

## GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

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### PURPOSE

This guide provides the program with an examination of the Standards and Criteria offering explanations and suggestions regarding the effective preparation of the Self-Study Report.

### FORMAT

The guide is divided into two sections.

- Structure and Format of the Self-Study Report
  - Addressing the Standards and Criteria
    - Essential Elements
    - Focus Questions
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## OVERVIEW

### Planning for Accreditation

Nursing education units seeking initial accreditation should contact the NLNAC to begin the Candidacy process. As part of this process, nursing education units will be assigned a member of the professional staff as their mentor. The mentoring service is provided to facilitate faculty self-review and planning. The faculty of the program and administrative officers of the governing organization determine when the program is ready to apply for Candidacy and initial evaluation. The decision should be based on an in-depth self-study of the program in relation to the NLNAC Accreditation Standards and Criteria. When the NLNAC Commission grants accreditation to a program, all students who graduated during or after the accreditation cycle\* during which the site visit was performed will be recognized as graduates of an accredited nursing program.

\* *Fall Cycle - July1 to December31*  
*Spring Cycle - January1 to June 3*

### Self-Study

Any program seeking initial or continuing accreditation must undergo self-review and evaluation and prepare a Self-Study Report to demonstrate the extent to which the program meets the NLNAC Accreditation Standards and Criteria.

The process of self-study represents the combined effort of the governing organization administrators, nursing education unit administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other individuals concerned with the nursing program. All those associated with the program should participate in the self-study process. Broad participation leads to an understanding of the total program.

### Self-Study Report

The Self-Study Report is the primary document used by the site visit team, the Evaluation Review Panels, and the Board of Commissioners to understand the nursing program.

- The report must be based upon the NLNAC Accreditation Standards and Criteria in effect at the time of the review and the most recent edition of the NLNAC Accreditation Manual available online. Accreditation Standards and Criteria become effective on the Commission approval date. Programs scheduled for review within twelve months of revision of the Standards and Criteria may elect to use the current or the former version of the Standards and Criteria.
- Faculty and administrators are responsible for presenting evidence that clearly indicates how the NLNAC Accreditation Standards and Criteria are being met. Members of the site visit team will use the Self-Study Report in preparation for their visit to the program.

## **Submitting the Self-Study Report**

The program will submit copies of its Self-Study Report and catalog to the NLNAC and each member of the site visit team.

### To the NLNAC:

- Three (3) paper copies of the Self-Study Report;
- Six (6) electronic (USB flash drive) copies of the Self-Study Report;
- Six (6) electronic (USB flash drive) copies of the current Catalog; and
- One (1) paper copy of the Executive Summary (first-section of the Self-Study Report) in a separate unbound folder.

*If the nursing education unit is having a multiple program visit, a complete set (6) of the items listed above should be sent for each program being reviewed.*

All copies for the NLNAC are to be sent to:

National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission  
3343 Peachtree Road NE, Suite 850  
Atlanta, GA 30326

The **materials must be received in the NLNAC office in Atlanta no less than six weeks prior to the scheduled date of the site visit.** The Self-Study Reports and Catalogs become the property of the NLNAC.

### To Each Member of the Site Visit Team:

- One (1) paper copy of the Self-Study Report;
- One (1) electronic (USB flash drive) copy of the Self-Study Report; and
- One (1) copy (USB flash drive) of the current catalog.

*The materials should be shipped/mailed to each member of the site visit team; items must be received by the team members no less than six weeks prior to the scheduled date of the site visit.*

## STRUCTURE AND FORMAT OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT

The Self-Study Report is written by the members of nursing education unit using the current version of the NLNAC Accreditation Standards and Criteria. The self-study document must include program history, context, and self-evaluation related to the Standards and Criteria as well as program plans for future development and improvement. Program specific Standards and Criteria and a Glossary can be found in the *NLNAC Accreditation Manual* available online.

