

**CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR EXPANSION
FROM WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY
BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PROGRAM**

BACKGROUND:

Western Governors University (WGU) located in Salt Lake City, Utah, with a campus address in Houston, Texas, was approved by the Board of Nursing (Board or BON) at the July 2009 meeting to begin an online baccalaureate degree nursing program in Texas. The first two cohorts of ten (10) students each was approved for the Houston and Dallas areas. The community needs and clinical sites were identified for these two communities. In a letter dated February 26, 2010 (See Attachment #1), WGU informed the BON of a needs assessment in the El Paso Region and provided notification of their intent to expand the baccalaureate program into the El Paso area. Board staff requested additional information about current students and future plans (See Attachment #2).

HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

- WGU was approved in California and began the baccalaureate degree program in that state in July 2009. They have a total of 55 students in California.
- WGU currently has fifteen (15) students in Texas in the Houston and Dallas areas.
- The programs in California and Texas are the first programs to admit prelicensure nursing students to WGU.
- WGU is planning to apply for approval to offer the nursing program in Florida and Utah.
- The baccalaureate degree and master's degree in nursing from WGU are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Education (CCNE). The accreditation of the baccalaureate degree is based upon their previously established RN to BSN online program. The prelicensure program is considered a substantive change by the accrediting agency and a focus site visit is scheduled by CCNE in Spring 2011.
- The program is designed on a cohort model and students are advised they should devote 25-30 hours per week to the curriculum. Many of the students are working adults.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN THE REQUEST:

- Rule 215.3(b)(1) related to *Extension Program/Campus* states that "Only nursing educational programs that have full approval are eligible to initiate or modify an extension program/campus."
- Rule 215.2 (21) defines "extension program or campus" as "instruction provided by an approved professional prelicensure nursing educational program through a variety of instructional methods **to any location(s) other than the program's main campus and where students are required to attend activities such as testing, group conferences, and/or campus laboratory.**" As a completely online program, WGU does not have the traditional model with a main campus.
- A new program is placed on initial approval until a class has graduated and demonstrated 80% or higher on the NCLEX examination.
- The program may then be advanced to full approval based upon a successful pass rate on the NCLEX examination and a positive survey visit.
- WGU states that the expansion is a response to their El Paso hospital partners' pleas for more baccalaureate-prepared nurses in their facilities and their eagerness to provide clinical spaces for the students.
- WGU is not restricted in recruiting additional students to their program in the Houston or Dallas areas. WGU contracts for lab spaces and clinical sites to accommodate additional students.
- Nursing educational programs have attested to the scarcity of clinical settings as well as the shortage of qualified nursing faculty, especially when new nursing programs initiate programs and seek clinical contracts and faculty in the same area.
- WGU have identified specific available clinical affiliates and units in the El Paso area for their students.

Pros:

- WGU holds CCNE accreditation for the BSN and MSN degrees.
- Reports from WGU of ongoing ATI testing and evaluation of the prelicensure students have been positive.
- The WGU model appeals to hospital employees who might be encouraged to enter the nursing program.
- To date, the cohorts of students have been small which may minimize the impact on clinical availability.

Cons:

- Other nursing programs in the El Paso area have voiced concerns about new providers in the community. (Please refer to Agenda Item 3.2.12 related to issues related to maintaining standards in the changing environment of nursing education.)
- The evidence of the success of the WGU program in nursing education has not been determined because data is not available.
- In an atmosphere of change in nursing education and the number of new providers of nursing education, allowing early expansion of new programs may put students at risk.

SUMMARY:

- The WGU proposal was reviewed and approved under the requirements in Rule 215.
- Under the usual process, a program on initial approval would not initiate an extension campus until the first graduating class demonstrates success on the NCLEX examination.
- The Nursing Practice Act 305.1605 Pilot Programs for Innovative Applications and Rule 227 Pilot Programs for Innovative Applications to Professional Nursing Education allow for an option for nursing educational programs to submit a proposal for a pilot project which requires a waiver of Board rules.
- It is unusual for a program on initial approval to submit an application for a pilot project.
- Submission of an application for a pilot program may be an acceptable option for WGU to request approval for an expansion.
- The expansion could proceed while WGU also takes measures to recruit more students for the Houston and Dallas sites.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recognize the importance of considering the current environment where many new programs are seeking Board approval and are requesting variations from what has been seen as traditional nursing education models.

Submission of a pilot program application by WGU and approval by the Board would provide a mechanism for expansion of WGU into two other areas.

This mechanism helps remove barriers to WGU's efforts to increase enrollments while staying within Board rules and regulations.

While expansion might enable WGU to have sufficient student numbers for meaningful data, the new curriculum model has not been tested for its effectiveness.

