

**Report of Survey Visit  
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in Edinburg, Texas  
Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program**

**Summary of Request:**

Consider the report of the April 25, 2017 survey visit to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) in Edinburg, Texas Baccalaureate Degree Nursing (BSN) Education Program pursuant to the January 19, 2017 Board Order. The survey visit was conducted by Beverly Skloss, MSN, RN, Contract Program Evaluator.

**Historical Perspective:**

- UTRGV was created by action of the Texas Legislature in 2013 and began operation August 31, 2015.
- Two universities, the former University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) and the former University of Texas Pan American (UTPA), joined resources and assets to form the UTRGV BSN Education Program.
- Formal regional accreditation of UTRGV was granted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) in 2015. On December 6, 2016, SACSCOC placed UTRGV on probation for one year.
- UTRGV as a new university name began enrolling students in Fall 2015. Students who had been enrolled at UTB and UTPA were automatically admitted to UTRGV.
- The UTRGV BSN Program was accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) under the new name on December 18, 2015. The CCNE accreditation term expires on December 31, 2021.
- Carolina Huerta, EdD, RN, FAAN has served as School of Nursing Director since the founding of UTRGV. Dr. Huerta previously served as Chair of the UTPA BSN Program, having been with UTPA since 1972.
- Sandy Sánchez, PhD, RN is the UTRGV BSN Program Undergraduate Program Director.
- The NCLEX-RN® examination pass rates for UTRGV, established August 31, 2015, for the past two years are included in the table below.

<b>Examination Year</b>	<b>BON Approval Status</b>	<b>NCLEX-RN® Examination Pass Rate</b>	<b>Number of First Time Candidates (Passed/Total)</b>
2016	Full with Warning	73.20%	142/194
2015	Full	78.26%	72/92

- The program was required to submit a Self-Study Report (SSR) in 2016 due to the 78.26% NCLEX® examination pass rate for 2015.
- The Program Director and faculty members identified multiple factors in the SSR that may have contributed to the NCLEX-RN® pass rate falling below 80% as well as corrective measures to improve success, including:
  - ▶ review enrollment patterns for optimal cohort size;

- ▶ examine readmission policy;
  - ▶ integrate social media with traditional teaching strategies;
  - ▶ develop comprehensive, ongoing remediation program throughout curriculum;
  - ▶ expand recruitment efforts for seasoned faculty members;
  - ▶ evaluate faculty salaries to determine if they are competitive;
  - ▶ use curriculum mapping and standardized exam results to guide curriculum and teaching strategies;
  - ▶ schedule regular course team meetings;
  - ▶ increase inter-rater reliability policies and practices; and
  - ▶ review and revise as needed the Total Program Evaluation plan.
- Due to the 2016 NCLEX-RN® examination pass rate of 73.20%, the approval status of the program was changed from Full Approval to Full Approval with Warning at the January 2017 Board meeting.
  - A survey visit to the UTRGV BSN Program was conducted on April 25, 2017 pursuant to the January 19, 2017 Board Order. The survey visit was conducted by Beverly Skloss, MSN, RN, Contract Program Evaluator.

**Summary of Survey Findings (See Attachment #1):**

**Pros and Cons of Survey Visit:**

**Pros:**

- Students indicated there is wide variety of clinical sites for student learning experiences.
- Administration identifies the BSN program as being an integral part of the new UTRGV and BSN graduates are needed to meet growing healthcare needs in the community.
- The faculty offers diversity in their cultural, educational, and clinical backgrounds. Many are veteran nurse educators.
- The Program Director is experienced in nursing education and program administration, having served as Chair of the UTPA BSN Program.

**Cons:**

- The NCLEX-RN® examination pass rate has not been above 80% since the program became UTRGV.
- All corrective measures identified in the SSR have not yet been implemented.

**Staff Rationale for Recommendation:**

Board Staff considered the challenges that have been faced by the Program Director and faculty at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) School of Nursing in Edinburg, Texas, as they have transitioned to a new organizational structure. Communities in South Texas are experiencing an increased need for nurses and UTRGV is striving to help meet that need. Administration's goal is to admit 150 nursing students each fall and this number places heavy demands on the nursing faculty to assist with many non-teaching-related activities. In addition, it was noted that clinical restraints mandate a need for faculty training in simulation to allow for greater use of simulation in the program. Board Staff recommend that the administration and program study the current faculty workload and consider adding ancillary personnel to relieve faculty from such responsibilities as advising pre-nursing students, providing remediation and assistance to at-risk students, coordinating lab learning experiences, and coordinating scheduling of clinical placements. This would allow faculty to concentrate more time on teaching, committee work, and faculty training in simulation and debriefing.

**Staff Recommendation #1:**

The administration, Program Director, and faculty study the current faculty workload and consider adding ancillary personnel to relieve faculty from non-teaching activities so they may focus more on quality instruction, committee work, and faculty development to promote simulation.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Move to accept the report of the survey visit to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program in Edinburg, Texas and issue the recommendation in the attached letter (see Attachment #2).

