

# NEPAB

Nursing Education Program Approval Board

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**Standards for Alberta Nursing Education  
Programs Leading to Initial Entry to Practice  
as a Registered Nurse**

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January 2013

Approved by the *College and Association of Registered Nurses (CARNA)* Provincial Council in January 2013.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Fundamental Beliefs .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Standard 1: Program.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Standard 2: Curriculum .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Standard 3: Students .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Standard 4: Graduates.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>18</b>

# Standards for Alberta Nursing Education Programs Leading to Initial Entry to Practice as a Registered Nurse

## Introduction

The *Standards for Alberta Nursing Education Programs Leading to Initial Entry to Practice as a Registered Nurse* (2013) contain the **nursing education standards** and **criteria** that represent the requirements for nursing education program approval. The standards and criteria are the basis by which nursing education programs are reviewed by the Nursing Education Program Approval Board (NEPAB) for approval.

The four nursing education standards must be met for a nursing education program to obtain the designation of an “approved nursing education program” in Alberta. The criteria represent the usual outcomes that must be achieved in order to meet a particular nursing education standard. A nursing education standard cannot be achieved if each criterion has not been met. Alternate criteria demonstrating the unique characteristics of a nursing education program may be proposed. If an alternate criterion is being proposed it must be clear which of the usual criteria it is intended to replace. All proposed alternate criteria must be supported by sound rationale that may include expert, empirical or documented evidence and will be considered on an individual basis.

It is the responsibility of the educational institution to provide evidence that demonstrates that the nursing education standards are being or will be met. The *Standards for Alberta Nursing Education Programs Leading to Initial Entry to Practice as a Registered Nurse: Approval Mechanism* provides detailed information regarding NEPAB’s approval policies and processes.

The authority to approve nursing education programs is granted in Section 3(1)(f) of the *Health Professions Act* (2000), which states:

*A college may approve programs of study and education courses for the purposes of registration requirements.*

The *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* (2005) in Section 3(1) outlines the registration requirements:

*An applicant for registration as a regulated member on the registered nurse register must*

- (a) have successfully completed as an education requirement...*
  - (ii) on and after January 1, 2010, a baccalaureate degree in nursing from an approved nursing program undertaken in Alberta,*

*and*

- (b) pass the registration exam.*

An approved nursing education program is defined in the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation* as follows:

*“approved nursing program” means a nursing education program approved by the Nursing Education Program Approval Board in accordance with nursing education standards and criteria approved by the Council...*

Further, the Nursing Education Program Approval Board is defined as follows:

*“Nursing Education Program Approval Board” means the Nursing Education Program Approval Board continued pursuant to bylaws under section 132 of the Act...*

Article 30 of the College and Association of Registered Nurses (CARNA) *Bylaws* (2013) states:

*The purpose of Article 30 is:*

*30.1(a) to continue the membership and functions of the Nursing Education Program Approval Board (NEPAB) as an impartial decision making body of the College to perform the functions required of it under the Act, Regulations and this Article...*

In addition, CARNA *Bylaws* outline the duties and powers of NEPAB including the following:

*30.2 NEPAB may:*

- (a) Establish policies and processes respecting any matters that are required to secure effective nursing education programs:
  - i leading to initial entry to practice as a Registered Nurse;*
  - ii. leading to initial entry to practice as a Nurse Practitioner;**
- (b) Establish policies and processes respecting any matters that are required to secure effective nursing refresher education programs.*
- (c) Establish the minimum nursing education standards and criteria required to obtain and maintain the designation of “approved nursing education program”, which must be ratified by Provincial Council before they become effective;*
- (d) Grant to and withdraw from a nursing education program the designation “approved nursing education program”, based on nursing education standards and criteria ratified under subsection (c), with or without conditions, terms, limitations and restrictions...*

## Fundamental Beliefs

The fundamental beliefs about initial entry-level Registered Nurse education underlying the development of the *Standards for Alberta Nursing Education Programs Leading to Initial Entry to Practice as a Registered Nurse* include:

