Learning Outcomes Data for the Senate Committee on Instructional Program Priorities

Program: MS Nursing (with RN license) - Master’s of Science in Nursing (MSN)

Department: School of Nursing

Number of students enrolled in the program in Fall, 2011: 86 MSN (26 of these students are also enrolled in the School Nursing Credential Program, housed in CCE)

Faculty member completing template: Dr. Carolynn Goetze, Chair; Dr. Alexa Curtis, Graduate Coordinator

Date: February 3, 2012

Period of reference in the template: 2006-07 to present

1. Please describe your program’s learning-outcomes trajectory since 2006-07: Has there been a transformation of organizational culture regarding the establishment of learning outcomes and the capacity to assess progress toward their achievement? If so, during which academic year would you say the transformation became noticeable? What lies ahead; what is the next likely step in developing a learning-outcomes organizational culture within the program?

The School of Nursing (SoN) has a firmly embedded evaluative culture. There has been substantial program review and outcome revision since 2006, when faculty recognized that the mission, philosophy, program purposes and outcomes needed updating to better match current trends and a shared faculty vision for the future. Recent transformations in measuring MSN learning outcomes occurred in preparation for the 2009 Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) accreditation and in response to this organization’s graduate nursing education mandates.

In 2008, survey data was obtained from students, alumni, and community partners to assess learning outcomes. In 2011, learning outcome measures were evaluated again as part of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation of the MSN online curriculum and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) accreditation of the School Nurse program. Also in 2011, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) released the newest version of *The Essentials of Master’s Education in Nursing*, requiring a current re-evaluation of the learning outcomes for alignment. Future assessment of learning outcome measures will reflect the 2011 AACN *Essentials*, the CCNE accreditation standards, the CTCC mandates, and the WASC requirements for online curriculum.

2. Please list in prioritized order (or indicate no prioritization regarding) up to four desired learning outcomes ("takeaways" concerning such elements of curriculum as perspectives, specific content knowledge, skill sets, confidence levels) for students completing the program. For each stated outcome, please provide the reason that it was designated as desired by the faculty associated with the program.

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The SoN graduate program has clearly delineated purposes and eight Core Competencies which are guided by the School’s mission and philosophy. All of these are consistent with the mission/philosophy of the College and University and approved by the accrediting body, the CCNE. Faculty are presently working on updates to program goals to better align with the 2011 AACN Essentials. For the purposes of this document, the SoN has selected the following learning outcomes without prioritization.

a) Competency 1: Access, analyze, and utilize current and relevant data to address problems, initiate change, and improve practice of nursing.

The SoN believes that Master’s graduates should acquire competence in the use of the scientific method for the purpose of improving health care. More and more, healthcare organizations are expected to be able to measure client outcomes and utilize this data for quality improvement. The IOM and others note that patient outcomes are improved when clinicians participate in research trials and when dissemination of findings is rapid. Students in the MSN program are expected to develop skills in identifying the key components of data analysis, determining the type of analysis needed, and in interpreting the findings in a way that is applicable and easily understood. These skills are developed within the program via courses in theory, research, and as part of the culminating experience.

b) Competency 4: Utilize theoretical frameworks in framing exploration of current issues in nursing practice.

The MSN student is challenged to acquire advanced knowledge of nursing science and nursing theory as a basis for role development in nursing practice. The faculty believe that Master’s-level nursing graduates must have an advanced level of nursing and relevant sciences as well as the ability to integrate this knowledge into practice. By increasing their professional skills, graduates will be able to enhance patient care and to assume leadership roles in nursing. The MSN curriculum provides an entire nursing theory course to introduce basic and higher order frameworks for exploring the profession and also to help students learn to define levels of theory development. Students are also asked to demonstrate mastery of theoretical concepts throughout the core curriculum and as part of the Comprehensive Examination.

c) Competency 5: Demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and disposition needed to participate in the development of health care policy as an advocate, consultant, consumer, and leader.

