III. ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR ACADEMIC QUALITY OF POST-SECONDARY AND HIGHER DEGREE PROGRAMS IN NURSING

A. NLNAC Definition of Quality

The core values of accreditation emphasize learning, community, responsibility, integrity, value, quality, and continuous improvement through reflection and analysis. They require that the nursing program measures itself by exacting standards, honors high aspiration and achievement, and expects all persons associated with the program to recognize its responsibility to provide a supportive and humane environment in which people interact with each other in a spirit of cooperation, openness, and mutual respect.

Accreditation standards are agreed upon rules to measure quantity, extent, value, and quality. Criteria are statements, which identify the variables that need to be examined in evaluation of a standard. NLNAC criteria are presented to peer reviewers as statements that represent an accurate description of an accredited program.

Peer review is a long established and effective component of program evaluation in education settings. In education, peer review is used to help determine which programs to accredit. Peer reviewers know the current thinking in the various program types, the curriculum rules and conventions and are trained to identify program compliance with standards and criteria.

Program specific expertise is preserved at the point of criteria documentation, program evaluation conducted by peers from like programs at the time of the site visit, during evaluation review panel deliberations, and upon appeal.

Quality in education ensures high levels of opportunity for student learning and student achievement. Accreditation is an affirmation of certain values central to thinking about post-secondary and higher education – appropriate mission, organization structures, processes, functions, and resources aligned with core values and each other, collegiality, and continuous self-improvement.

NLNAC accredits all types of nursing education programs in a variety of postsecondary and higher education settings including vocational-technical agencies, community colleges, hospitals, proprietary schools, professional schools, seminaries, colleges and universities, and other institutions which offer diplomas, certificates, and/or academic degrees.
B. NLNAC Accreditation Standards:

I. Mission/Governance
There are clear and publicly stated mission and/or philosophy and purposes appropriate to post-secondary or higher education in nursing.

II. Faculty
There are qualified and credentialed faculty, appropriate to accomplish the nursing education unit purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.

III. Students
The teaching and learning environment is conducive to student academic achievement.

IV. Curriculum and Instruction
The curriculum is designed to accomplish its educational and related purposes.

V. Resources
Resources are sufficient to accomplish the nursing education unit purposes.

VI. Integrity
Integrity is evident in the practices and relationships of the nursing education unit.

VII. Educational Effectiveness
There is an identified plan for systematic evaluation including assessment of student academic achievement.

C. Understanding standards and criteria in the evaluation of nursing education programs.

- The singular function of nursing is the improvement of the human condition. Each certificate, diploma, or degree has an identifiable, discrete set of specific outcomes. Post-secondary and higher education provide for the development of the learner’s ability to think for oneself, to master analytical problem solving, to apply scientific knowledge, and to make value judgments within the context of the specific program type. Thus, education requires a broad academic orientation, and depth and breadth of intellectual skills translated into competencies so as to fulfill nursing’s function in all types of nursing from practical nursing through advanced practice nursing at the master’s level.

- **Standards:** agreed upon rules for the measurement of quantity, extent, value, and quality

- **Criteria:** statements which identify the variables that need to be examined in evaluation of a standard
## D. STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

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| **I. MISSION & GOVERNANCE** | 1. Mission and/or philosophy of the nursing education unit is congruent with that of the governing organization, or differences are justified by the nursing education unit purposes.  
2. Faculty, administrators, and students participate in governance as defined by the parent organization and the nursing education unit.  
3. Nursing education unit is administered by a nurse who is academically and experientially qualified, and who has authority and responsibility for development and administration of the program.  
4. Policies of the nursing education unit are consistent with those of the governing organization, or differences are justified by nursing education purposes. |
| **II. FACULTY** | 5. Faculty members (full- and part-time) are academically and experientially qualified, and maintain expertise in their areas of responsibility.  
6. Number and utilization of full- and part-time faculty meet the needs of the nursing education unit to fulfill its purposes.  
7. Faculty performance is periodically evaluated to assure ongoing development and competence.  
8. The collective talents of the faculty reflect scholarship through teaching, application, and the integration and discovery of knowledge as defined by the institution and the nursing education unit. |
| **III. STUDENTS** | 9. Student policies of the nursing education unit are congruent with those of the governing organization, publicly accessible, non-discriminatory, and consistently applied; differences are justified by the nursing education unit purposes.  
10. Students have access to support services administered by qualified individuals that include, but are not limited to: health, counseling, academic advisement, career placement, and financial aid.  
11. Policies concerned with educational and financial records are established and followed. |

There are clear and publicly stated mission and/or philosophy and purposes appropriate to postsecondary or higher education in nursing.