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|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Accountability</b> | Refers to the responsibility to ensure that graduates of a nursing education program have the competencies necessary to provide safe, competent, and ethical nursing care in a variety of settings with clients across the life span and over a range of acuity (CNA, 2004a).   |
| <b>Flexibility</b>    | Refers to the need to provide nursing education programs that use a wide range of instructional techniques, and enhance access to learning by using creative delivery models (CNA, 2004).   |
| <b>Responsiveness</b> | Refers to the adaptability of nursing education programs to meet the changing needs of society, the health care delivery system and diverse client populations in the best interests of the public, nursing education, and the nursing profession.  |
| <b>Quality</b>        | Refers to congruence among all elements of the nursing education program including the philosophy, conceptual framework, and curriculum as well as relevance to the practice of nursing. In addition, the curriculum is implemented in a way that ensures that the students have the expert guidance to obtain the broad-based preparation, including the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to meet the complex needs of clients in an ever-changing practice environment. |

## Glossary

In this document, the following terms have been defined as follows:

<b>Classroom hours</b>	The time students spend in theory acquisition using methods such as lectures, seminars, online learning, and tutorials.
<b>Clinical hours</b>	The time students spend in <i>nursing practice</i> with <i>clients</i> including pre and post conferences.
<b>Clients</b>	Include individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations.
<b>Clinical resources</b>	Includes those facilities, agencies, and settings where students engage in <i>nursing practice</i> .
<b>Competence</b>	The integrated knowledge, skills, judgment, and attributes required of a nurse to practice safely and ethically in a designated role and setting.
<b>Competencies</b>	The specific knowledge, skills, and personal attributes required for a nurse to practice safely and ethically in a designated role and setting.
<b>Conceptual framework</b>	A set of logically related concepts that provide the structure for the <i>nursing education program</i> and the development of the <i>curriculum</i> .
<b>Course objectives</b>	Statements which describe what the learner is expected to achieve as a result of instruction. May also be referred to as course outcomes, learning objectives or outcomes, enabling objectives, educational objectives, performance objectives, aims, etc.
<b>Criteria</b>	The usual outcomes that must be achieved in order to meet a particular <i>nursing education standard</i> . A <i>nursing education standard</i> cannot be achieved if each criterion has not been met.
<b>Curriculum</b>	A systematic and comprehensive plan of learning activities including the individual courses, their sequencing, and the integration of key concepts.
<b>Designated program outcomes</b>	The expected end results of a <i>curriculum</i> that describes the specific knowledge, skills or attitudes that the learners are required to achieve by the completion of the <i>nursing education program</i> .
<b>Educational institution</b>	The Alberta college or university responsible for the delivery of the <i>nursing education program</i> .
<b>Entry-to-practice competencies</b>	The <i>competencies</i> , as amended from time to time, required of the new Registered Nurse graduate who is entering the workforce for the first time. The College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta define these <i>competencies</i> .

<b>Faculty</b>	The teaching and administrative staff and those members of the administration having academic rank in an <i>educational institution</i> .
	<b>Nursing faculty member(s)</b> are regulated members, in good standing, of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta on the Registered Nurse, Nurse Practitioner or Graduate Nurse Practitioner register who teach the nursing content in the <i>nursing education program</i> .
	<b>Non-nursing faculty members</b> are those who teach the non-nursing content in the <i>nursing education program</i> .
<b>Laboratory hours</b>	The time students spend acquiring nursing skills and <i>competencies</i> in a simulated setting.
<b>NEPAB</b>	The Nursing Education Program Approval Board.
<b>Nursing education program</b>	A program of nursing education offered by an <i>educational institution</i> , leading to initial entry to practice as a Registered Nurse.
<b>Nursing education program approval process</b>	The steps used to determine if a <i>nursing education program</i> has met and continues to meet the established standards set by <i>NEPAB</i> and approved by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta Provincial Council. Approval is a required process for all new <i>nursing education programs</i> . Ongoing approval is for a period not more than five years, therefore, re-approval is required for all approved <i>nursing education programs</i> at least every five years.
<b>Nursing education standards</b>	An explicit set of statements that represent the minimum requirements for approving a <i>nursing education program</i> . The standards are the basis by which the actual performance of a <i>nursing education program</i> is measured for approval.
<b>Nursing practice</b>	Nursing practice is a synthesis of the interaction among the concepts of person, health, environment and nursing. The practice of individual nurses is determined by the needs and health goals of their <i>clients</i> and is limited by the specific competencies of the individual nurse to perform the activities necessary for the client population with whom that nurse practices, within applicable legislation and requirements of the employer as described in employer policies. The nursing practice context is any setting where a nurse establishes a <i>therapeutic relationship</i> with a client with the intention of responding to health needs.
<b>Nursing practice standards</b>	The acceptable requirements for determining the quality of nursing care a patient/ <i>client</i> receives as defined by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta.