**Summary of Survey Visit  
Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program**

**Purpose of Survey Visit:** Approval status change from Full to Full with Warning

**Date of Visit:** April 25, 2017

**Board Staff Conducting Survey Visit:** Beverly Skloss, MSN, RN, Contract Program Evaluator

**Program Evaluator:**

- Reviewed:
  - curriculum with all syllabi;
  - student handbook and faculty handbook;
  - academic catalog;
  - assignments and clinical evaluation tools;
  - clinical affiliation agreements;
  - minutes of committee meetings;
  - organizational chart;
  - budget;
  - 2016 Nursing Education Program Information Survey (NEPIS) and faculty profile;
  - faculty and student files; and
  - Total Program Evaluation (TPE) Plan and data.
- Met with:
  - Havidán Rodriguez, PhD, Provost & EVP for Academic Affairs
  - Cynthia J. Brown, PhD, Deputy Provost
  - Michael Lehker, PhD, Dean – College of Health Affairs
  - Laura Sáenz, PhD, Associate Provost for Accreditation & Assessment
  - Julie Anderson, OD, Associate Dean of Accreditation & Program Development
  - Carolina Huerta, EdD, RN, FAAN, School of Nursing Director
  - Sandra Sánchez, PhD, RN, Professor & BSN Coordinator

**Faculty:**

- Jaya Sabu Abraham, MSN, APRN, Clinical Instructor
- Janie Acebedo, PhD, RN, Lecturer
- Maria I. Diaz, EdD, MS, RN, Associate Professor
- Linda Eanes, EdD, MSN, APRN, Assistant Professor
- Esmeralda Garza, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Orelia Herrera-Erdem, DNP, RN, Assistant Professor
- Betty John, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Joe Lacher, LPN, AAS, RN, BSN, MSN, N-E – BC, Clinical Associate Professor
- Liji Mathew, MSN, RN, Clinical Instructor
- Virginia Maldonado Maxwell, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Sharon Helsley McGinley, MSN, RN, Clinical Associate Professor
- Nancy Nadeau, BSN, MSN, RN, Clinical Associate Professor
- Beatriz C. Nieto, PhD, RN, Associate Professor
- Dalia Paul, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Betty Philips, MSN, RN, Lecturer I
- Edna Reyna, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor

- Dahlia Rojas, PhD, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Luz Maria Silva, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Norma Silva, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Pam Sullivan, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Susamma Thomas, MSN, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor
- Judy Voss, MSN, RN, Clinical Associate Professor

Other:

- Aaron Salinas, MSN, RN, Former Student
- Interviewed approximately 35 BSN students;
- Toured program facilities;
- Observed a class in session; and
- Conducted exit interview with Administrators, Director, Coordinator, and Faculty.

## **Summary of Findings:**

### Administration and Organization:

- Administration indicated the nursing program is in alignment with the UTRGV's mission, vision, and values. The program adds value to the university and continues to meet a need for increased numbers of professional nurses in the local community.
- The nursing program is in the College of Health Affairs along with eight other health-related schools, departments, and programs.
- The Board-approved Program Director is Carolina Huerta, EdD, RN, FAAN. Dr. Huerta is an experienced nurse educator and nursing program administrator, having served as the Chair of the UTPA BSN Program.
- The UTRGV administration is supportive and readily available to the Program Director.
- The Director carries a teaching load of three credit hours per year.
- UTRGV is in the final process of analyzing data related to faculty salary competitiveness. The results will reflect necessary increases in Fall 2017.

### Program of Study:

- The curriculum is designed to be completed in four years. The program consists of 120 credit hours: 42 hours of general education, 24 hours of pre-requisites, and 54 hours of nursing courses.
- The program of study is comprehensive and based upon sound educational principles and safe nursing care.
- The curriculum clearly identifies the *Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECs) for Graduates of Texas Nursing Programs* in the documents.
- Standardized testing is currently used throughout the program to measure progression and to determine readiness for the NCLEX-RN® examination. NCLEX® review courses are required at the end of the program. New remediation strategies are being evaluated for implementation across the curriculum.
- The Pharmacology, Issues, and Research courses are offered only via an online delivery.
- New safeguards have been implemented to enhance academic integrity.
- The program has increased the rigor of readmission criteria and has identified the need to increase the rigor of admission criteria. The TEAS entrance exam is being considered as an additional resource for screening.
- The Program Evaluator observed classroom teaching consisting of a variety of techniques. Students were fully interactive and attentive.

- The Program Evaluator suggested greater consistency in syllabi content and formatting.

