

# ACCREDITATION OF CANADIAN BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMMES IN NURSING

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What is accreditation? Why should we be concerned with accreditation of baccalaureate programmes in nursing? Accreditation is a process by which an agency or organization evaluates and recognizes an educational institution or programme of study as meeting certain pre-determined criteria or standards (Ozimek 1974:4). The decision to award accreditation status or not involves a judgement on quality. Nursing is accountable for the quality of care delivered by its practitioners. Educational programmes, the primary means of preparing nursing practitioners, must prepare individuals who will meet society's need for highly qualified practitioners.

Baccalaureate programmes in nursing need to periodically assess their overall effectiveness. Faculty in the programme must ascertain the validity of the purposes and goals, the extent to which each part of the programme supports and builds on other parts thereby promoting or negating the accomplishment of the goals of the programme and the effect of factors influencing the programme.

An educational programme is complex; evaluation is difficult and consuming of time and resources. Accreditation through establishing standards or criteria by which the programme can be assessed facilitates and stimulates self-evaluation as well as identifying the degree to which the programme meets established standards.

## *C.A.U.S.N. AND ACCREDITATION*

The Canadian Association of University Schools of Nursing (C.A.U.S.N.) has identified the evaluation and ultimately the accreditation of baccalaureate programmes in nursing in Canada as one of its primary functions. The development of criteria and methods for evaluation has been undertaken by various task groups between the years 1957-1971. In April, 1973 a task group presented a report which identified criteria for the assessment of educational programmes in nursing. Four criteria perceived as qualities or values

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essential to the effectiveness of any baccalaureate programme in nursing were identified. Assessment of the degree to which the criteria were present in a programme was seen as a basis for self-evaluation (C.A.U.S.N.: 1973). The four criteria are:

1. Accountability of the faculty: the extent to which the stated goals of a nursing education programme and the abilities of its graduates are giving evidence of faculty fulfilling responsibility for preparing students to function as baccalaureate nurses.

2. Relatedness of parts of the programme: the extent to which each part of the nursing education programme supports and builds on other parts thereby promoting or negating the accomplishment of the goals of the programme.

3. Relevance of the programme: the extent to which the described goals of the programme and the nursing abilities of its graduates are relating adequately to the health needs of its community.

4. Uniqueness of the programme: the extent to which each part of a programme is manifesting fitness, or is appropriate to the goals of the programme, the faculty, and to its setting.

In March, 1974 a C.A.U.S.N. Committee on Accreditation was established to assess the criteria and to develop methods for evaluating baccalaureate programmes in nursing. The criteria and methodology may ultimately form the basis for accreditation.

A critical review of the literature on evaluation and accreditation of educational programmes in nursing led the Committee to accept the approach advocated by Allen (1975).

The Committee has examined three self-selected baccalaureate programmes in nursing in order to:

1. Identify the major components or parts of a baccalaureate programme;
2. Develop means of gathering data relevant to the four components;
3. Develop means of analyzing the data in relation to the four criteria;
4. Identify indicators of the criteria in relation to each component;
5. Evaluate the criteria as standards by which baccalaureate programmes may be evaluated and if the criteria are considered appropriate, then
6. Develop scales by which the degree of accountability, relevance, relatedness and uniqueness may be measured, thus permitting judgements regarding the quality of the programme.

## STATUS REPORT

The major components or parts of a baccalaureate programme in nursing are: goals and purpose, curriculum, teaching of nursing, practice of nursing and research, and administration. The components interact to achieve the common goals and purposes. Clearly articulated goals and purposes provide the direction for the programme. The curriculum provides for an organized and sequential plan of learning experiences. Teaching of nursing, the focal activity of the programme, involves the provision of conditions which enable the students to interact with patient situations in a problem-solving way (learning to nurse might best be characterized as a problem-solving process). The practice of nursing and research are integral parts of the programme as they contribute to the teaching of nursing and to increasing knowledge in nursing. The administration of a programme needs to provide and to organize the resources in a manner that most effectively will support and facilitate the achievement of programme goals and purposes. Resources include: faculty, students, finances, facilities, communication channels, decision-making processes, etc. (Allen 1975).

