

**TO:** Mike Mahon  
President

**DATE:** November 29, 2011

**FROM:** Bob Boudreau  
Chair, University Review Committee

**RE:** NESA Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the University Review Committee approved the review of the Nursing Education in Southwestern Alberta (NESA) Bachelor of Nursing program results at its October 6, 2011 meeting. The NESA quality assurance review produced four documents:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Nursing Education in Southwestern Alberta (NESA) – BN Programs: Self-Study Report for the Quality Assurance Review* (March 2011) – self-study report drafted by the NESA Program Review Committee.
2. *Nursing Education in Southwestern Alberta (NESA) – BN Programs, Lethbridge College & University of Lethbridge: External Review Report* (May 18, 2011) – prepared by external reviewers Dean Care (Brandon University) and Joanne Profetto-McGrath (University of Alberta).
3. *Nursing Education in Southwestern Alberta (NESA) – BN Programs, Lethbridge College & University of Lethbridge: Program Response to the External Review Report* (August 9, 2011) – the response of the NESA Program Review Committee to the external review.
4. *Nursing Education in Southwestern Alberta (NESA) BN Programs – Faculty of Health Sciences in collaboration with Lethbridge College: Dean's Report to the University Review Committee* (September 26, 2011) – response to the review, written by Chris Hosgood, Dean of Health Sciences. Chris Hosgood presented the results of the review to the University Review Committee on October 6, 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> All documents are available upon request.

The self-study summarized strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities for the NESA collaborative program itself, for Lethbridge College, and for the University of Lethbridge:<sup>2</sup>

**For the NESA B.N. Programs –**

- Strengths:*
- High demand for the programs.
  - Students have access to services from both campuses.
  - Students are involved in the governance structure of the programs.
  - GLER provides diverse course options.
  - A “high functioning, centralized clinical placement process.”
  - Professional development activities.
  - Cross-teaching between the college and university.
  - Program delivery and simulation labs at both the college and university campuses.
  - An effective joint administration team.
  - “active participation in local, provincial, and national nursing organizations.”
  - In 2009 the four-year B.N. received Nursing Education Program Approval Board five-year approval.
- Weaknesses:*
- The two-semester year at Lethbridge College and three semesters at the U of L provides limited entry points for students that take a break from studies during years one and two.
  - Limited time for attending planning and committee meetings.
  - Overcrowded classrooms at Lethbridge College, due to increased student acceptance rates to allow for attrition.
  - No free electives, due to a highly-prescribed curriculum.
  - Inconsistent sharing of program evaluation information with students and faculty.
  - Communication challenges across sites.
- Challenges:*
- Increase student retention rates.
  - Increase recruitment and retention of preceptors.<sup>3</sup>
  - Develop a new curriculum.
  - Attract qualified faculty.
  - Develop a faculty orientation process that is coordinated between both campuses.
  - Funding models differ for both partners.
  - Fiscal constraints.
  - Administrative structures, policies, and priorities differ for both partners.
  - Increase collaboration and coordination of program delivery and simulation laboratories at the two sites.
  - Develop a plan for the transition to a new Chair of Nursing at Lethbridge College.
  - Continue to build relationships with Alberta Health Services and other partners in health care.
  - Understand Alberta’s political landscape and its impact on nursing education.

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<sup>2</sup> The NESA B.N. programs are a collaboration between Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge.

<sup>3</sup> A “preceptor” is an experienced, working Registered Nurse who helps a nursing student in a practice setting gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of a baccalaureate-prepared RN.

- Opportunities:*
- Increase enrolment.
  - Improve the database for tracking students.
  - Create more entry points into the program.
  - Expand rural health care delivery.
  - Expand distributed learning opportunities.
  - Get a mobile simulation laboratory.
  - Expand international student learning initiatives.
  - Complete curriculum review and renewal.
  - Explore a Practical Nurse to B.N. bridging program.
  - Use clinical practice sites during summer months to reduce demand intensity.
  - Develop a competency-based curriculum.
  - Mentor and support students and faculty.
  - Celebrate faculty and student successes.
  - Organize joint ventures with community partners.
  - Develop a strategic plan for the nursing programs.

**For Lethbridge College –**

- Strengths:*
- Competitive tuition rates.
  - “Retention alert” initiative to improve attrition rates.
  - SPHERE laboratory to provide simulation experiences.
  - Instructors whose primary focus is teaching and learning.
  - Current and well-supported professional development.
  - Best practices and pedagogical support through Educational Enhancement.
- Weaknesses:*
- Overcrowded classrooms.
  - Little flexibility in timetabling.
  - No Chair of Nursing or Theory Coordinator.
  - Lack of clarity for administrative roles like Course Leader and Clinical Teaching Development Coordinator.
  - Faculty members’ entry level of education is often less than a Master’s degree.
  - Limited release time for faculty to mentor new faculty.
  - Overreliance on hourly-paid faculty.
  - One administrative support position.
  - No shared computer drive.
- Challenges:*
- Private office space is limited, which affects confidentiality.
  - Hourly-paid faculty require extensive orientation and support.
  - Evaluation processes do not separate perceptions of the course and instructor.
  - Program delivery cost is high relative to other programs.
- Opportunities:*
- Recruit a new Chair of Nursing.
  - Design and construct new space for the program.

