

**Consideration of Report of An Innovative Project from
Western Governors University in Austin, Texas
Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program**

Summary of Request:

Consider the report of an innovative pilot project conducted by Western Governors University (WGU) located in Austin, Texas, to expand the Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Program while on initial approval.

Historical Perspective:

- WGU Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program was approved at the July 2009 Board meeting to begin operating in the Houston and Dallas area.
- WGU is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, holds a certificate of authorization for an exemption from The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the nursing programs are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).
- The curriculum is designed for online delivery of didactic content and faculty-supervised hands-on clinical instruction in partner hospitals through the use of MSN-prepared clinical instructors and preceptors (called coaches in the WGU model) assigned to work with students one-on-one.
- Students participate in nursing skills and simulation laboratories to prepare for actual patient care.
- The MSN-prepared clinical instructors supervise up to ten (10) preceptor (coach)/student dyads and are responsible for post clinical conferences, clinical evaluations, and communication with WGU mentors. Preceptors (coaches) receive WGU training to serve in this role and to familiarize them with the curriculum.
- Board Staff determined that the use of MSN-prepared clinical instructors and preceptors (coaches) is in compliance with Rule 215 for the supervision of clinical learning experiences.
- In February 2010 WGU expressed an interest in expanding their program to the El Paso and Brownsville communities. Board policy requires that programs on initial approval may not establish extension sites until their approval status has been changed to full approval.
- Since WGU was still on initial approval and the success of the WGU model for nursing education had not been determined, the Board recommended that WGU submit an Application for an Innovative Pilot Program to expand into El Paso and Brownsville.
- The application was received in May, 2010, and was considered by the Education Liaison Committee (ELC). Members of the ELC agreed to approve the innovative project and to require that WGU supply additional information and clarification.
- The pilot project was approved at the July 2010 Board meeting to be implemented during a two-year period beginning June 1, 2010 and ending May 31, 2012. WGU was required to submit progress reports describing relevant activities during the period.
- WGU submitted three progress reports.
- Descriptions of the WGU model are included in information provided by the progress reports for further clarification of their model.

Highlights from Progress Reports:

Progress Report #1 for Time Period July 1 – December 31, 2010:

- WGU identified several areas in their education model for alteration as they began the innovative project:
 - Changes in admission and enrollment processes related to academic difficulties experienced by students
 - Additional strategies implemented to facilitate and enhance students' learning

- Only about ten percent (10%) of students who inquired about the program matriculated to the pre-nursing curriculum. The pool of qualified applicants who matriculated into the El Paso program was smaller than expected.
- WGU has established positive collaborative partnerships with clinical partners in Houston, Dallas, and El Paso.
- Preceptors (coaches) are employees of the partner facility, and receive a WGU-developed online course of study on clinical teaching. Both clinical instructor and preceptor (coach) complete the WGU-developed course of study and content specific to preparing students in the Texas-required *Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECs)* are included in the training materials. In June, 2012, as WGU representatives were completing an analysis of the 2010 DECs inclusion in their curriculum, they identified missing content in didactic and clinical areas in the WGU curriculum needed to fulfill the DECs, and developed a plan to address the gaps. Course revisions and clinical practices to strengthen DEC content in the identified areas will be implemented in January 2013.
- Clinical learning experiences are conducted during weekends and/or evenings in addition to days, and this scheduling helps alleviate clinical placement shortages for nursing programs in the area.
- There have been and continue to be ongoing efforts to strengthen the relationship between the clinical faculty and the academic mentors, especially in the area of collaboration between the academic mentor and the clinical instructor to plan and implement the students' clinical experience. At WGU, faculty are called "mentors" and meet all faculty requirements in Rule 215. The mentors hold at least a master's degree and facilitate students' online learning (didactic component) while the clinical instructor provides the presence in the clinical learning experience. Consistent with the clinical model, the instructors collaborate closely with mentors to plan and implement the clinical experience, and both engage with students' post-conference discussions in the online learning community.
- Six (6) students were enrolled in the El Paso area in Fall 2010.

Progress Report #2 for Time Period January 1 – June 30, 2011:

- During this time period, the Texas program was visited by CCNE and the nursing accreditation was extended to include the Texas program.
- The program monitored students' progress through the program as a measure of the success of the preceptor (coach)/clinical instructor model. There was no increase in enrollment during this period. Of the total of thirty-four (34) students in Houston, Dallas, and El Paso, fifty-nine percent (59%) of the students were progressing "on track;" and twenty-nine percent (29%) were on modified progression (need to repeat courses). Twelve percent (12%) of the students admitted to the program have withdrawn. The overall retention rate of students admitted to the nursing program during this time period was eighty-eight percent (88%).
- Students were surveyed for their satisfaction with the program. On a five point scale, students rated the clinical experiences at higher than four points. Highest scores were credited to the preceptors (coaches), and students stated that the didactic portion of the courses and learning labs helped prepare them for clinical. Students stated that they preferred shorter shifts rather than twelve-hour shifts, and that they would have liked more clinical time. Students were completing their clinical rotations within the scheduled time frames.

Progress Report #3 for Time Period July 30 – December 30, 2011:

- During this time period, WGU experienced the first graduates in Texas
- WGU has continued to establish new relationships with clinical and academic partners, expanding into more community-based agencies for clinical learning experiences.
- WGU has enhanced their collaborative relationships with hospital partners with the introduction of a new initiative – hospital-based lab partnerships, an arrangement that will benefit both the clinical facilities and WGU.
- Student enrollments in the El Paso area has continued to be a huge challenge.

Update on June 27, 2012:

- Despite very positive support and collaboration with academic and clinical partners in the El Paso area, WGU continued to experience insufficient numbers of applicants with the pre-requisite preparations to enroll in WGU's pre-licensure program.
- WGU administration decided to temporarily suspend El Paso student enrollment and focus the program's efforts on the Houston and Dallas areas. The length of this suspension has not been determined.

The 2012 NCLEX-RN® examination pass rate for the first graduating cohort in Texas was 87.50% (7/8).

Future Plans:

- After receiving full approval, WGU plans include expansion to other Texas cities providing there are available clinical partners and clinical placement sites.
- They are also in the process of finalizing a state wide community college affiliation agreement and are planning to participate in the innovative sixty (60) credit associate degree model (designed as the CABNET model, a model that facilitates graduates from associate degree programs to readily articulate into a BSN program).

Staff Recommendation:

Move to accept the progress reports from Western Governors University for the innovative pilot project in operation from 2010 to 2012.