Master’s education must prepare the graduate to lead change to improve quality outcomes and lead collaborative inter-professional care teams. Nurses are at the front lines of healthcare delivery and must be involved in policy development. Within the MSN curriculum, the faculty provide learning experiences to build knowledge of and skills in policy analysis and evaluation.

d) Competency 7: Demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and disposition in a specialized nursing area needed to provide excellent nursing care to individuals, groups, and communities.

The MSN program prepares graduates to deepen their level of preparation in a specialized area. SoN faculty value this competency as a stimulus for continued personal and professional

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development, including a scholarly foundation that allows for seamless movement into a research or practice-focused doctoral program. The program allows students to pursue this aim in the direction of particular interest or expertise with varied opportunities for exploration and analysis across the curriculum.

3. *For undergraduate programs only,* in what ways are the set of desired learning outcomes described above aligned with the University’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals? Please be as specific as possible.

This item is not applicable for the graduate program.

4. *For each* desired outcome indicated in item 2 above, please:
   a) Describe the method(s) by which its ongoing pursuit is monitored and measured.
   b) Include a description of the sample of students (e.g., random sample of transfer students declaring the major; graduating seniors) from whom data were/will be collected and the frequency and schedule with which the data in question were/will be collected.
   c) Describe and append a sample (or samples) of the “instrument” (e.g., survey or test), “artifact” (e.g., writing sample and evaluative protocol, performance review sheet), or other device used to assess the status of the learning outcomes desired by the program.
   d) Explain how the program faculty analyzed and evaluated (will analyze and evaluate) the data to reach conclusions about each desired student learning outcome.

a), b) The SoN Program Evaluation Plan prescribes the means and frequency of evaluation related to each program outcome. This process and the data collected are similar for each of the outcomes listed in item 2, as listed below.

i. Annual course evaluations conducted for each MSN course, submitted in fall (unless course taught in spring, which necessitates the evaluation be conducted and submitted in spring)
ii. Annual syllabus review conducted for each MSN course, conducted in spring
iii. Annual EBI exit survey of graduating students to be implemented this spring
iv. Annual focus group of graduating students, conducted in spring
v. Annual alumni survey to be implemented in coming year
vi. Employer focus group survey, conducted twice annually

Student achievement of learning outcomes is also measured via aggregate student performance on several major program requirements. Data from the Comprehensive Examination (NURS 500 Culminating Experience) and the electronic portfolio (E-folio) informs faculty on how well students are meeting overall program outcomes. In addition, aggregate student performance on the quality improvement project yields information regarding several expected outcomes such as *Core Competency 1.*

c) A sample of the updated Program Evaluation Plan (University approval pending) as well as the course evaluation student surveys, course evaluation summary report template, syllabus evaluation form and focus group prompts are included at the end of this document.
d) The PEC and Graduate Curriculum Committee are charged with reviewing the evaluation data and taking action in an effort toward program improvement. Each committee’s responsibilities are delineated within the Program Evaluation Plan (see attached).

5. Regarding each outcome and method discussed in items 2 and 4 above, please provide examples of how findings from the learning outcomes process have been utilized to address decisions to revise or maintain elements of the curriculum (including decisions to alter the program’s desired outcomes). If such decision-making has not yet occurred, please describe the plan by which it will occur.

Program evaluation findings from data collected between 2008 and 2010 were used to guide curricular revisions to improve learning outcomes in the MSN program. As noted previously, the curriculum needed better alignment with the updated AACN Essentials. Faculty found that the core curriculum had experienced some drift in content and objectives, leaving gaps in covering both program goals and program standards.

Employer findings showed that many expressed an interest in MSN graduates with a generalist background consisting of both leadership and educator skills. Employers reported a need to increase emphasis on informatics and research while identifying that employment opportunities for Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) in the region were limited.

