

**Report of Survey Visit
Western Governors University in Austin, Texas
Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program**

Summary of Request:

Consider the report of the May 27, 2015 survey visit to Western Governors University (WGU) Baccalaureate Degree Nursing (BSN) Education Program in Austin, Texas pursuant to the January 2015 Board Order.

Historical Perspective:

- The WGU BSN Program has been in operation since 2009.
- WGU in Salt Lake City, Utah holds national nursing accreditation from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) for their Baccalaureate and Master's degree programs in nursing through 2024. This accreditation applies to their extension campuses as well.
- WGU is regionally accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities through 2016.
- The NCLEX-RN® examination pass rates for the past three (3) years for WGU Texas are provided in the following table:

Examination Year	NCLEX-RN® Examination Pass Rate	Number of First-Time Candidates (Passed/Total)	Board Approval Status	Board Requirements
2014	71.43%	5/7	Full	Change to Full Approval with Warning at January 2015 Board meeting
2013	73.73%	11/15	Full	Self-Study Report submitted in 2014
2012	87.50%	7/8	Initial	

- The program of study is designed as a competency-based curriculum with didactic content delivered online and clinical learning experiences (skills and simulation labs) with face-to-face faculty-led supervision. Clinical experiences are provided near the students' homes.
- Jan Jones-Schenk, DHSc, RN, NE-BC, was approved as Program Director in 2014. Dr. Jones-Schenk is mentoring her assistant, Kim Kelly-Cortez, PhD, RN-BC, to assume the director role in the future.
- Due to the 2014 NCLEX-RN® examination pass rate of 71.43%, the approval status of the program was changed from Full Approval to Full Approval with Warning at the January 2015 Board meeting.

- A survey visit to the WGU Austin, Texas site was conducted on May 27, 2015 by Jo Queen, LTC(R), PhD, MS, MSN, RN-CCNS, Janice I. Hooper, PhD, RN, FRE, CNE, and Virginia D. Ayars, EdD, MS, RN, CNE.

Summary of Survey Findings (See Attachment #1):

Pros and Cons of Survey Visit:

Pros:

- Students in the WGU Program receive close attention and monitoring. Students are provided additional helps and remediation as needed.
- The 180-hour intensive clinical experience at the end of the program readies students for transition to practice.
- Students have many opportunities to participate in governance of the institution.
- WGU provides significant resources for professional development for faculty and program leaders.

Cons:

- The NCLEX-RN® examination pass rate has only been above 80% once since the program began.
- Inclusion and application of the *Differentiated Essential Competencies for Graduates of Texas Nursing Programs (DECs)* needs better clarification in the curriculum.
- The program has identified the need to include a measure of reading comprehension in the admission criteria.

Staff Rationales for Requirements and Recommendations:

Staff Rationale for Requirement #1:

Rule 215.9(a)(7) 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: Professional (VN), Diploma/Associate Degree (Diploma/ADN), Baccalaureate Degree (BSN), October 2010 (DECs)*”.

During the survey visit, it was noted that the curriculum mentions the DECs but the syllabi and outcomes do not reflect or correlate the DECs in the learning experiences or objectives.

Therefore, the program shall submit to Board Staff no later than January 1, 2016 a plan for including the DECs in the curriculum and preparing faculty to implement the DECs throughout the program for students in Texas.

Staff Recommendation:

Move to accept the report of the authorized survey visit to the Western Governors University Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program in Austin, Texas and issue the requirement in the attached letter (see Attachment #2).

**Summary of Survey Visit
Western Governors University in Austin, Texas
Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program**

Purpose of Survey Visit: Follow-up survey visit pursuant to the January 2015 approval status change

Date of Visit: May 27, 2015

Board Staff Conducting Survey Visit: Jo Queen, LTC(R), PhD, MS, MSN, RN-CCNS; Janice I. Hooper, PhD, RN, FRE, CNE; and Virginia D. Ayars, EdD, MS, RN, CNE

Nursing Consultants for Education:

- Reviewed:
 - Curriculum with all syllabi;
 - Student Handbook and Faculty Handbook;
 - Assignments and clinical evaluation tools;
 - Clinical affiliation agreements; and
 - Total Program Evaluation (TPE) Plan.
- Met with WGU Program Director and administration;
- Viewed an online demonstration of course materials;
- Viewed online data related to program evaluation; and
- Observed the online classroom environment through a virtual tour of the courses and WGU's learning management system.

Summary of Findings:

Administration and Organization:

- The Board-approved Program Director is Jan Jones-Schenk, DHSc, RN, NE-BC who is mentoring Kim Kelly-Cortez, PhD, RN-BC during a three (3) year period while Dr. Kelly-Cortez is gaining the required number of years of teaching experience.
- WGU has provided Dr. Kelly-Cortez many valuable leadership development activities to enhance her skills to function in the director role.
- Dr. Kelly-Cortez is an active participant in state, local, and national nursing education organizations and is building relationships with other nursing programs and professional constituents.
- WGU offers prelicensure nursing education programs in five (5) states: California, Florida, Indiana, Texas, and Utah.

