

White Paper

Starting Off Right: The Successful Nursing Candidate



STARTING OFF RIGHT: THE SUCCESSFUL NURSING CANDIDATE

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Introduction

Nursing faculty members are tasked with the challenge of helping students successfully move towards safe and effective nursing practice (Billings & Halstead, 2012). Along with this task are pressures to admit a diversified student population, maintain high admission and progression rates, and decrease course hours and credits—all while keeping up with changing classroom technologies and shifts in curricular emphasis to reflect the changing healthcare landscape. Additionally, faculty must keep their students engaged in learning and progressing through the program, often while these students have competing obligations to work, family, and other outside responsibilities.

Not only are faculty concerned about individual student success on the National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX), but they must also find the balance between maintaining appropriately high retention rates and NCLEX pass rates. State Boards of Nursing dictate a specific annual percentage of graduates that must pass the NCLEX in order for a program to maintain its ability to continue an approved pre-licensure curriculum. As a result, it is important to admit students who have the capacity to be successful. However, admission criteria cannot be so selective that schools are unable to fulfill the supply of nurses in the service area. Therefore, it is essential to identify those students who are at risk and appropriately intervene to help them succeed in the program. **The purpose of this paper is to identify practical strategies to assess potential students' capacity for success in a nursing program.**

The process of assessing potential students' capacity for success begins with setting admission criteria to screen candidates. Nursing programs are rigorous and fast paced. It is important to recognize admitted students who may be “at risk” to ensure adequate resources can be allocated and mobilized. Screening students for math, reading, comprehension, and science aptitude can help identify candidates who will require additional support. Furthermore, personality and learning styles testing can help faculty better understand their student population to more effectively select teaching strategies. Faculty have a wide variety of opportunities to measure student outcomes and progress throughout a program. Once a student is identified as “at risk”, either by self or faculty, a plan needs to be initiated. McClenery et al. (2012) reports student engagement in the educational process aids in ownership and compliance, which ultimately improves learning outcomes.

Components of an Admission Process

Evaluation of the candidate in these areas:

- English/reading comprehension
- Language
- Math
- Science specific to the program
(only applicable if pre-requisites are required for the program)

Minimum score needed:
Many use 75% on the A2

Questions to Consider

How often can a candidate retest?

Are you including coaching on remediation?

Is there a course or remediation materials available to the candidate to help with these basic entry skill?

Creating a Path for Student Support and Guidance

Establishing an effective guideline for identifying at risk students should be considered a mainstay to create reproducible outcomes. The key to these outcomes starts with developing an understanding of who the students are with respect to their learning style, lifestyle, and academic abilities. Success can only be fostered by initiating involvement from the student candidate early in the process. Admission Assessment(A2) is an example of a tool that can provide foundational information on strengths and weaknesses of the student prior to admission.

The A2 can be customized to include only the areas that are meaningful or applicable to a program’s requirements. This comprehensive assessment provides a picture of the student’s actual strengths and potential weaknesses from an academic perspective. Supportive preparation tools such as assessment study guides, online practice questions, and even remediation for the student after taking the A2 exam are available. The addition of coaching can improve a candidate’s success by lending support to a learner’s personal goals and achievements. These resources should be suggested and made available to all candidates applying for the program.

When students do not successfully meet admission criteria there is a tenuous balance that must be struck between meeting capacity requirements and maintaining adequate admission screening. Admission screening is necessary to preserve student pass rates. However, administrative financial needs require high enrollment and retention. Program directors can **START** with these strategies to help improve capacity issues related to high admission criteria.

Learning Styles

Beyond academics, other contributing factors play a role in a student’s potential for success. Learning and life styles can be evaluated as part of the standard entrance assessment. Learning style is frequently described as the optimal conditions for the student to learn or gain knowledge the best (Learning style. (n. d)). The Memletic learning style inventory (Whitley 2003) suggests learners have a variety of styles in which they learn. Knowing the learning styles of the students in a class can help influence the selection of teaching strategies. Ultimately, the educator needs to consider the diversity of learning needs and select options that use differing styles to engage the student, such as action activities, practice questions, and multi-media methods.

