I. INTRODUCTION

MISSION

The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) supports the interests of nursing education, nursing practice, and the public by the functions of accreditation. Accreditation is a voluntary, self-regulatory process by which non-governmental associations recognize educational institutions or programs that have been found to meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality. Accreditation also assists in the further improvement of the institutions or programs as related to resources invested, processes followed, and results achieved. The monitoring of certificate, diploma, and degree offerings is tied closely to state examination and licensing rules, and to the oversight of preparation for work in the profession.

PURPOSE

To provide specialized accreditation of nursing education programs, both post-secondary and higher degree, which offer either a certificate, a diploma, or a recognized professional degree (Master’s, Baccalaureate, Associate, Diploma, and Practical Nursing).

GOALS

- Promulgate a common core of standards and criteria for the accreditation of nursing programs.
- Strengthen educational quality through assistance to associated programs and schools, and evaluation processes, functions, publications, and research.
- Advocate self-regulation in nursing education.
- Promote peer review.
- Foster educational equity, access, opportunity, mobility, and preparation for employment based upon type of nursing education.
- Serve as gatekeeper to Title IV-HEA programs for which NLNAC is the accrediting agency. These include some practical nursing and all hospital diploma programs eligible to participate in programs administered by the DOE or other federal agencies.
RECOGNITION

The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission is recognized as the accrediting body for all types of nursing education programs by:

- U.S. Department of Education (USDOE)
- U.S. Uniformed Nursing Services (USUNS)
- Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veteran Affairs (VHA)
- National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN)
- State Boards of Nurse Examiners (SBNE)
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
- Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Health Professions, Division of Nursing (USHHS)
- Employers

Regional and specialized accreditors that provide oversight in regard to federal funding eligibility must be reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that the accrediting body meets specific standards established by Congress. The U.S. Secretary of Education is charged with review of accrediting bodies and providing recognition to those accrediting agencies that meet the Secretary’s criteria. Students in institutions or programs accredited by a USDOE recognized agency are eligible for federal financial aid assistance and other needed resources. NLNAC also meets the recognition standards of The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA, a non-governmental organization, recognizes regional, specialized, national, and professional accrediting bodies to ensure quality, accountability, and improvement in higher education.
BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION

NLNAC accreditation, is a voluntary peer review process to enhance quality improvement in nursing education. Accreditation:

- Provides recognition that a program or school has been evaluated and periodically re-evaluated by a qualified, independent group of respected and competent peers who have found it to be meeting appropriate post-secondary, baccalaureate and higher educational purposes in a satisfactory manner.

- Assures professional development opportunity and validation for faculty.

- Is a gateway to licensure and eligibility for entitlement programs.

- Identifies areas needing development.

- Fosters on-going, self-examination, re-evaluation, and focus on the future.

- Aids in student recruitment and retention.

- Assists employers seeking graduates who are competent practitioners.

- Facilitates career and education decision making.

- Promotes professional and educational mobility of program graduates.

- Enables student eligibility for funding support from federal and state agencies, and foundations for those programs that do not have regional accreditation.
PHILOSOPHY OF ACCREDITATION

The NLNAC accreditation program is founded on the belief that specialized accreditation contributes to the centrality of nursing for the public good and provides for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality through continuous self assessment, planning, and improvement. Accreditation indicates to the general public and to the educational community that a nursing program has clear and appropriate educational objectives and is working to achieve these objectives. Emphasis is placed upon the total nursing program and its compliance with established standards and criteria in the context of current and future practice.

Accrediting agencies share responsibility with practitioners and faculty for the development of accreditation standards, criteria, policies and procedures for participation in accreditation, and for review of accreditation processes and changing them as needed.

NLNAC supports the continuation and strengthening of voluntary specialized accreditation by peers as a principal means of public accountability and ongoing improvement. Specialized accreditation sets standards for programs and insures, through the self-study process and accreditation review, the promotion of effective education and program improvement. Since the nursing education unit analysis is closely related to the institution itself, NLNAC activities will, when possible, be coordinated with other officially recognized regional and specialized accrediting bodies.

Standards and criteria for accreditation, indicators that document compliance, and policies and procedures are based on principles widely accepted and tested in general and professional education. All those involved in the process must be aware of current developments in education and nursing; the effectiveness of the current standards, criteria, policies, and procedures; and to the evidence of need for change. A systematic ongoing review of all components of the accreditation process is essential to ensure an up-to-date, reliable, and valid accrediting process.
HISTORY OF NURSING ACCREDITATION

1893 The American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, forerunner of the National League for Nursing, was founded for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a universal standard of training for nurses.