There are qualified and credentialed faculty, appropriate to accomplish the nursing education unit purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.

The teaching and learning environment is conducive to student academic achievement.
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| **IV. CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION**<br>The curriculum is designed to accomplish its educational and related purposes. | 12. Curriculum developed by nursing faculty flows from the nursing education unit philosophy/mission through an organizing framework into a logical progression of course outcomes and learning activities to achieve desired program objectives/outcomes.  
13. Program design provides opportunity for students to achieve program objectives and acquire knowledge, skills, values, and competencies necessary for nursing practice.  
14. Practice learning environments are selected and monitored by faculty and provide opportunities for a variety of learning options appropriate for contemporary nursing. |
| **V. RESOURCES**<br>Resources are sufficient to accomplish the nursing education unit purposes. | 15. Fiscal resources are sufficient to support the nursing education unit purposes commensurate with the resources of the governing organization.  
16. Program support services are sufficient for the operation of the nursing education unit.  
17. Learning resources are comprehensive, current, developed with nursing faculty input, and accessible to faculty and students.  
18. Physical facilities are appropriate to support the purposes of the nursing education unit. |
| **VI. INTEGRITY**<br>Integrity is evident in the practices and relationships of the nursing education unit. | 19. Information about the program intended to inform the general public, prospective students, current students, employers and other interested parties, is current, accurate, clear, and consistent.  
20. Complaints about the program are addressed and records are maintained and available for review.  
21. Compliance with Higher Education Reauthorization Act Title IV eligibility and certification requirements is maintained. |
| **VII. EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**<br>There is an identified plan for systematic evaluation including assessment of student academic achievement. | 22. There is a written plan for systematic program evaluation that is used for continuous program improvement.  
23. Student academic achievement by program type is evaluated by: graduation rates, licensure/certification pass rates, job placement rates, and program satisfaction. |
PLANNING FOR SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM EVALUATION INCLUDING ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT TO DETERMINE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND TO IMPROVE PROGRAM QUALITY

Principles

- Systematic program evaluation involves the process of determining whether the various parts and the entire program are in fact, achieving its mission, goals, objectives, and outcomes.
- Multiple indicators are used to determine program effectiveness in the preparation of competent practitioners.
- A central concern of accreditation is that the evaluation and assessment processes be directed toward achievement of program goals and result in program improvement on an ongoing basis.
- Programs develop overall evaluation plans unique to their own needs and interests as a means of coordinating outcomes with goals and objectives. They must select methods of assessment to generate data relevant to their individual outcomes and establish levels of achievement, and use the results of the evaluation findings for improving program quality.
- Program goals and objectives should be evaluated in terms of:
  - educational appropriateness
  - relevance to constituent needs
  - expectations of practitioners in the field
  - relation to the program mission
  - relevance to the expectations and responsibilities to the publics that nursing aims to serve.

NLNAC does not mandate specific evaluation techniques, procedures or use of specific instruments for outcomes assessment by programs. NLNAC encourages programs to select assessment methods that are based upon the evaluation question being addressed within the context of their own evaluation.

Program evaluation in this framework facilitates program revision and improvement, supports decisions regarding about curriculum change, enhancement of approaches to teaching, changing clinical teaching sites, and finding new role models. It also allows the faculty and staff to address student perceptions about inconsistencies among what the faculty teach, what students see in actual practice, and what workplace requirements exist. Furthermore, it encourages program self-examination as well as auditing of what occurs.
### Elements for Systematic Program Evaluation
Including Assessment of Student Academic Achievement

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<th>Activity</th>
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<td><strong>The Plan:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Component</td>
<td>Identify specific components within Standards and Criteria</td>
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<td>Levels of Achievement</td>
<td>Define expected levels of achievement for each component</td>
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<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Establish time frames for assessment of all plan components</td>
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<td>Assessment Methods</td>
<td>Select and/or develop procedures, and/or instruments/tools to measure each component</td>
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<td><strong>Implementation of the Plan:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Results of Data Collection &amp; Analysis</td>
<td>Data collected as prescribed</td>
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<td>Data aggregated and analyzed</td>
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<td>Data trended</td>
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<td>Verification that evaluation findings are used in decision making for program development, revision, and maintenance</td>
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