

SHARON J. TANNER, EDD, RN, NLNAC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

NLNAC receives a number of questions by phone and email. The questions presented here are typical of those received.

QUESTION Our nursing program is scheduled for a site visit for continuing accreditation during the Fall Cycle next year. I was a faculty member at the time of the last site visit (seven years ago), and the faculty developed the Self-Study Report over a 10- to 12-month period; we divided into subcommittees based on NLNAC Standards. The administrators recently announced that an external consultant has been hired by the college to write the current Self-Study Report (SSR), and faculty will not be participating, except to review the final draft. This is a concern to us as the report will have limited input from faculty and will be written by someone who is not familiar with our program. Is this the best way to prepare the SSR? Does the NLNAC encourage this practice?

ANSWER Having an external consultant develop the SSR is contrary to a fundamental principle of accreditation — self-review. It is the NLNAC's intent that faculty be integrally involved in the program's self-review process and analysis that result in the Self-Study Report. As stated at the Self-Study Forums and in NLNAC materials, the process should be faculty driven. Accreditation encourages continuous program improvement, and the intent is that through review of the program, faculty and administrators will be engaged in data analysis and reflection, such that program strengths and areas needing improvement will be identified. It is unclear how the program would be improved through a process such as you describe, where an external consultant develops the SSR; most likely, the report will lack the richness and depth of a faculty-developed report. If there is a concern about lack of faculty experience for the process, Self-Study Forums are available to provide faculty with the professional development required. If the issue is one of faculty workload, particularly if faculty are working heavy overloads, this may be an area needing development for the program. Most nursing programs include accreditation-related activities as part of the normal faculty workload as the data analysis and program review process tend to strengthen the program. When accreditation processes are conducted in an ongoing manner through the effective use of a systematic evaluation plan, the SSR can be written without undue burden on faculty.

QUESTION The nursing faculty have been working to update our programmatic systematic evaluation plan. We have incorporated all of our student learning outcomes, program outcomes, and 2008 NLNAC Standards as required. In reviewing the expected levels of achievement that we previously used, a nursing program in our area suggested that we revise the levels

such that all would reflect faculty agreement in place of the goals that we currently use. Is this a change that you would recommend for us?

ANSWER In order for the evaluation plan to be used effectively, expected levels of achievement or goals that the faculty set must be measurable. It is not necessary to measure Criteria such as those that state simply that congruency exists, as with the philosophy statements for the program and governing organization. However, the majority of program components that will be included in your plan require a specific and measurable expected level of achievement. You cannot determine if you have met goals for program outcomes, such as licensure and certification pass rates, program completion, placement, or student learning outcomes, with an expected level of achievement of faculty agreement. Please remember that in order for the assessment to truly determine success, faculty should set reasonable goals and strive to meet them. Stating that faculty agree is not an effective or measurable means to determine if goals have been achieved.

QUESTION Our baccalaureate program recently received a sizable state grant to increase enrollment in the degree completion option. The grant would allow us to double our enrollment next year. Should this be reported to NLNAC?

ANSWER Yes, an enrollment increase of more than 25 percent in the program is considered a substantive change according to Policy #14, Reporting Substantive Changes, and must be reported. Please refer to this policy within the *NLNAC Accreditation Manual* for additional guidance as to the required timelines and documentation.

QUESTION As a nurse administrator, I would like to nominate one of our experienced faculty to serve as a program evaluator. How would I do so?

ANSWER We encourage you to support one or more of your faculty members or administrators to serve as volunteer peer evaluators. The nomination form is available online at the NLNAC website www.nlnac.org. Each year, we select new educators and clinicians to serve in this vital role based on their experience and expertise with a program type. We seek evaluators from each program type and also from all geographical areas; candidates are invited to attend the Program Evaluator Forum. Serving as a site visitor offers invaluable opportunities to learn about other educational programs as well as opportunities for networking with colleagues and professional development. I congratulate you on your willingness to support a faculty member in this important role. 