Program of Study:

- The curriculum is designed on a competency-based format with supervised nursing labs (skills and simulation) and faculty supervised hands-on clinical experiences using a coach (preceptor) model.

- Board Staff viewed several complete syllabi with supportive information and appropriate online links. The total program is comprehensive and based upon safe nursing care. Professionalism is stressed at the end of the program.
- The curriculum is designed to address general baccalaureate nursing education in multiple states and does not clearly identify the *Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECs) for Graduates of Texas Nursing Programs* in the documents. WGU representatives were receptive to Board Staff suggestion to emphasize the DECs in the curriculum, and WGU proposed future faculty development activities focusing on the DECs for all WGU nursing faculty.
- Standardized testing is currently used throughout the program for progression, remediation, and to determine readiness for the NCLEX examination. New remediation strategies are being implemented across the curriculum.

Faculty:

- New nursing faculty participate in a lengthy training program and begin a professional development plan.
- All WGU nursing faculty who teach Texas students online hold a current Texas nursing license or privilege to practice.
- WGU representatives described the faculty member roles and the faculty-student interactions during the program.
- Faculty are engaged in regular online faculty meetings.

Students:

- At the time of the survey visit, one hundred four (104) students were enrolled in the Texas program.
- Most of the currently enrolled students live in the Dallas and Houston areas.
- The online format is designed to admit ten (10) students in each cohort.
- If a student experiences academic difficulties, he/she is provided with additional assistance and potentially more time to complete a course.
- Each student's progress is monitored closely to promote success and program completion. Ongoing communication is maintained with students to assess and guide them.
- Students are engaged in participating in the governance of WGU in formal and informal ways.
- Students in cohorts interact with each other through their lab and simulation experiences, and may be in the same clinical setting. Feedback provided to supervising faculty is shared with administration.
- Students also participate in synchronous online conferences to communicate with faculty, fellow students, and administration.
- WGU considers their governance triangle to include student communication.
- Board Staff reviewed course evaluation data from students that indicated strong satisfaction with all aspects of the program.
- During the survey visit, Dr. Kelly-Cortez stated that the program has recently included reading comprehension in the admission criteria because of evidence of its importance in program success.

Clinical Learning Experiences:

- Pre-hands-on clinical experiences include practice in the skills lab, virtual simulation activities, and high-fidelity simulation labs.
- All clinical learning experiences correlate with didactic content.
- WGU uses clinical agencies considered “partners” for the clinical placements for students.
- Students participate in two (2)-week intensive slots of clinical practice for each clinical course, with a capstone one hundred eighty (180) hour experience at the end of the program. The outcome from this intensive clinical course at the end of the program has meant that the graduates need less orientation in an employment setting.
- WGU-trained coaches (preceptors) supervise individual students during their shifts and clinical assignments are driven by clinical availability. This clinical model creates a limited effect on other programs using the same facility.
- Students are evaluated on their clinical performance by their coaches and clinical instructors working together.

Facilities, Resources, and Services:

- The online website is easy to navigate, easy to read, and conducive to learning.
- Students have twenty-four (24) hour access to online resources and computer assistance.
- A full-array of student services is provided online.
- Skills and simulation laboratories are contracted for each cohort and contain state-of-the-art equipment and resources.
- Private student conferences are conducted over secure connections via telephone, email, and web conferencing.
- Dr. Kelly-Cortez stated that appropriate resources are readily available and consistently reviewed for adequacy.

Records and Reports:

- Faculty files provide evidence of faculty qualifications, responsibilities, and faculty evaluations.
- The program has a Total Program Evaluation (TPE) plan that is used for decision-making.
- Clinical affiliation agreements are current.
- File maintenance and storage follows WGU policies and is in alignment with Board Rule 215.12.

DRAFT LETTER

October 26, 2015

Jan Jones-Schenk, DHSc, RN, NE-BC, Director
Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program
Western Governors University
221 West 6th Street, Suite 1050
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Dr. Jones-Schenk:

At the October 22-23, 2015 meeting, members of the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) discussed the May 27, 2015 survey visit to the Western Governors University Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program in Austin, Texas. Based upon the discussion and review of the findings from the survey visit, it was the decision of the Board to accept the report of the survey visit and issue the following requirement:

Requirement #1:

The program shall submit to Board Staff no later than January 1, 2016 a plan for including the DEC's in the curriculum and preparing faculty to implement the DEC's throughout the program for students in Texas.

A requirement is a mandatory criterion based upon program assessment directly related to the rules that must be addressed in the manner prescribed.

If you have questions or if we may provide assistance, please contact Board Staff at janice.hooper@bon.texas.gov or 512-305-6814.

Sincerely,

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

Copy: Kim Kelly-Cortez, PhD, RN-BC
Dr. Robert Mendenhall, PhD, President, WGU