<b>Preceptor</b>	An experienced Registered Nurse who functions as a role model for a nursing student and provides transitional role support via a collaborative, collegial relationship. In conjunction with a nursing <i>faculty</i> advisor, the <i>preceptor</i> is responsible for mentoring, supervising, and evaluating the nursing activities of a nursing student during the final clinical <i>preceptorship</i> .
<b>Preceptorship</b>	A teaching and learning method involving a formal, usually one-to-one, relationship between the <i>preceptor</i> and a nursing student (preceptee). The learning occurs as the nursing student practices full-time (as defined in the clinical facility) alongside the expert nurse. The <i>preceptor</i> assists the student to consolidate theory with the roles, functions, and <i>competencies</i> of the graduate about to enter practice.
<b>Program</b>	The system, including all of the resources and structures that provide the necessary support to the <i>curriculum</i> to ensure the achievement of the educational goals.
<b>Requisite skills and abilities</b>	The basic skills and abilities necessary to attain the <i>entry-to-practice competencies</i> , begin to practice as a Registered Nurse, and provide safe, competent, and ethical nursing care in the best interest of the public. The College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta define the <i>requisite skills and abilities</i> (RSAs).
<b>Therapeutic relationship</b>	A planned, goal directed, interpersonal process occurring between the nurse and <i>client</i> that is established for the advancement of <i>client</i> values, interests, and ultimately for promotion of <i>client</i> health and well-being.

## Standard 1: Program

The nursing education **program** has sufficient structures and human, clinical, physical, and fiscal resources so that students are capable of achieving the Entry-to-Practice Competencies as defined by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta.

### Criteria:

- 1.1 There is support for, and interest in the *nursing education program* from the *educational institution*, government, potential employers, and the community.
- 1.2 There is an organizational structure which:
  - (a) Demonstrates the lines of authority and decision-making which are pertinent to the nursing education program,
  - (b) Defines the committees whose decisions affect the nursing education program, and
  - (c) Includes a director who has the authority and responsibility for decisions related to the *curriculum* and the nursing education program.
- 1.3 There is tracking of student trends including:
  - (a) Enrollment,
  - (b) Transfers and withdrawals, and
  - (c) Graduation.
- 1.4 Student trends are analyzed and used to guide policies regarding admission, selection, and promotion.
- 1.5 There are approved institutional policies and procedures for all full and part-time *faculty* related to:
  - (a) Faculty selection including clinical expertise, teaching ability, and research and scholarly activities,
  - (b) Ongoing evaluation of teaching and scholarly activities, research and clinical *competence* in the settings where *nursing faculty members* supervise students,
  - (c) Discipline, termination, and grievance,
  - (d) Ethical treatment of faculty, and
  - (e) Professional development.
- 1.6 There are a sufficient number of faculty members with the theoretical knowledge and clinical expertise to meet the *course objectives, designated program outcomes*, and *entry-to-practice competencies*. The minimum faculty requirements shall include:
  - (a) Faculty members sufficient in number and adequately prepared to:
    - i. Ensure the development, implementation, and evaluation of the nursing education program,
    - ii. Facilitate student learning, and
    - iii. Safeguard nursing care to *clients*,