There are four sections to the Self-Study Report:

- **Section One:** Executive Summary
- **Section Two:** Standards 1-5
  - Standard 1 Mission and Administrative Capacity
  - Standard 2 Faculty and Staff
  - Standard 3 Students
  - Standard 4 Curriculum
  - Standard 5 Resources
- **Section Three:** Standard 6 Outcomes
- **Section Four:** Appendix

### Section One: Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is a brief (10-15 pages) presentation of the nursing education unit including a description of how the nursing program fits within the governing organization and the extent to which it is in compliance with the NLNAC Accreditation Standards and Criteria. In addition to offering basic demographic information about the nursing education unit and the governing organization, the summary offers information describing the relationship between the nursing program and its institution and community. In addition, key evidence demonstrating how the program is in compliance with each of the Standards for accreditation should be presented in summary form. Finally, an analysis of the nursing education unit's strengths and areas needing development as identified through the self-evaluation should be included.

#### Content

- General Information:  
Program type(s) being reviewed, purpose(s) and dates of the visit; name and address of the governing organization; name, credentials, and title of the chief executive officer of the governing organization; name of the governing organization's accrediting body and accreditation status (date of last review and action); name and address of the nursing education unit; name, credentials, and title of the nurse administrator of the nursing education unit; telephone, fax number, and email address of the nurse administrator; name of the State Board of Nursing and approval status (date of last review and action); the NLNAC Accreditation Standards and Criteria used to prepare the Self-Study Report.
- Introduction:  
Overview of the nursing program in context by describing how it fits within the nursing education unit (if more than one program is offered) and how the nursing education unit fits within the governing organization and community; student population (number of full-

time and part-time students by program type); and faculty cohort (number of full-time and part-time by program type).

- **History of the Nursing Education Unit:**  
Year nursing program(s) was/were established; length of program(s) in credits and time; history of the nursing education unit; NLNAC accreditation history (include date of initial accreditation); clarification of differentiated education where more than one type of nursing program is offered; number of campuses or locations offering the nursing program(s) and distance education offerings (if applicable); other nursing accreditation (e.g. Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthetists, the American College of Nurse-Midwives Division of Accreditation).
- **Summary of Standards and Criteria:**  
Overview reflecting the major findings that demonstrate program compliance with each Standard.
- **Analysis and Summary of Strengths and Areas Needing Development:**  
Conclusions with a concise listing of significant strengths, areas needing development, and future plans.

## **Section Two: Standards 1-5**

Section Two provides the opportunity for the nursing education unit to demonstrate the extent to which the program being reviewed is in compliance with the Standards 1-5: Mission and Administrative Capacity, Faculty and Staff, Students, Curriculum, and Resources.

The narrative presentation should be clear and succinct. Tables, graphs, and/or presentations of sections of the nursing education unit's evaluation plan may also be used as a means to simplify and organize information to demonstrate trends and changes over time.

Nursing education units submitting one Self-Study Report for a multiple program visit are expected to address each program type offered, beginning with the basic program and progressing to the most advanced program, demonstrating the extent to which each is meeting the Standards and Criteria.

## **Section Three: Standard 6**

This section is a presentation of the nursing education unit's plan for systematic evaluation of the unit and the results of the ongoing assessment including the assessment of program and student learning outcomes and the NLNAC Standards. Please note that the plan should be included in its entirety in the SSR either in this section or as an appendix. In addition to the presentation of the plan, the narrative should address how the finding related to all the Standards have been used for program maintenance, revision, and development.

## **Section Four: Appendix**

The Appendix is for supplemental materials that support information discussed within the body of Self-Study Report.

## FORMAT

### Binding:

The Self-Study Report must be securely bound, but the program may decide the format of the binding. Accepted binding types include, but are not limited to, three-ring binders, comb binding, spiral binding, or perfect binding.

### Length:

- Single program = 200 pages
- Multiple program = 300 pages

Please note that the above page limits are inclusive of the narrative for all Standards and all appendices except the evaluation plan.

### Margins:

- Margins should be at least one inch on all sides; the method of binding may require more.