The methods developed to collect data in relation to these components include: participant observation, questionnaires, interview guides, written materials, i.e. course descriptions, calendar, curriculum description, reports, etc.

The tools developed to date are being further refined but do provide a means of gathering adequate data on most of the components.

Indicators of the criteria in relation to each of the components have been developed. A series of evaluative questions based on these indicators allows a judgement to be made regarding the degree to which a criterion is or is not present.

A lengthy list of indicators has been developed, but examples of the indicators in relation to each component may suffice to illustrate the type of information required.

### PURPOSES AND GOALS

*Relevance* — evidence that the purposes and goals are influenced and modified by the health care needs of the community i.e., systematic manner of data collection, monitoring and evaluation of factors which influence the nature of the programme.

*Relatedness* — the programme purposes and goals are consistent with those of the university.

*Accountability* — programme goals and purposes compatible with the needs of the students.

## *CURRICULUM*

*Relevance* — clinical situations in which students learn to nurse are basically representative of situations graduates of the programme will encounter.

*Relatedness* — the clinical situations and their sequencing is consistent with the teaching of nursing; the programme goals and the teaching of nursing influence the selection of clinical situations for each segment of the programme.

*Accountability* — there is increasing complexity of clinical situations within the planned experiences and students have the prerequisite behaviours required to deal with complexities.

## *TEACHING OF NURSING*

*Relevance* — students learn a type of problem-solving which will prepare them to respond to the health needs of the community.

*Relatedness* — the students learn a type of problem-solving consistent with the purposes and goals; there is a consistency of approach across teachers.

*Accountability* — learning to nurse proceeds with scientific knowledge; students look at health needs, at problems of individuals, families, and communities with broad understanding and insight.

## *PRACTICE OF NURSING AND RESEARCH*

*Relevance* — type of faculty involvement in nursing practice and research is consistent with the type of practitioner required by the community.

*Relatedness* — there is a consistency between the approach to the practice of nursing and the purposes and goals.

*Accountability* — the faculty's involvement in practice and research contributes to meeting the health needs of the community.

## *ADMINISTRATION*

*Relevance* — the administration supports and facilitates faculty in determining the relevance of the programme to the health needs of the community i.e., provision of opportunity for faculty to participate in community groups examining health needs.

*Relatedness* — the selection of students and faculty is consistent with the programme purposes and goals; budget allotments allow for faculty, supplies, equipment, facilities etc. required for the development, implementation and evaluation of the programme.

*Accountability* — the administrative structure is responsive to external influences and demands i.e., the employers demand changes

in the educational programme in order to prepare nurses for specific roles.

It is difficult to differentiate between the criteria relevance and uniqueness in relation to specific components. The criterion, *uniqueness* may be applied best to the overall programme. The major question to be raised is: do the programme goals take cognizance of the characteristics peculiar to that community, university, potential student population etc.?

### CONCLUSIONS

Accountability, relevance and relatedness do provide a basis for programme evaluation. Additional work must be done in order to refine the techniques of data gathering and analysis. The component "teaching of nursing" is particularly difficult to assess and efforts are now directed toward the development of valid, reliable tools to measure this component. Baccalaureate programmes in nursing are complex systems but the components identified have proven to be appropriate sub-entities. Evaluating the criteria and developing and evaluating methods by which baccalaureate programmes in nursing may be evaluated has been a most challenging and rewarding task for the programmes involved and the members of the Committee on Accreditation.

### References

- Allen, Moyra. *A Design for Evaluation: Applied in Educational Programmes in Nursing*, 1975 (in press).
- C.A.U.S.N.: *Criteria for Evaluation of Schools of Nursing*, Ottawa: Canadian Association of University Schools of Nursing, 1973.
- Ozimek, Dorothy. *Accreditation of Baccalaureate and Masters Degree Programs in Nursing*, Pub. No. 15-1519. New York: National League for Nursing, 1974.

**A SPECIAL ISSUE of Nursing Papers is planned for later this year on "Meeting Consumer Needs by Teaching Students Nursing Administration". A C.A.U.S.N. interest group report on this subject and responses to it from nurses across Canada will comprise the entire issue. If you wish to respond to this report in a brief statement (3-4 pages) in English or French please request a copy from the editors.**