Student data was also used to assess the program. Data showed that 50% of graduate students did not progress to graduation when opting for either a thesis or project as their culminating experience. Once these options were substituted with a Comprehensive Examination, the faculty found that students struggled in utilization of research and application of theory, that many had insufficient writing skills, and that some did not feel adequately prepared for the Examination. At the same time, data showed that students were predominately interested in School Nurse, Family Nurse Practitioner (via a partnership with the University of California, Davis), or a combination of Education and Advanced Clinical Practice. Those who stated an interest in Education often were switching tracks due to a concurrent interest in the advanced pathophysiology and advanced pharmacology content, which was offered to students in the clinical program tracks. Student surveys showed continued interest in distance learning but also a desire for some face to face connection and some students noted that the technology and writing expectations were difficult. Graduates reported feeling prepared to assume a professional role that requires an advanced education in nursing and reported obtaining or seeking a change in employment as a result of their MSN program.

The format of program offerings was adjusted in light of the program evaluation data. The MSN core courses were completely restructured and included creation of three new courses and changes in the emphasis of two remaining courses. The core consolidated from seven courses and 18 units to five courses and 15 units. These core courses were better aligned with the AACN Essentials. The CNS track was eliminated and the Education and Advanced Clinical Role tracks were consolidated. The graduate nursing program became accredited as an online program and opportunities for face to face class meetings were integrated throughout the curriculum. The Comprehensive Examination was implemented in spring 2008 as the primary option for the culminating experience. Supports for successful completion of the Examination were instituted earlier in the curriculum via an entry writing intensive course (NURS 209). This course provides both writing and use of technology assessment for early detection of student remediation needs. The graduate coordinator also implemented MS Nursing(with RN License)
Comprehensive Examination workshops for all students and Examination expectations were integrated into the core coursework. Lastly, the E-folio was integrated into the graduate curriculum to organize and showcase graduate student learning outcomes.

6. Has the program systematically sought data from alumni to measure the longer-term effects of accomplishment of the program’s learning outcomes? If so, please describe the approach to this information-gathering and the ways in which the information will be applied to the program’s curriculum. If such activity has not yet occurred, please describe the plan by which it will occur.

Measurement of MSN alumni data has primarily been gathered via employers. The SoN has regularly utilized focus groups to ascertain employer perceptions of nursing graduates’ preparation adequacy. Some focus groups have been agency-specific (such as managers’ meetings) while others have occurred within annual regional clinical placement meetings or during annual community advisory committee meetings.

This past year there has been a concerted effort to contact alumni for the Campaign for Nursing, which has resulted in amazing response. Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that our MSN graduates are employed, many have returned to teach for our program or are teaching elsewhere, many alums have gone on to doctoral study or to professional certification programs such as Nurse Practitioner, and many hold management positions. The SoN is exploring the use of an online alumni survey that can be used with MSN graduates within five years of program completion. There is also hope that the new Efollio program requirement will yield alumni data for analysis.

7. Does the program pursue learning outcomes identified by an accrediting or other professional discipline-related organization as important? Does the set of outcomes pursued by your program exceed those identified as important by your accrediting or other professional discipline-related organization?

The MSN program is accredited by the CCNE and WASC with additional accreditation of the School Nurse Credential Program by CCTC. It is the goal of the graduate program to promote excellence in all learning outcomes established by the accrediting agencies and professional organizations. The SoN does not believe the program currently exceeds what is required by accreditors.

8. Finally, what additional information would you like to share with the Senate Committee on Instructional Program Priorities regarding the program’s desired learning outcomes and assessment of their accomplishment?

Graduate nursing learning outcomes can be difficult to track because they are dependent on several indicators that occur after graduation and response rates for alumni surveys may be insufficient for adequate evaluation. The E-folio was adopted in part for the capacity to track nursing graduate student activities after graduation. The E-folio is available to students to update after graduation. Students will

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be encouraged to retain their portfolio account and structure the link so that it is accessible to the SoN graduate coordinator to assist in communicating with alumni and tracking graduate student activities post-graduation.