### Pagination:

- The pages of the Report must number consecutively starting with the Executive Summary through the last page of the Appendix.

### Page Set-Up:

- Front to Back or
- One-sided

### Directions for Electronic Copies:

- The Self-Study Report must be in a single file/document. This one file/document should include the narrative for all Standards and any appendices in the order that they would appear in a paper copy.
- The preferred file formats are Portable Document Format (PDF) or Microsoft Word (2003 version or later).
- The Self-Study Report and Catalog must both be included on a single USB flash drive. (See the guidelines for the number of flash drives to include.)

## **ADDRESSING THE STANDARDS AND CRITERIA**

### **ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS**

The Essential Elements are supporting materials that may be used as guides to facilitate the development of the Self-Study Report. The Essential Elements are used in your presentation to demonstrate that each Criterion in each Standard has been met. As an example in Standard 1 Mission and Administrative Capacity, Criterion 1.1 addresses the congruence of the mission/philosophy of the nursing program with that of the governing organization. In the list of Essential Elements, you will note that both the mission/philosophy of the governing organization and nursing program are mentioned as materials that should be included in the presentation. In addressing this Criterion, you may choose to utilize a side-by-side chart or table to demonstrate that the two mission/philosophy statements have common components or key concepts as a method of easily conveying the congruence between the governing organization and nursing program.

Please keep in mind that the actual materials identified as Essential Elements may be used in any of three ways: as part of the narrative in the Self-Study Report; and/or placed in the Appendix as a supporting document to the narrative; and/or cited in the narrative and placed in the documents prepared for review during the onsite visit. As the author, you will decide how to best utilize the Elements listed to convey compliance of your program with the Standards and Criteria.

It is helpful to reviewers if you cite specifics related to supporting documents; for example, you would cite both the title and page number of the Student or Faculty Handbook when referring to information related to policies or procedures contained within these materials. In addition, it is recommended that you list specific website information within the narrative for any documents or supporting materials that are available to reviewers through the governing organization or nursing program's website. Accurate webpage addresses are recommended as citations within the body of the report as well as ensuring access to the site visitors both prior to and during the onsite visit.

Additionally, please note that it is not uncommon to use a selected portion of a document in the Self-Study Report such as the mission statement, policy for faculty evaluation, definition for the faculty scholarship, etc. while onsite you may have the full document available for review by the site visitors during the accreditation visit.

While the Essential Elements are intended to be a helpful guide to the development of the Self-Study Report, they are not all inclusive. As each nursing education unit is unique, you may wish to include items not identified in the listing and should feel free to do so.

### **FOCUS QUESTIONS**

The Focus Questions are statements intended to facilitate the faculty's review of the Self-Study Report. Once the narrative is complete, you may utilize the Focus Questions to assist you in determining clarity and completeness of the Report. If you can easily answer the questions by reading the narrative, you have most likely addressed the Standard.

## Standard 1 Mission and Administrative Capacity

### Essential Elements

- Mission statement of the governing organization
- Mission/Philosophy of the nursing education unit
- Outcomes of the nursing education unit
- Governing organization chart
- Nursing unit organization chart
- Listings of participation of faculty and students in governance (Committees/Task Forces/Workgroups of the governing organization and nursing education unit)
- Evidence of the participation of Communities of Interest
- Partnership agreements (description of partnerships; contracts; grants, etc.)
- Credentials (academic and experiential) of the nurse administrator (CV/Resume; Transcripts; Position description)
- Faculty Handbook
- Policies and procedures for the governing organization and nursing education unit (Manuals, Website links, etc.)
- Accrediting agency report for the governing organization and decision verification; state board of nursing documents
- Compliant/Grievance policies and records for the nursing education unit
- Distance education information (type of distance education offerings, approvals, etc.)

