

**Report of Survey Visit  
 University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas  
 Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program**

**Summary of Request:**

Consider the report of the August 25, 2016 survey visit to the University of St. Thomas Baccalaureate Degree Nursing (BSN) Education Program in Houston, Texas pursuant to the January 21, 2016 Board Order. The survey visit was conducted by Beverly Skloss, MSN, RN, Contract Program Evaluator.

**Historical Perspective:**

- The University of St. Thomas BSN program was approved at the July 2011 Board meeting. The first cohort of students was enrolled in May 2012 and graduated in May 2014.
- Poldi Tschirch, PhD, RN, CNE has served as Dean and Program Director since the inception of the program.
- The University is regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. The BSN program is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education through December 31, 2019.
- The NCLEX-RN® examination pass rates since the inception of the program are provided 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	Initial with Warning	Pending	
2015	Initial	67.65%	23/34
2014	Initial	68.42%	13/19
2013	Initial	New Program	

- The Program Director and faculty members identified multiple factors in the 2015 Self-Study Report (SSR) that may have contributed to the NCLEX-RN® pass rate falling below 80%, as well as corrective measures to improve success, including:
  - Appointment of a full-time Nursing Admissions Counselor;
  - Renovation of a new, larger facility to house the Nursing Success Center;
  - Revision and enhancement of the Comprehensive Retention Plan;
  - Enhancements to academic Boot Camps;

- Creation of the Student Testing/Evaluation Task Force to establish structures, processes, and outcome criteria;
- Refinement of faculty orientation process;
- Further incorporation of Health Education Systems Incorporated (HESI) products into the curriculum; and
- Faculty completion of the NCSBN online Test-item Writing course.
- All corrective measures have been implemented and indicators at the time of the survey, for the year-to-date 2016 pass rate, are positive.

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

**Pros and Cons from Survey Visit:**

Pros:

- Students in the University of St. Thomas BSN program have personalized attention and close monitoring through the Nursing Success Center (NSC).
- Students are provided additional tutoring and remediation as part of the expanded support staff in the NSC.
- A wide variety of clinical sites appropriate for BSN students is available for clinical learning experiences.
- Students talked in detail about the faculty members' availability and how much they feel connected with the values of the school.
- There are many opportunities for faculty development related to all aspects of nursing education.

Cons:

- The NCLEX-RN® examination pass rate has not been above 80% since the program began.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Move to accept the report of the authorized survey visit to the University of St. Thomas Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program in Houston, Texas (see Attachment #2).

**Summary of Survey Visit  
University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas  
Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program**

**Purpose of Survey Visit:** Follow-up survey visit pursuant to the January 2016 approval status change

**Date of Visit:** August 25, 2016

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

**Program Evaluator met with:**

- Dr. Robert Ivany, President
- Dr. Dominic Aquila, Provost and Vice President, Academic Affairs
- Dr. Poldi Tschirch, Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program (BSN) Dean and Program Director
- Dr. Angelina Chambers, Associate Dean and Professor
- Dr. Lucindra Campbell-Law, Professor
- Dr. Phyllis Waters, Professor
- Dr. Kristina Leyden, Assistant Professor
- Dr. Claudine Dufrene, Assistant Professor
- Dr. Marilyn Haupt, Assistant Professor
- Ms. Christen Sadler, Nursing Instructor
- Ms. Geny Moreno, Nursing Success Center Director
- Dr. Catherine Barber, Associate Professor and Director-Research Program, School of Education
- Ten (10) BSN students

**Program Evaluator:**

- Reviewed:
  - Curriculum and all syllabi;
  - Student Handbook, Faculty Handbook, and Academic Catalog;
  - Exams, assignments, and clinical evaluation tools;
  - Clinical affiliation agreements;
  - Budget and Organizational charts;
  - 2015 Nursing Education Program Information Survey (NEPIS) and NEPIS Faculty Profile;
  - Records and documents including: student and faculty files, minutes of faculty meetings, and the Total Program Evaluation (TPE) Plan with data;
- Interviewed ten (10) BSN students;
- Toured program facilities;
- Observed a class in session; and
- Conducted exit interview with Program Director, administration, and faculty.