Development and evaluation of an application for a pilot program would:

- Provide a detailed expansion plan for the El Paso and Brownsville areas while seeking to enroll additional students in Houston and Dallas;
- Help establish a more credible data base to determine the effectiveness of the WGU model of nursing education;
- Insure that controls are in place if students display negative outcomes;
- Provide for ongoing monitoring of several cohorts;
- Limit the risks to students because of careful planning and ongoing data collection;
- Allow WGU to further its educational goals of increasing nursing graduates in Texas.

RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize the Education Liaison Committee (ELC) to take action on a pilot project proposal developed by Western Governors University to expand their baccalaureate degree nursing program into the El Paso and Brownsville areas with a detailed two-year plan resulting in an evidence-based curriculum model. The pilot project will be presented at the July 2010 Board meeting.



WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

ONLINE. ACCELERATED. AFFORDABLE. ACCREDITED.

Janice Hooper, PhD, RN
Nursing Consultant for Education
Texas Board of Nursing
333 Guadalupe #3-460
Austin TX 78701

February 26, 2010

Dear Dr. Hooper:

This letter provides information about our recent needs assessment in the El Paso Region for BSN prepared nurses and serve to notify the Texas Board of Nursing of our plans to deploy our program in the El Paso area the spring of 2010, with students beginning clinical in partner facilities August of 2010.

WGU conducted an online survey through three partner hospitals in El Paso area late in 2009 to determine the potential interest and need for additional baccalaureate nursing educational opportunities in the area. The survey was disseminated to hospital employees via email and was available online for 3 weeks. Responses were received primarily from two of the three hospitals; Sierra Medical Center and Sierra Providence East Medical Center. An analysis of interests was extrapolated from the survey results and showed a robust interest among hospital employees in pursuing academic degrees as listed below:

There were a total of 314 responses:

- 174 Pre-licensure responses; individuals who expressed interest in becoming RNs
- 106 RN - BSN/MSN responses; RNs interested in advancing their education
- 34 other health program responses; individuals interested in other health programs

Both Sierra Medical Center and Sierra Providence East Medical Center have expressed willingness to support an initial cohort of 10 students each with the goal of improving their workforce of BSN prepared nurses and decrease RN vacancy rate. Both hospitals report an RN vacancy rate of around 10%, they also describe a current ratio of ADN prepared to BSN prepared nurses as approximately 2:1 and a desire to reverse that ratio.

Capitalizing on our experiences in Houston and Dallas, WGU wants to ensure that our presence will not adversely impact already limited clinical spaces for existing nursing programs in the area. Therefore, data from both hospitals highlighting current nursing programs with clinical placements and available clinical placements at both facilities has been collected. The tables outlining clinical site

availability in both hospitals are provided for your review and are attached to this document beginning on page 3.

Additionally, WGU held an informational session with colleagues from the El Paso area on Tuesday December 8th, 2009 to describe our nursing programs, share plans for expansion of nursing programs in the El Paso area, listen and address questions and concerns. The session was well attended with representatives from University of Texas at El Paso, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Anita Thigpen Perry School of Nursing El Paso Campus, and El Paso Community College. We look forward to a collaborative working relationship with our colleagues in the area.

Please note that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has been informed and acknowledged WGUs plans to expand the pre-licensure nursing program to the El Paso area. I will be happy to provide any additional information that may be required. Thank you for your assistance in this process. We look forward to continuing to expand our educational services in Texas.

Sincerely,



Veronica Abdur-Rahman RN, M.Ed, PhD
Texas Director, MAP RN Project
Western Governors University
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Attachment: El Paso Data – Availability for nursing student clinical

Summary of Information on El Paso Clinical Sites

Two Tenet hospitals are willing to sponsor a cohort of ten students each in the El Paso Metropolitan area beginning April 1, 2010. The two hospitals are:

Sierra Medical Center (SMC)

Sierra Medical Center (SMC) is a 350-bed, acute short-term hospital located in El Paso, Texas, and offers a full range of advanced medical and surgical services. Sierra is accredited as a Chest Pain Center with a PCI designation from the Society of Chest Pain Centers. Specialties include advanced cardiac care including balloon angioplasty, open heart surgery, coronary stent placement and coronary by-pass surgery, Neonatal Intensive Care Nursery services for critically-ill or premature babies, advanced neurological care including MinOp System-Endoscopic Neurosurgery, Deep Brain Stimulation and Stereotactic Radiosurgery, and Gamma Knife Radiosurgery.