#### Faculty:

- There are 31 full-time faculty (eight have one-year appointments), four part-time faculty, and two vacant full-time faculty positions.
- National recruitment efforts for qualified faculty to fill vacancies are ongoing.
- All faculty meet Board qualifications and offer diversity in their cultural, educational, and clinical backgrounds. Many are experienced nurse educators.
- The Faculty Handbook includes policies that are detailed and clearly written. The nursing organization functions using shared governance reflected in the School of Nursing policies and by-laws.
- Though an online faculty orientation is in place, faculty expressed a preference for a more personalized orientation within the Nursing School.
- Faculty stated they feel supported by their colleagues and continue to work towards a cohesive team since the formation of UTRGV.
- In order to handle the program demands, faculty assist in advising pre-nursing students, providing remediation for current students, teaching additional courses as overload, assisting in supervising and coordinating skills lab experiences in addition to their regular teaching load. Faculty indicated they lack adequate time to focus on the teaching-learning process. Some ideas for alleviating faculty from so many tasks included using teaching assistants and providing more ancillary staff to be assigned to some of the responsibilities.
- Faculty expressed the desire for consistency in contract length for all faculty.
- Faculty stated they participate in committee meetings and some serve on more than one committee. They expressed they would like to devote the needed time to committee work. Meeting minutes are in order and reflect decision-making by faculty. However, meetings are not held as frequently as would be optimal.
- The Program Director, BSN Program Coordinator, and faculty indicated the need for a lab coordinator on the Edinburg campus (similar to the one on the Brownsville campus), a remediation specialist, and a clinical coordinator to schedule placement for all BSN students in clinical settings.

#### Students:

- At the time of the survey visit, 273 students were enrolled in the program with 133 seniors and 140 juniors.
- The program admits one cohort of 150 students each fall semester. However, the Director and faculty identified 130 as being the ideal number in a cohort until the pass rates on the NCLEX-RN® examination stabilize. (One of the corrective measures in the SSR was to evaluate the enrollment policies to optimize success.)
- Student policies are well written, detailed, and include all requirements of Rule 215.
- Students receive remediation and tutoring when required and additional assistance as requested.
- Students expressed they are supported by faculty and staff throughout the program.
- Students identified using the simulation hospital at the medical school in Harlingen, Texas as being one of the highlights of the program. They also indicated that clinical learning experiences are exceptional and they like the wide variety of clinical experiences.

- Students have input into the program through evaluation of the courses and faculty and representation on the Curriculum, Student Development, Program Development, and the Nursing Advisory Committees.

#### Clinical Learning Experiences:

- Prior to providing hands-on patient care in clinical settings, students practice in the skills lab and participate in low, mid- and high-fidelity simulation labs.
- Clinical learning experiences are abundant in all aspects of nursing. All clinical learning experiences correlate with didactic content.
- Students are evaluated by faculty and receive formative and summative evaluations that indicate progression throughout the curriculum.
- Faculty supervise students using the 1:10 ratio in clinical settings. However, faculty indicate that due to stringent requirements/limitations by clinical sites (not allowing more than five or six students in an area, not allowing use of the electronic health record for charting), there is an increased need for more simulation and trained faculty to provide the experiences.
- Preceptors are used during the program and packets with appropriate documents are in place and meet all Board requirements.
- Clinical affiliation agreements are in place and reviewed on a regular basis per Rule 215.

#### Facilities, Resources, and Services:

- A full array of student services is provided online and in person, including a virtual library with an abundance of different resources.
- Students have 24-hour access to a large volume of online resources and computer assistance.
- The nursing program is housed in a modern building with modern technology, nearby parking, student-friendly open areas, where students can gather and study as well as private areas. There are other buildings nearby with study areas as well.
- Classrooms are well-lit, spacious, and conducive to learning. Media equipment is available for every classroom.
- The skills labs are large and equipped with supplies and low, mid and high fidelity mannequins for teaching use by nurse faculty.
- The Program Director and faculty have private offices that are appropriate for a comfortable work environment with privacy for counseling students.
- There was an expressed need for more simulation labs with dedicated nurse faculty to prepare case scenarios and monitor student learning activities.

#### Records and Reports:

- Faculty files provide evidence of faculty qualifications, responsibilities, and faculty evaluations.
- The Total Program Evaluation (TPE) plan is being used for decision-making as reflected in meeting minutes.
- Clinical affiliation agreements are current.
- Faculty and student records are in order and compliant with Board Rule 215.12.

DRAFT LETTER

July 24, 2017

Carolina Huerta, EdD, RN, FAAN  
School of Nursing Director  
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
1201 West University Drive  
Edinburg, Texas

Dear Dr. Huerta:

At the July 20-21, 2017 meeting, members of the Texas Board of Nursing considered the findings from the April 25, 2017 survey visit to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program in Edinburg, Texas.

It was the decision of the Board to accept the report of the survey visit to the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program in Edinburg, Texas and issue the following recommendation.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the administration, Program Director, and faculty study the current faculty workload and consider adding ancillary personnel to relieve faculty from non-teaching activities so they may focus more on quality instruction, committee work, and faculty development to promote simulation.

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

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

Sincerely,

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

Copy: Guy Bailey, PhD, President, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education