

EDITOR'S NOTE: *With this issue of Nursing Education Perspectives, we are pleased to present a new column by Dr. Sharon Tanner designed to answer questions related to accreditation standards, practices, and policies. In every other issue — May/June, September/October, and again in January/February 2009 — we will present a different topic based on your questions. With this inaugural column, Dr. Tanner tackles the 2008 Standards and Criteria. Please feel free to contact her at any time with topics you would like to see addressed in this format.*

QUESTION *Faculty are familiar with the current standards and criteria and have concerns about changes in the standards proposed for 2008. The current standards were working well. Why change?*

Based on our Systematic Evaluation Plan and in accordance with the US Department of Education regulation (602.21) requiring review of an accrediting agency's standards and procedures to ensure that they are current, adequate, and relevant, the NLNAC Standards and Criteria are reviewed every three years. The standards and criteria that are currently in place were adopted in 2005 and reflect minimal changes from those approved by the NLNAC Board of Commissioners in 2002. In 2005, the majority of responses to a call for comments — from educators, administrators, clinicians, and members of the general public — stated that current standards were relevant and adequate to ensure quality in all program types accredited by NLNAC (master's, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and practical nursing).

More recently, however, our constituents have raised questions about whether or not the 2005 standards were reflective of current practices. Health care has evolved considerably in recent years, and nursing education has attempted to keep pace by incorporating the latest research, adopting advances in technology, and embracing the evidence-based practices emerging both in practice and education. The nursing shortage has also ignited changes in curricula and admission patterns, as well as the adoption of new delivery modalities by nursing programs.

The NLNAC's mission is to support the interests of nursing education through the promulgation of a common core of standards,

criteria, and practices. With a focus on educational equity, access, opportunity, and mobility, we decided to initiate a systematic evaluation process leading to a thorough review of current standards and criteria and the development of constituent-driven strategic plan.

QUESTION *How were the 2008 Standards and Criteria developed? Was the process really constituent driven?*

Late in 2006, a call for volunteers from both education and practice went out to more than 4,000 constituents. We were seeking volunteers to serve on six program-specific subcommittees to work under the oversight of the Committee on Accreditation Standards and Criteria. This committee is composed of both educator and public representatives from the NLNAC Board of Commissioners. Hundreds of individuals responded to the call.

In February 2007, the subcommittees met face-to-face to begin drafting the new standards. They continued to meet via email and telephone during the next several months. The result of their work was Draft #1, which was distributed to all constituents in June along with a call for comments. More than 1,100 individuals responded to the call. We received an extensive number of comments, recommendations, and questions from educators, administrators, students, clinicians, and representatives from licensing and state agencies, as well as general public members.

These comments were collated and distributed to committee and subcommittee members who reviewed them carefully and used them to guide the development of Draft #2. Careful attention was given to each comment, particularly the questions raised due to diffi-

culty comprehending the meaning of terms or in understanding the applicability of individual criteria to specific nursing programs.

The same process was repeated when Draft #2 was released at the end of September. Again, more than 1,000 reviewers responded to the call for comments. The final edits and revisions are being done by committee members, and the 2008 Standards and Criteria will be ready for release in mid-February.

The process has indeed been driven by the volunteers serving on the committees as well as the thousands of constituents who responded to the drafts and steered the revision process. While adhering to the required elements from the US Department of Education, the resulting document is intended to be reflective of the state of practice in nursing education in all program types that are served by NLNAC, including the practice doctorate programs that will be accredited beginning in 2008.

QUESTION *Our master's program is due for an accreditation visit in spring 2009. Will we be required to follow the 2008 Standards and Criteria in preparing for the review?*

Programs scheduled for an accreditation review and site visit in spring and fall 2008 will utilize the 2005 Standards and Criteria. These are available online at www.nlnac.org/manuals/Manual2006.htm and also in the 2006 edition of the *Accreditation Manual with Interpretive Guidelines by Program Type*. Programs scheduled for a site visit in spring 2009 have a choice: They may review their program and develop their self-study report in accordance with the 2005 or the new 2008 standards. Beginning in fall 2009, all programs will be required to use the 2008 Standards and Criteria. 