Integrating HESI tools improves NCLEX scores

**Background:** Widener University School of Nursing, Chester, Pa., offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral nursing degrees. Its BSN, MSN, and DNP programs are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, and the BSN and MSN programs are approved by the State Board of Pennsylvania. The school offers RN-to-BSN and DNP programs in a hybrid format, combining on-campus classes with distance learning.

**Issue:** Faculty at Widener wanted to improve student performance on the NCLEX.

**Approach:** Widener added HESI Case Studies, Practice Tests, and Specialty Exams to its use of the HESI Exit Exam. The tools are integrated into the nursing curriculum. For example, Case Studies are started early in the program for homework or in class to augment lecture topics; research shows that longer use of the studies improves scores on the Exit Exam. Results on Case Studies are weighted in a manner similar to a graded quiz. Students can fully access Case Studies at the end of the course so they can prepare for the HESI Specialty Exam. Practice Tests, which consist of NCLEX-type questions, are used in each course, with one test saved so seniors can practice for the Exit Exam. Each HESI Specialty Exam counts toward 20% to 30% of the final course grade. The Exit Exam also counts as part of the student's final grade.

In addition to integrating the tests throughout the program, faculty implemented a remediation strategy for the Exit Exam. After taking the exam, students review the report on how they did, then work with a faculty coach to develop a remediation plan. Students who scored less than 850 retake the Exit Exam.

**Results:** Since making the score on the HESI Exit Exam is part of the student's final grade, average scores have increased nearly 90 points. After implementing the complete set of HESI tools, NCLEX scores increased by almost 15%.

**Benefits:** Integrating HESI throughout the nursing program helps students identify areas of weakness so they can correct them. Consistent feedback promotes better performance on the NCLEX.