### Focus Questions

- Does the nursing education unit's mission/philosophy demonstrate congruence with that of the governing organization?
- Do the organizational structures of the governing organization and nursing education unit provide for participation by faculty and students in governance processes? Is there evidence of participation by faculty and students?
- Do the communities of interest participate in the program processes? If so, how?
- What partnerships does the nursing program participate in? How do they benefit the program? The students?
- Does the nurse administrator have responsibility and authority for the nursing unit? How is this demonstrated? Is the nurse administrator qualified for the position? Does the nurse administrator have adequate time to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the role?
- How does the budget process work? How is equity between educational units demonstrated?
- Are the nursing faculty governed as other faculty? If there are differences, can they be justified by the purposes of the nursing education unit?
- How are complaints/grievances handled? Do records show evidence of resolution?
- How does distance education fit within the mission and purposes of the program? Of the governing organization? How is distance education utilized?

## Standard 2 Faculty and Staff

In addressing Standard 2, you must provide a listing of all faculty teaching (full- and part-time) in the nursing education unit at the time of the onsite visit. In order to assist you in compiling and reporting this information, a [sample table](#) has been provided.

As an example of how the Essential Elements may be used in this Standard's Criterion 2.7 addresses the orientation and mentoring of the faculty. You may choose to report this information by listing the various activities that new faculty are engaged in as they learn their roles in the classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings. The activities may be a combination of those offered by the nursing education unit, the governing organization, and the clinical affiliations. In terms of mentoring, you may write a narrative presentation about the ways faculty are mentored in their roles.

### Essential Elements

- Faculty Table including credentials and responsibilities in the nursing education unit
- Faculty, lab personnel, and staff academic and experiential credentials (CVs, transcripts, etc.)
- Evidence of maintenance of faculty expertise
- Evidence of compliance with the requirements of the state and governing organization for all faculty and staff
- Position/Job Descriptions for faculty, lab personnel, and staff
- Documentation of faculty-to-student ratios in class, labs, and clinicals
- Faculty workload documentation including teaching, advising, committee work, and other responsibilities
- Evidence of scholarly activities as defined by the nursing education unit for faculty including distance education development (if utilized)
- Documentation of evaluation for faculty and staff
- Policies for evaluation processes
- Evidence of orientation and mentoring processes for faculty and staff

### Focus Questions

- Are the faculty, staff, and lab personnel qualified for their positions?
- Are there enough faculty and staff to accomplish the program goals and outcomes?
- Is there ongoing review of faculty, lab personnel, and staff?
- Do the faculty participate in scholarly activities? Do they maintain expertise?
- What evidences are there that faculty receive orientation and mentoring?
- Is there adequate support and development for faculty utilizing distance education?

## FACULTY PROFILE TABLE

Faculty Profile										
Faculty Name	FT/PT	Date of Initial Appointment	Rank	Bachelor Degree (credential)	Institution Granting Degree	Graduate Degrees* (credential)	Institution Granting Degrees*	Areas of Clinical Expertise	Academic Teaching (T) and Other (O) Areas of Responsibility	
*****	*** **	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	T *****	O *****

\* = add doctoral degree after master's degree if applicable

## Standard 3 Students

When addressing Standard 3, you will be writing about the student policies of the nursing education unit. A straight-forward method of addressing policies that are both congruent and different would be to make a table listing the policies that are the same and then identifying the policies that vary with the rationale identified for each policy. A dissimilar category of policies would be those that vary due to requirements of the affiliating agencies that the program utilizes for student clinical experiences. Often, policies are available in student handbooks, which may be available in paper copies to be reviewed during the onsite visit or available online for which the online link can be specified within the narrative.