Sierra Providence East Medical Center (SPEMC)

Sierra Providence East Medical Center (SPEMC) is a 110-bed, acute short-term hospital also located in El Paso, TX. SPEMC provides a full range of medical and surgical services. Sierra Providence East Medical Center is approximately 15 miles from SMC (about a half hour drive). SPEMC also offers robust obstetrical services with 1615 deliveries in 2008, a stable newborn nursery, and a 12 bed Level III NICU. SPEMC's expansion plans include increasing current ICU bed capacity (number of beds to be determined), and add a second patient tower to include additional medical beds, oncology, cardiac critical care (date to be determined).

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA FOR STUDENT CAPACITY:

The data tables that follow describe all current clinical affiliations, current student clinical rotations at each of these two El Paso area hospitals including current availability for WGU students. Other than a limited number of preceptor students, these two hospitals do not have students during the summer months and have significant time available during the week after 3pm and on weekends. Careful analysis of this data reveals WGU student clinicals using the compressed clinical intensives scheduling model could easily be accommodated without any impact at all on existing student educational programs.

Table 1. Current Nursing Programs with Clinical Placements at the two El Paso area hospitals

Table 2. Available Clinical Placements Sierra Medical Center, El Paso TX

Table 3. Available Clinical Placements Sierra Providence East Medical Center, El Paso TX

Table 1. Current Nursing Programs with Clinical Placements at the two El Paso area hospitals (Sierra Medical Center, El Paso TX, Sierra Providence East Medical Center, El Paso TX)

Nursing Programs	Partner Agency	Degree(s) Offered	Type of Clinical	Admission Sequence	# of Students
<i>Public Institutions</i>					
University of Texas at El Paso	SMC	BSN	Cohort	Spring Semester	38
El Paso Community College	SMC	ADN	Cohort	Spring Semester	30
University of Texas at El Paso	SPEMC	BSN	Cohort	Spring Semester	55
University of Texas at El Paso	SPEMC	BSN	Preceptor	Spring Semester	10
University of Texas at El Paso	SPEMC	BSN	Preceptor	Summer	4
El Paso Community College	SPEMC	ADN	Cohort	Spring	10
El Paso Community College	SPEMC	ADN	Preceptor	Spring	9

Table 2. Available Clinical Placements Sierra Medical Center

Semester/Quarter/ Clinical Units by Agency	ADC	Fall	Spring	Summer
Sierra Medical Center (SMC)– 350 Beds				
L&D	13	OPEN	OPEN	Open
Nursery	22	OPEN	OPEN	Open
NICU	14	OPEN	OPEN	Open
Women's – OB/BYN	17	OPEN	OPEN	Open
Medical//Surgical Units				
Renal	28	OPEN – F, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	OPEN – Fr, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	Open
Medical Oncology	60	OPEN – F, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	OPEN – F, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	Open
Telemetry	56	OPEN – F, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	OPEN – M, Th, Su OPEN – any day from 3pm – 7am	Open
Surgical/Ortho	65	OPEN – F, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	OPEN – F, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	Open
Emergency	22	OPEN	OPEN	Open
CCU	12	OPEN – F, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	OPEN – F, Sa, Su OPEN – M, T, W, Th, 3pm – 7am	Open

ICU	15	OPEN - F, Sa, Su OPEN - M, T, W, Th, 3pm - 7am	OPEN - F, Sa, Su OPEN - M, T, W, Th, 3pm - 7am	Open
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Table 3. Available Clinical Placements Sierra Providence East Medical Center

Semester/Quarter/ Clinical Units by Agency	AD C	Fall	Spring	Summer
Sierra Providence East Medical Center (SPEMC) - 110 Beds				
Emergency Department	20	OPEN - M, T, F, Sa, Su OPEN - 3p - 7a W, Th	OPEN - M, T, F, Sa Su OPEN - 3p - 7a W, Th	OPEN
Newborn Nursery		OPEN - F OPEN - 3p - 7a M, T, W, Th	OPEN - F, OPEN - 3p - 7a T, T, W, Th	OPEN
NICU	7	OPEN - M, T, F OPEN - 3p - 7a W, Th OPEN - 7p-7a Sa, Su	OPEN - M, T, F OPEN - 3p - 7a W, Th OPEN 7p-7a Sa, Su	OPEN
Labor & Delivery	10	OPEN - F OPEN - 3p-7a M, T, W, Th OPEN - 7p - 7a Sa, Su	OPEN - F OPEN - 3p - 7a M, T, W, Th OPEN - 7p-7a Sa, Su	OPEN
Women's - OB/GYN	10	OPEN - W, Th, F OPEN - 3p - 7a M, T OPEN - 3p-7a Sa, Su	OPEN - W, Th, Fr OPEN - 3p - 7a M, T OPEN - 3p-7a Sa, Su	OPEN
Medical//Surgical Units				
Medical	20	OPEN - F, Sa Su OPEN - 3p-7a M, T, W, Th	OPEN - F, Sa Su OPEN - 3p-7a M, T, W, Th	OPEN
Telemetry	19	OPEN - F, Sa, Su OPEN - 3p - 7a M, T, W, Th	OPEN -F, Sa Su OPEN - 3p - 7a M, T, W, Th	OPEN
Cath Lab	1	OPEN - M, T, F, Sa Su OPEN - 3p - 7a W, Th	OPEN - M, T, F, Sa Su OPEN - 3p - 7a W, Th	OPEN
IMC	7	OPEN - M, T, F, Sa Su OPEN - 3p - 7a W, Th	OPEN - M, T, F, Sa Su OPEN - 3p - 7a W, Th	OPEN



WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

Information requested by the Texas Board of Nursing regarding WGU's desire to provide the prelicensure nursing program in other sties in Texas beyond Dallas and Houston.

Prepared 3/26/2010 by: Jan Jones-Schenk, MAP RN Director and Director of National Prelicensure Nursing and Veronica Abdur-Rahman, Director of Nursing for Texas

1) What do you see as reasons for the small groups of students in the Houston and Dallas areas?

Upon receiving approval from the Board of Nursing, we immediately began plans to recruit qualified students for the program. We believe now that the short timeframe of only 7 weeks of recruitment time (July 27 approval to Sept 18 intake for October 1 start) made it extremely difficulty to effectively get the message out to qualified students, As a brand new program in the area, we had two distinct challenges:

- To market and educate residents of the Dallas and Houston metropolitan areas about WGU, a new University with a competency-based education model and
- To effectively reach qualified nursing students in those markets. Our goal was to identify 20 qualified students, 10 in Dallas and 10 in Houston.

We initially enrolled a total of 17 students (9 in Houston and 8 in Dallas) for an October 1st start date. It is our opinion that one of the main reasons for the small enrollment groups was insufficient time to advertise and recruit students who had completed the necessary pre-requisite course work required for the nursing program. Our Texas Workforce Commission grant that specified the first cohort was to start by October 1 was a key driver of this timeframe. As we discussed in our application, we do require all students we enroll to pass a national CNA performance exam in order to progress in the program. Unfortunately, 2 of these initial 17 did not pass the exam (even though both were certified as CNAs) so we did not allow them to progress. Additionally, we had some attrition as 2 chose not to continue in the program. Needless to say, we have learned and continue to learn from our experiences in Texas and California and have expended effort to fine-tune our recruitment and admission process.

2) How were these students recruited and were there more students who sought admission?

Several strategies were used to recruit students. Ads were placed in both markets (Dallas and Houston) recruitment via onsite visits to our partner hospitals was conducted in August and September. We worked with our partner hospitals in Houston (Mainland Hospital and Clear Lake Regional Medical Center) and Dallas (Lake Pointe, Centennial and Doctors Hospital) to employ Survey Monkey to identify employees across the organizations who may be potential students. From our experience in California, we learned that potential students come from all hospital departments and we wanted to attract employees inside and outside nursing departments. We received over 200 leads, with approximately 90 expressing interest in the BSN/MSN programs and approximately

75 leads for the prelicensure BSN program. However many of those who expressed an interest in the program still required many pre-requisite courses to complete.

3) When do you expect the first students to graduate from WGU in Texas?

We expect to have our first Texas cohort graduates in September, 2011.

4) Other sites for the future were not included in the proposal except for a mention of the Austin area. Can you list sites of interest for the future?

When we got our approval for Texas, we thought the approval was not based on a specific geographic region and would be able to offer the program throughout the state. Since we do not have a specific geographic location and because one of our program goals is to make sure we are responding to employer needs, which can change, based on local conditions we believe one of the values of a "non-geographically bound" program is the flexibility to be able to respond to new sites throughout the state. Since our approval, we have had discussions with hospital organizations in El Paso, Brownsville and preliminary outreach discussions with several other regions in the state that have expressed a desire to enhance their BSN workforce.

While our student pipeline changes almost hourly, we have provided below an overview of current student activity by market area below:

Market or City	Total Pipeline	# Potentially qualified	# Incumbent workers
Houston	81	31	0
Dallas	74	20	2
El Paso	93	22	8
Brownsville	7	3	3

Additionally, our process in each and every instance where we receive requests from hospitals (whether they are partners or not) is to thoroughly analyze their current clinical capacity as well as potential student pipeline and we submit that info to both the Board of Nursing and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

5) When CCNE comes to Texas for a focal visit, where will they make the visit?

We do not have that information at the present time, but will be happy to share with you once it is confirmed. The prelicensure BSN program is currently approved in two (2) states (California and Texas), and do not know if CCNE will plan focused visits to these states or will confine their visit to Utah.