- (b) Sufficient full-time equivalency (FTE) faculty positions for a faculty member to student ratio of 1:10 to deliver all aspects of the nursing education program, and
  - (c) Sufficient full-time continuous or tenure track faculty positions to ensure the continuity of the nursing education program.
- 1.7 There are nursing faculty members with adequate preparation including minimum educational qualifications:
- (a) A director of the nursing education program, who:
    - i. Has a master's degree, doctoral degree preferred,
    - ii. Has a graduate or undergraduate degree in nursing, and
    - iii. Is a regulated member, in good standing, of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta on the Registered Nurse, Nurse Practitioner or Graduate Nurse Practitioner register.
  - (b) Full-time continuous nursing faculty members, who:
    - i. Have a master's degree with at least one degree, either graduate or undergraduate, in nursing and
    - ii. Are regulated members, in good standing, of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta on the Registered Nurse, Nurse Practitioner or Graduate Nurse Practitioner register.
  - (c) Part-time nursing faculty members, who:
    - i. Have a baccalaureate degree in nursing, master's degree preferred and
    - ii. Are regulated members, in good standing, of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta on the Registered Nurse, Nurse Practitioner or Graduate Nurse Practitioner register.
- 1.8 Only nursing faculty members teach the nursing content in the nursing education program.
- 1.9 There is a system to annually verify that all nursing faculty members are regulated members, in good standing, of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta on the Registered Nurse, Nurse Practitioner or Graduate Nurse Practitioner register.
- 1.10 ***Clinical resources*** are available to enable students to meet the entry-to-practice competencies. An assessment of the appropriateness and applicability of clinical resources to the nursing education program should include, but not be limited to, the consideration of the following:
- (a) Faculty personnel are informed about the nursing education program's philosophy, purpose and the objectives for the clinical experiences,
  - (b) Faculty personnel assume responsibility in providing an environment conducive to learning,
  - (c) The proximity of the clinical facilities to the students,
  - (d) The availability of clients from across the lifespan who present with a variety of health issues over a range of acuity, and
  - (e) Measures are in place to ensure the safety of students and clients at all times.

- 1.11 There are written contracts between the nursing education program and the facilities used for learning and clinical experiences that:
  - (a) Define the rights and responsibilities of the parties,
  - (b) Define the use of the resources, and
  - (c) Are regularly reviewed.
  
- 1.12 Resources are available, including library and technical resources, to enable students to achieve the course objectives and designated program outcomes.
  
- 1.13 There are financial and budgetary arrangements for the establishment of the nursing education program and for its continued operation.

## Standard 2: Curriculum

The **curriculum** provides the educational experiences necessary for students to achieve the Entry-to-Practice Competencies as defined by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta.

### Criteria:

- 2.1 The philosophy of nursing and education and the *conceptual framework* guide the development and implementation of the *curriculum*.
  - (a) There is congruence between the philosophy, conceptual framework, and curriculum.
- 2.2 The *entry-to-practice competencies* are addressed throughout the curriculum.
- 2.3 The *designated program outcomes* are consistent with the entry-to-practice competencies.
- 2.4 The curriculum is responsive to and reflects current and emerging trends including:
  - (a) Health and wellness,
  - (b) Legal and ethical considerations,
  - (c) Diversity in client populations,
  - (d) Evidence-informed *nursing practice*,
  - (e) Education and research,
  - (f) Health service delivery,
  - (g) Society, and
  - (h) Other.
- 2.5 The curriculum includes:
  - (a) An overall organizing framework, course sequencing, course descriptions, and *course objectives* that are logically structured to achieve the course objectives, designated program outcomes, and entry-to-practice competencies,
  - (b) Courses and teaching and learning methods that are consistent with the philosophy, conceptual framework, and designated program outcomes,
  - (c) Nursing courses comprising at least 60% of the curriculum as measured by course credits,
  - (d) Courses from the biological or physical sciences or both, the behavioural or social sciences or both, and the humanities,
  - (e) Learning experiences that involve interprofessional education and care,
  - (f) Learning experiences that enable students to meet the course objectives, designated program outcomes, and the entry-to-practice competencies, and
  - (g) Allocated *classroom, laboratory, and clinical hours* that enable students to meet the course objectives, designated program outcomes, and the entry-to-practice competencies.

- 2.6 The clinical learning activities and clinical placements provide sufficient opportunities for students to meet the course objectives, designated program outcomes, and entry-to-practice competencies, including:
- (a) The allocation of a sufficient number of clinical hours in the **nursing education program** and
  - (b) Clinical learning activities and placements in a variety of settings (acute, continuing, and community) with varying levels of **client** acuity and complexity and with clients from across the life span.
- 2.7 A full-time clinical **preceptorship** at the end of the nursing education program.
- (a) Is a minimum of 10 weeks in length,
  - (b) Consolidates theory with nursing practice, and
  - (c) Allows the student to demonstrate the roles, functions and responsibilities of a new graduate about to enter practice.
  - (d) The **preceptor** must be a regulated member, in good standing, on a Registered Nurse register.
- 2.8 There is a method for tracking and monitoring clinical hours and placements for each student to ensure that all students have clinical practice with clients across the life span in a variety of settings.
- 2.9 **Nursing faculty members** supervise students in all clinical placements.
- 2.10 Students are assigned, in all clinical placements, to regulated members, in good standing, on the Registered Nurse, Nurse Practitioner or Graduate Nurse Practitioner register, whenever possible.
- 2.11 The nursing faculty member to student ratios in the clinical settings are sufficient to ensure optimum student learning and safe client care. Factors to be considered in determining these ratios include the: course objectives, students' level, clinical site, needs of the client, type of clinical experience, professional role models, and supports in the clinical setting. In addition to giving consideration to these factors, the recommended nursing faculty member to student ratios for clinical experiences are:
- (a) One nursing faculty member to eight students (1:8) in the non-preceptorship experiences,
  - (b) One preceptor to one student (1:1) in the clinical preceptorship described in 2.7, and
  - (c) One nursing faculty member to sixteen students (1:16) in the clinical preceptorship described in 2.7.
- 2.12 There is systematic and continuous evaluation of all curriculum components including content, learning activities, student evaluation methods, and designated program outcomes to ensure the ongoing development, maintenance, and enhancement of the curriculum.
- (a) Students, faculty members, and key stakeholders participate in the evaluation of the curriculum.