### Essential Elements

- Student policies (identified by source)
- Student Handbook (paper or online link)
- Listing of available student services (by location if more than one teaching site is utilized)
- Identification of student services available to students enrolled in courses offered by distance education
- Identification of student services personnel by areas of responsibility
- Evidence of compliance with Title IV regulations, FERPA, ADA, and other federal and state guidelines and regulations
- Evidence of currency, accuracy, clarity, completeness, and consistency of all program information (paper or electronic) including information related to distance education
- Evidence of communications to students (paper or electronic) related to policy changes
- Evidence of orientation to and support provided for technology utilized by students in classrooms, labs, and clinical areas

### Focus Questions

- Are policies for the nursing students accessible? Are policies congruent? If not congruent, are differences justified?
- Are support services appropriate, available, and accessible to all students?
- If the program is offered by more than one modality or in more than one location, are the support services offered comparable and accessible?
- Is the program and governing organization in compliance with policies related to records?
- Is the governing organization in compliance with Title IV regulations?
- Are student rights protected?
- Is information intended to inform the public current, accurate, clear, and consistent?
- Are program or policy changes clearly and consistently communicated to students?
- Are students oriented to campus and clinical technologies? Is technical support provided to students?
- Do you have an effective method for verifying student identification for those students enrolled in distance modalities?

## Standard 4 Curriculum

As you demonstrate compliance with Standard 4, you will be addressing the curriculum including its organization, presentation, and evaluation. As an example, a closer look at Criterion 4.3 may be helpful. Most likely, you have identified the student learning outcomes in Standard I. In the narrative for this Standard, you will describe how the learning outcomes have been used to guide the delivery of the courses within the curriculum and the selection of the learning activities that are incorporated into each course as well as the evaluation methodologies that the faculty and students are engaged in as the student progresses through the program. A suggestion would be to use a table format to link outcomes with delivery methods, learning activities, and evaluation methods along with a narrative describing the relationships among these important program elements. To support the Self-Study Report, you will want to gather several documents for the onsite visit including complete course materials. An organized presentation will be helpful to the site visitors in reviewing the materials.

### Essential Elements

- Curricular plan/design with courses and credits/hours specified
- Identification of the professional standards, guidelines, or competencies utilized to guide the curriculum
- Evidence of faculty review of the curriculum
- Student learning outcomes
- Program outcomes
- Evidence that diverse concepts, best practices, and national patient safety goals are incorporated into the curriculum
- Course materials including syllabi, evaluation methodologies, and learning activities
- Samples of student written work (papers, projects, assignments)
- Evidence that the curriculum reflects educational theory, interdisciplinary collaboration, and research
- Evidence that program length facilitates achievement of learning outcomes and is consistent with state and national standards. (NLNAC uses a 3:1 ratio of contact to credit hours for clinical experiences)
- Class and clinical schedules
- Clinical agency contracts and/or agreements
- Evaluation tools/methodologies for classes, clinicals, and labs
- Documentation of congruence of delivery method(s) and instructional processes

### Focus Questions

- Are professional standards, guidelines, or competencies used to guide the curricular design?
- Are the student learning outcomes used to organize the curriculum, guide delivery of courses, and direct learning activities?
- Are evaluation methodologies varied and appropriate to measure attainment of learning outcomes?
- Is there regular review of the curriculum for rigor and currency?

- Does the curriculum address best practices?
- Does the curriculum include diverse concepts and experiences?
- Does the program of study provide time for student to learn and achieve the outcomes?
- Are the clinical learning experiences appropriate for students to achieve the identified outcomes/competencies? Reflective of best practices and safety standards?
- Are the contracts for clinical experiences current and designed to protect students?
- Are the delivery methodologies congruent with the curricular design?

## **Standard 5 Resources**

As an example of addressing a Criterion within Standard 5, you will be presenting information about the currency, relevancy, and accessibility of the learning resources in Criterion 5.3. Since the collection of learning resources for the nursing education unit will be extensive, you will not be able to provide a complete listing in the Self-Study Report or the Appendix. However, you may prepare a listing for the onsite visitors to review. As an element of the narrative, you may address the process for selecting, acquiring, and reviewing the learning resources. Also, you will want to discuss the accessibility of the resources for all students inclusive of those in alternative delivery options as well as those taking courses at any location where the program is offered.