1917 National League of Nursing Education published *Standard Curriculum for Schools of Nursing*.

1920 Accrediting activities in nursing education were begun by many different organizations.

1937 National League of Nursing Education published *A Curriculum Guide for Schools of Nursing*, the last of its type by the organization.

1938 National League of Nursing Education initiated accreditation for programs of nursing education for registered nursing.

1949 The formation of National Nursing Accrediting Service unifying accreditation activities in nursing. It was discontinued in 1952 when accreditation activities were consolidated under the National League for Nursing.

1952 The National Organization for Public Health Nursing and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Nursing merged with the National League of Nursing Education to form the National League for Nursing (NLN). Accreditation of nursing education became the function of the NLN Division of Nursing Education.

The U.S. Department of Education recognized the National League for Nursing and included it on the initial list of recognized accrediting agencies. NLN (later NLNAC), has been continually recognized by the U.S Department of Education since this date.

1958 The NLN Board of Directors established a policy charging each educational council with the responsibility for developing its own accreditation program. The program was conducted through the NLN three membership units: the Council of Baccalaureate and Higher Degree Programs; the Council of Diploma and Associate Degree Programs; (the Diploma and Associate Degree Programs separated into two councils in 1965), and the Council of Practical Nursing Programs (1966). The accreditation program and services were administered by NLN professional staff.

1964 A significant feature of the Nurse Training Act of 1964 was the public recognition it gave to national accreditation standards. Accreditation by NLN, or assurance of meeting accreditation standards within a reasonable time, was a condition of eligibility for funds dispensed under the act.

Federal funding for nursing education under the Nurse Training Act was contingent upon the compliance of schools of nursing with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

1977 Council on Post-secondary Accreditation (COPA) recognized the NLN Accreditation Program.

1991 Outcome criteria were incorporated into Standards and Criteria for all accredited programs.

1995 NLN Board of Governors approved the recommendation of the NLN Accreditation Committee to institute core standards and criteria.
HISTORY OF NURSING ACCREDITATION (continued)

1996  NLN Board of Governors approved establishment of an independent entity within in the organization to be known as the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC).

1997  January, the NLNAC began operations with sole authority and accountability for carrying out the responsibilities inherent in the accreditation processes.

      Fifteen Commissioners were appointed: nine nurse educators, three nursing service executives, and three public members. The Commissioners assumed responsibilities for the management, financial decisions, policy making, and general administration of the NLNAC.

      The peer review process was strengthened with the formation of program specific Evaluation Review Panels.

1998  NLNAC continued collaborative work with specialty organizations to strengthen application of standards for advanced practice nursing programs. Advanced practice nurses were invited to serve as program evaluators.

1999  January, the U.S. Department of Education Secretary renewed NLNAC recognition as a nationally recognized accrediting agency for nursing education.

2000  January, NLNAC received continuing recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

2001  NLNAC was incorporated as a subsidiary of the National League for Nursing.

2002  U.S. Department of Education renewed NLNAC recognition as a nationally recognized accrediting agency for nursing education.
PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Initial accreditation and continuing accreditation of approximately 200 nursing programs per year

- Continuous monitoring of approximately 1500 programs per year

- NLNAC Accreditation Manual

- NLNAC Interpretive Guidelines for Standards and Criteria by program type
  - Master’s Degree Programs in Nursing
  - Baccalaureate Degree Programs in Nursing
  - Associate Degree Programs in Nursing
  - Diploma Programs in Nursing
  - Practical Nursing Programs

- NLNAC Directory of Accredited Nursing Programs

- Forums
  - Self Study
  - Program Evaluator

- Consultation

- Annual Report and Analysis

- NLNAC website; www.nlnac.org
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCREDITATION

Board of Commissioners

Volunteer Peer Reviewers
Site Visitors
Evaluation Review Panelists
Appeal Panelists

Professional Staff

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Ext.</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Barbara Grumet, JD</td>
<td>451</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bgrumet@nlnac.org">bgrumet@nlnac.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Director</td>
<td>Carol Gilbert, PhD, RN</td>
<td>407</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cgilbert@nlnac.org">cgilbert@nlnac.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Administrative Staff

Administrator for Finance & Operations
Ricki DeSantis 362 rdesantis@nlnac.org

Accounting & Information Systems Manager
Joe Luis Ortiz 493 jortiz@nlnac.org

Support Staff

Special Assistant
Anthony Bugay 261 abugay@nlnac.org

Special Assistant
Alex Mariquit 247 amariquit@nlnac.org

Administrative Assistant
Dolores Caggiano 253 dcaggiano@nlnac.org

Administrative Assistant
Yvonne Lopez 409 ylopez@nlnac.org

Administrative Assistant
Michael Philips 114 mphilip@nlnac.org