## Standard 3: Students

There are policies and procedures related to **students**, which meet the requirements of all relevant legislation.

### Criteria:

- 3.1 Students are informed about the *requisite skills and abilities* needed to achieve the *entry-to-practice competencies*.
- 3.2 Pertinent student policies and procedures are published in the *educational institution's* calendar or student handbook or both.
- 3.3 There are policies and procedures including, but not limited to:
  - (a) Admission requirements specific to the *nursing education program*,
  - (b) Selection of the most qualified applicants utilizing the educational institution's criteria for most qualified,
  - (c) Academic progression through the nursing education program, including promotion, graduation, withdrawal, probation, and failure,
  - (d) Appeals, grievances, and student discipline,
  - (e) Ethical treatment of students, and
  - (f) Access to services that increase the students' potential for success in the completion of the nursing education program, including:
    - i. Learning support services (e.g., tutoring, remedial learning),
    - ii. Personal counselling,
    - iii. Academic counselling,
    - iv. Student health services,
    - v. Learning resources, and
    - vi. Financial aid.
- 3.4 Processes are in place to ensure that students' progress toward the achievement of the entry-to-practice competencies, *course objectives*, and *designated program outcomes* is evaluated, using a variety of student evaluation methods, and communicated in a timely fashion. This is to include formative and summative feedback from *nursing faculty members* regarding the students' theoretical and practice learning and progress.
- 3.5 Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that prior to clinical experiences:
  - (a) The students' immunization status meets the requirements of the clinical facility,
  - (b) The students have had a security clearance completed, and
  - (c) The students have life support certification that meets the requirements of the clinical facility.

- 3.6 The minimum educational admission requirements shall include English 30, mathematics in the 30 series, two sciences in the 30 series and one other 30 level course, and an average of 65%. In addition:
- (a) Those applicants who are lacking specific subject requirements can be considered on an individual basis,
  - (b) Out-of-province candidates are required to meet the equivalent minimum educational admission requirements, and
  - (c) The admission of mature students is according to policies set by the educational institution.
- 3.7 The educational institution shall maintain records and reports, including:
- (a) Permanent records of course descriptions, including *clinical* and *classroom hours*, for all cohorts of graduates,
  - (b) Permanent records of course grades for each student,
  - (c) Permanent records that only contain information permitted under relevant legislation, and
  - (d) Policies regulating access to student records that ensure the confidentiality and privacy of these records.

## Standard 4: Graduates

**Graduates** of the nursing education program achieve the Entry-to-Practice Competencies as defined by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta.

### Criteria:

- 4.1 Prior to graduation, student evaluations provide evidence that the students have met:
  - (a) The *entry-to-practice competencies* and
  - (b) The *course objectives* and *designated program outcomes*.
  
- 4.2 Trends in the graduates' performance on the registration examination approved by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta Provincial Council are identified, including a comparison to the national mean.
  - (a) The *educational institution*, as necessary, takes action when graduate performance falls below the national mean.
  
- 4.3 Graduates meet the *nursing practice standards* and entry-to-practice competencies as evidenced by evaluation of their performance by their employer within six months of completing the *nursing education program*.
  
- 4.4 Graduates meet the nursing practice standards and entry-to-practice competencies as evidenced by their performance on self-evaluations within six months of completing the nursing education program.

## References

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