ADMISSIONS ASSESSMENT (A2) by HESI (evaluates basic knowledge)

Anatomy and Physiology
 Biology
 Chemistry
 Critical Thinking
 Grammar
 Mathematics
 Physics
 Reading
 Comprehension
 Vocabulary

S-T-A-R-T

Study and remediation for Admission Assessment testing should be provided to students

Testing environment and proctoring


Academic Collaboration with Academic Counselors and pre-requisite Department chairs

- Guide candidate towards program selection
- Inform candidate of the program exam rigors
- Preparation for the candidate
 - Life skills
 - Financial aide
 - Exam Preparation

Review program data results

Timing of Admission Assessment

Sample of A2 Test Results


HESI Assessment

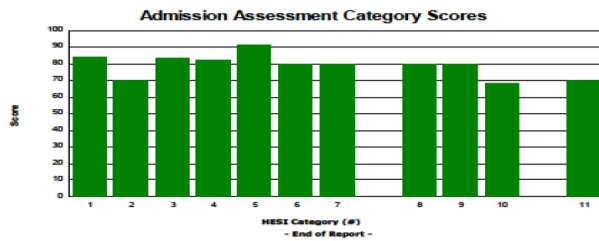
Testing & Remediation - Powered by HESI
Exam Results

Name: Student Testing **Date:** 03/01/2013
Institution: ELSEVIER COLLEGE-RN **Duration:** 13 Minutes 40 Seconds
Student ID: p438773

HESI Admission Assessment Exam Cumulative Report

The chart included in your report describes your particular scores.

Subject Area	HESI Score
(1) Reading Comprehension	84.00%
(2) Hearing-Word Use	79.00%
(3) Conclusions	83.00%
(4) Implications	82.00%
(5) Understanding	91.00%
(6) Grammar	80.00%
(7) Vocabulary & General Knowledge	80.00%
English Language Composite Score	81.33%
(8) Biology	80.00%
(9) Chemistry	80.00%
(10) Anatomy & Physiology	68.00%
Science Composite Score	76.00%
(11) Math	70.00%
Cumulative Score:	77.43%

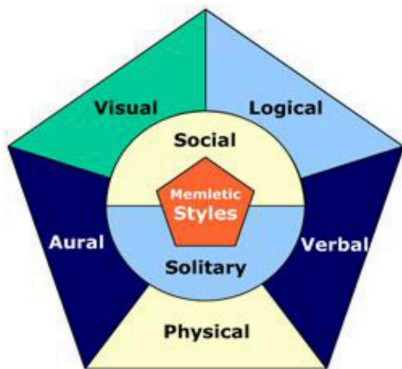


Kinesthetic learners would have an affinity for the Flipped Classroom approach; they need to do hands-on activities.

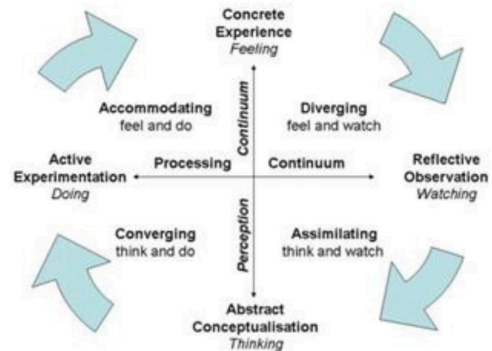
Auditory learners do well with role play and story-telling; lectures and pod casts are great instructional mediums for this group.

Visual Learners respond well to videos, demonstrations, and “see it first” instructional formats.

Tip: It is not recommended that any program use the learning styles and personality assessment as criteria for admission. This information can help to inform the student and program instructors of information that can help guide to a more successful path.



<http://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html>



<http://www.learning-styles-online.com/overview>

Life Styles and Diversity

Life style factors will vary by student. An understanding of the factors that motivate the student toward a nursing career should be considered. These motivational factors are often impacted by other events and situations outside the realm of school and may include drivers such as family, individual living conditions, and personal responsibilities. Sometimes these are unspoken detractors and distractors for the students that can create a situation of risk by introducing individual expectations, personal commitments and moral responsibilities. These unforeseen complications can challenge success and learning in the nursing student and can lead even the most capable student off track.

Another factor that impacts admissions and drives success is an acceptance and willingness to recognize the need for diversity of caregivers. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation report (2011) notes that health care lacks a diverse population of caregivers even though the population requiring care has become more diversified. Yet, the admission criteria should screen and identify students that have the minimum skills and aptitudes needed to be successful in the program, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or race. Therefore, it is vital that programs adhere to their established admission policies and minimum candidacy requirements.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the guide to successful entry into a nursing program hinges on multiple strategies. These include variables such as admission criteria, a testing policy based in best-practices, and a well communicated plan of expectations and support. The student must embrace the need to work toward success and must be prepared to spend time and effort to be successful in a nursing program and ultimately attain the goal of passing NCLEX. In this way, the student can participate in all aspects of learning.

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