;
 - a gauge of students' strengths and weaknesses for remediation purposes;
 - an indicator of the need for early remediation for students experiencing difficulties to assist in their success in the program; and/or
 - an assessment of readiness to take the NCLEX® examination.

- an assessment tool of the program's effectiveness providing:
 - trend data on cohort performance;
 - national comparison of student performance;
 - valid and reliable feedback of student knowledge in selected content areas;
 - data to monitor the effectiveness of specific course, level, and program curriculum revisions;
 - an assessment measure of student mastery of content; and/or
 - an evaluation of curriculum content for revision purposes.

- an assistive tool to familiarize students with computerized testing.

Based upon information from vendors who were interviewed, Board Staff recommend the following when standardized examinations are used by nursing programs.

- Individual examinations should be carefully placed across the curriculum with planned remediation as indicated. The correct placement of examinations is determined by the specific program of study.
- An academic progression policy should clarify the use, frequency, and points associated with standardized examinations and the use of the test results.
- The plan for the use of all standardized examinations should be reviewed with the school's legal counsel.

- The academic progression policy should be written and published in an accessible and public format.
- Any changes in policies regarding the use of standardized exams should be implemented when the student first enrolls in the program or at the beginning of a class or academic term.
- Policies should be consistently followed without exception.
- Students may be asked to sign their receipt of the academic progression policy.
- Faculty are encouraged to take advantage of information in reports in order to provide feedback that may be used to improve the curriculum and instructional strategies.

Note: Standardized examinations can be valuable tools to assist in the identification of student strengths and weaknesses but are not a replacement for faculty evaluation of student progress in meeting specific program objectives.

Cautions for the use of standardized examinations:

- The use of standardized examinations in a high stakes manner is not recommended. Performance on a standardized examination should not prevent students from progressing or graduating. If the score on a standardized examination prevents students from graduation, it is a “high stakes” test.
- Standardized examinations should be placed at appropriate points consistent with didactic content and clinical learning experiences.
- Programs should not pattern curriculum changes solely upon testing results but should consider multiple evaluation criteria in their curriculum evaluation.
- Programs should be aware of any security issues about the standardized examination test pool.

Evidence indicates that a remediation plan for nursing students is helpful in promoting success on the NCLEX® examination. Using standardized examinations as an indicator of the need for remediation is only one strategy to assist nursing students in successful preparation for licensure.