**For the U of L –**

- Strengths:*
- Full complement of qualified, full-time nursing faculty.
  - Some designated faculty with technological expertise.
  - Large number of male nursing faculty.
  - New facility – Markin Hall – with ample space and resources.
  - Funding for teaching duty release for instructors seeking Master’s preparation.
  - Faculty research accomplishments.
  - Effective administrative structure.
  - Dedicated student advisor.
  - Four administrative support personnel.
  - Excellent senior administration and community support.
  - Positive work environment.
- Weaknesses:*
- Small proportion of nursing faculty with doctoral degrees.
  - Faculty have limited access to graduate students due to an immature graduate program.
  - Many instructors lack the time to engage in scholarly research due to educational and teaching commitments.
  - Improved funding formula needed for reduced faculty teaching loads.
- Challenges:*
- Expanding opportunities for new faculty to do research.
  - Succession planning.
  - Effectively adopting new teaching and learning modalities and technologies.
  - Developing more graduate programming.

The self-study identified the key future directions for the NESA program. Top of the list was creating a new nursing curriculum. This will require the hiring of a curriculum specialist. The remaining key directions were:

- Continue work on nursing and faculty databases.
- Continue to develop methods of communicating with students and faculty.
- Implement new educational modalities and technologies.
- Created forums to celebrate faculty and student success.
- Continue to refine course and program evaluation processes.
- Develop coordinated orientation events for new faculty members.
- Continue to support faculty members in completing their graduate education.
- Continue to strengthen the collaboration with Lethbridge College.
- Succession planning.
- Continue to develop relationships with nursing education and health care service stakeholders, and boost recruitment and retention of preceptors.
- Develop a strategic plan for undergraduate baccalaureate nursing programs.

The external review commended the NESA administration and faculty for “their commitment to excellence in nursing education,” noting that the program is “top quality” and “meets or exceeds the recognized benchmarks established for nursing education.” The reviewers made 13 recommendations to further strengthen the program:

1. Plan a faculty retreat geared towards improving the current curriculum.
2. Revisit Problem Based Learning to decide if this teaching and learning philosophy still meets the needs of students.
3. Finalize strategic and operational plans that align with institutional strategic plans.
4. Review and revise the NESA B.N. Mission, Philosophy, and Goals document.
5. Formalize a cross-appointment process that allows qualified College faculty to hold a U of L rank.
6. Reconstitute the Program Advisory Committee and ensure it meets regularly.
7. Continue to pursue ways of increasing the response rate on graduate and employer surveys.
8. Consider establishing an Associate Dean at Lethbridge College to oversee the nursing programs.
9. Explore alternative models of clinical supervision, like Clinical Learning Units or Clinical Teaching Associate roles.
10. Build research development for faculty into the nursing strategic plan.
11. Identify and monitor scholarship metrics (like grant dollars, and publications per FTE).
12. Display outstanding faculty achievements on the Health Sciences website, newsletters, and other communication vehicles.
13. Consider including Lethbridge College on the degree parchment.

In its response to the external review, the NESA Program Review Committee discussed suggestions to improve the program, organized by seven general areas:

1. **Curricula and learning environment**— Faculty at both institutions support revisiting the NESA curriculum. A professional development session is planned for fall 2011 by the NESA Curriculum Committee. Input from this session will be used to develop a guiding document for an external facilitator to use in helping revise curricula. Faculty will agree upon curriculum changes and develop a plan for implementing these changes.
2. **Alignment with strategic planning**— A NESA B.N. Programs Strategic Plan should be developed to complement the unit plans and strategic plans from both institutions.
3. **Student learning outcomes**— Surveys of graduates and their employers will continue. Attrition rates will continue to be monitored and the NESA student database will be enhanced to track student progress and various trends. Alternate ways of getting student feedback will be explored. Transition strategies will be developed to enhance the success of graduates.

4. **Support**— Currently, Lethbridge College is not fiscally able to implement the position of Associate Dean for Nursing. The U of L will open a dialogue with the College to explore innovative ways of supporting the NESA program in all four years. The NESA Curriculum Committee will examine suggestions to consider alternate models of clinical supervision. The NESA strategic plan will need to address increasing international student enrolments and supports for these students. The U of L supports formalizing faculty orientations, mentoring arrangements, and the cross-appointment process.
5. **Resources**— The NESA program will continue to monitor the availability and appropriateness of resources to support student learning. Both institutions will continue to search for funding sources to support faculty in increasing their educational preparation. Positions that support NESA (Student Advisors, Clinical Development Coordinators, etc.) will continue to be sustained. Faculty at Lethbridge College will be advocated for increased teaching space.
6. **Research and scholarship**— The NESA program will develop a research plan and explore a mentoring program (where experienced researchers mentor novice researchers). Initiatives for sharing scholarly work will continue to be supported, and a plan for sharing scholarly work in the broader nursing community will be developed. The program will continue to seek opportunities to work with visiting nursing scholars.
7. **Degree recognition**— To maintain program visibility, the NESA program team will use tools like the website and a newsletter. The Faculty of Health Sciences agrees that the degree parchment should recognize Lethbridge College and the collaborative nature of the program.

In his Dean's Response, Chris Hosgood commented on the rigour of the review, noting that the review process confirms that NESA programs provide a "first-rate nursing education." The Dean's Response stated current and future follow-up on the review recommendations:

- The Dean supports a review of the NESA curriculum, stating in the response that the NESA program team has developed a process and timeline for this review, which leads to a facilitated retreat in summer 2012.
- Regarding aligning NESA and institutional strategic and operational plans, the Dean will ask each program in the Faculty of Health Sciences to develop an annual strategic plan.
- The Deans responsible for NESA will discuss potential revisions to the current policy and adjunct appointments to allow Lethbridge College instructors to receive adjunct U of L appointments.
- Both institutions support recreating the Program Advisory Committee and a new Terms of Reference for this committee is under development.
- The Faculty of Health Sciences is working with the VP Research and the University Advancement office to create new research opportunities, and is discussing key research performance indicators with the Office of Research Services.
- The Dean has referred the matter of recognizing Lethbridge College on the NESA degree parchment to the VP Academic.

The University Review Committee is satisfied that the NESA academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Regards,

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