### Essential Elements

- Program budget including a comparison to similar units or departments
- Evidence of sufficiency of resources for faculty, students, and staff
- Identification and description of physical resources
- Listing of learning resources with evidence of comprehensiveness, currency, and accessibility including those available in library, learning centers, skills labs, simulation labs, and other resource areas
- Evidence of resource support of faculty and students utilizing distance education
- Evidence of fiscal, physical, and learning resource comparability if the program is offered at multiple locations

### Focus Questions

- Are there adequate resources to support the faculty and students in achieving identified student learning and program outcomes including those engaged in alternate methods of program delivery?
- Are resources comparable across all locations where the program is offered?

## Standard 6 Outcomes

As an example of addressing Criterion 6.2, you will be discussing the use of the findings from the various methods of assessment utilized by the faculty in determining the achievement of identified outcomes. The findings are essential to effective program decision-making processes by the faculty, which may include revisions or changes to various program components. You will want to give specific examples of decisions made by the faculty based on the findings in the narrative of the report and identify where the evidence of the use of data, analysis, and decisions can be found in program documents.

### Essential Elements

- Systematic Plan for Evaluation
- Data for the program outcomes (minimum of 3 years)
- Data for student learning outcomes (minimum of 3 years)
- Evidence that data are consistently utilized for decision making by the faculty for program improvements
- Evidence that findings are shared with communities of interest
- Evidence that graduates are achieving identified competencies/outcomes
- Documentation of comparability of outcomes across locations and methods of delivery

### Focus Questions

- Is there an effective working evaluation plan in place that has been developed and implemented by the faculty?
- Is there evidence of ongoing systematic assessment of the program in relation to the NLNAC Standards?
- Are the students achieving the learning outcomes? If not, what strategies have been implemented?
- Have graduates achieved the identified competencies?
- Are program outcomes being achieved? If not, what strategies have been implemented?
- Are there clearly documented evidences that findings have been used by faculty to make decisions leading to program improvements?
- Are the data addressing student learning outcomes aggregated by method of program delivery? By teaching location? Are the outcomes comparable?

## SYSTEMATIC PLAN FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

The nursing unit's systematic plan for program evaluation and assessment of outcomes must differentiate between all program types offered by the nursing unit where applicable. Such planning requires timelines; appropriate methods; expected levels of achievement; collection and analysis of data that is aggregated and trended over time; and verification that the findings are used for development, maintenance, and revision of the program

*Example of a table format to assist you in addressing Standard 6 of the NLNAC Standard and Criteria*

PROGRAM EVALUATION					
NLNAC Standard or Program Outcome or Student Learning Outcome					
PLAN				IMPLEMENTATION	
Component	Expected Level of Achievement (or program terminology)	Frequency of Assessment	Assessment Method/s*	Results of Data Collection and Analysis <sup>+</sup> Including actual level/s of achievement	Actions for Program Development, Maintenance, or Revision

\* The appropriateness of an assessment method is based on whether its application yields data which when analyzed determine whether the expected level of achievement for the component being evaluated has or has not been met. It should be noted a tool is not always necessary to 'collect' data. The nursing unit should select assessment method(s) appropriate to the identified component being evaluated. Examples of components are NLNAC Standards, Program Outcomes (required and/or identified by the nursing unit), and Student Learning Outcomes.

+ If the program is offered at multiple locations, report data for each location and also in aggregate for the program

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES SUMMARY TABLE

Example of a table format to assist you in addressing a portion of Standard 6.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES SUMMARY				
Required Program Outcomes	Expected Level of Achievement*  (or program's terminology)	Actual Level of Achievement <sup>+</sup>	Resulting Action(s) Taken/To be Taken With Time Frame for Implementation	
			Action(s)	Time Frame
Performance on NCLEX and/or Certifying Examinations	**			
Program Completion				
Program Satisfaction				
· Graduate Satisfaction				
· Employer Satisfaction				
Job Placement				
Other outcome(s); identified by program (optional – not required by NLNAC)				

\* Defined by the program

\*\* Minimum must equal the national mean

+ If the program is offered at multiple locations, report data for each location and also in aggregate for the program