## **Summary of Findings:**

### Administration and Organization:

- Dr. Tschirch is well qualified to administer the program; she has served as a nurse educator and nursing program administrator for many years.
- Dr. Tschirch does not have teaching responsibilities. Dr. Tschirch has the authority to direct the program in all phases utilizing a shared governance model.
- Dr. Aquila indicated the Nursing School is a central component of the University and Administration is fully dedicated to the success of the program.
- Financial support and fundraising are in place to meet the ongoing needs of the program.
- A new Center for Science and Health Professions, scheduled to open in May 2017, will house the School of Nursing.

### Program of Study:

- The blended learning program consists of one hundred twenty-seven (127) credit hours with a three (3) semester academic year. This schedule allows full time pre-licensure BSN students to graduate in three (3) years, with three (3) semesters per year of continuous enrollment.
- The total program is comprehensive, based upon sound educational principles, and focuses on the provision of safe nursing care.
- A major curriculum change was submitted to the Board in August 2015.
- The curriculum clearly identifies the *Differentiated Essential Competencies (DECs) for Graduates of Texas Nursing Programs*.
- Standardized testing is used throughout the program for progression, remediation, and to determine readiness for the NCLEX examination.
- An academic retention program has been implemented across the curriculum.
- Nursing Informatics is the only course offered totally in an online format.
- Board Staff observed classroom teaching that consisted of a variety of instructional strategies. Students appeared to be engaged and attentive.

### Faculty:

- There are seven (7) full-time faculty, two (2) part-time faculty, numerous adjunct faculty, and one (1) vacant full-time faculty position. All faculty are experienced in nursing education.
- The faculty handbook with policies is detailed, well-written, and includes orientation plans for new faculty.
- Faculty stated they feel strongly supported by administration, have the time and resources to accomplish their work, and are extremely satisfied with their positions.
- The faculty indicated there are many opportunities for faculty development, such as conferences, on-site and off-site, as well as time to obtain continuing competencies related to clinical practice. Each faculty has a professional development file.
- Faculty participate in regular committee meetings. Decision-making is reflected in meeting minutes.
- Faculty evaluations are based on self-evaluation, administrative evaluation, and student evaluations.

### Students:

- At the time of the survey visit, one hundred twenty-two (122) students were enrolled in the program, as follow:  
Year One – forty-eight (48)

Year Two – thirty-eight (38)

Year Three – thirty-six (36).

- The program admits one (1) cohort per year in the fall.
- Student policies are well written and detailed.
- All students have continuous access to the Nursing Success Center. They receive remediation, tutoring, and additional assistance as desired.
- Each student's progress is closely monitored to promote success. Communication with students is continuous to assess and guide them throughout the program.
- Students expressed feeling fully supported by faculty and staff. They stated the University of St. Thomas provides all the tools and resources, including readily available faculty, for a student to be successful.

#### Clinical Learning Experiences:

- Prior to on-site clinical experiences, students practice in the skills lab and participate in mid and high-fidelity simulation labs.
- All clinical learning experiences correlate with didactic content.
- Clinical learning experiences and sites are abundant in all aspects of nursing care.
- Students are evaluated by faculty and receive formative and summative clinical evaluations.
- Faculty supervise students, using a 1:9 ratio, in all clinical settings. Preceptors are utilized and all preceptor documents are in place.
- Faculty stated that clinical site staff indicated they appreciate the level of participation from the University of St. Thomas BSN students and that facilities like to hire their graduates because of their clinical preparation.

#### Facilities, Resources, and Services:

- A full array of student services is provided online and in person.
- Students have twenty-four (24) hour access to a large volume of online resources and computer assistance.
- The nursing program is currently housed in several buildings with nearby parking and modern technology. A new Center for Science and Health Professions to house the School of Nursing is scheduled to open in May 2017.
- Classrooms are well-lit and conducive to learning. There are computers for each student in the classroom and other media equipment is also available.
- Offices for the Program Director and faculty are appropriate for a comfortable work environment with privacy for counseling students.
- A simulation lab is utilized by faculty to prepare case scenarios and monitor student learning activities.

#### Records and Reports:

- Faculty files provide evidence of faculty qualifications, responsibilities, and 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

October 31, 2016

Poldi Tschirch, PhD, RN, CNE, Dean  
Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program  
University of St. Thomas  
3800 Montrose  
Houston, TX 77006-4626

Dear Dr. Tschirch:

At the October 27-28, 2016 meeting, members of the Texas Board of Nursing considered the report of the August 25, 2016 survey visit to the University of St. Thomas Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Education Program in Houston, Texas. It was the decision of the Board to accept the report of the survey visit.

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: Dr. Robert Ivany, President