

OAKWOOD UNIVERSITY
Department of Nursing

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
Introduction

The attached Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are designed to provide answers to concerns that have been expressed to the Oakwood University Department of Nursing. Our communities of interest are often exposed to rumor and misinformation about the nursing program. Incorrect information does not facilitate the common good. There are credible sources of information about the program at Oakwood and about nursing education and practice in general. In evaluating such information, one must always ask, "Would I want a nurse who had not completed successfully a rigorous educational program to care for me or for my loved ones?"

Please feel free to contact the Department of Nursing or the other sources of information listed at the end of the FAQs if you have additional questions or concerns. We welcome the opportunity for conversations with you.

OAKWOOD UNIVERSITY
Department of Nursing

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why should a prospective student choose to study nursing at Oakwood University?

- The purpose of the Oakwood University Department of Nursing is to provide a liberal arts foundation to prepare nurses to apply Christian principles in meeting the biopsychosocial and spiritual needs of patients across the lifespan and in a variety of health care settings.
- The nursing program is appropriate to students who wish to learn and apply biblical and distinctly Seventh-day Adventist principles to the practice of nursing at the baccalaureate level.
- The department offers two options: a generic (four-year Bachelor of Science) option that prepares students for the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and a two-year option (RN-BS Completion) that provides registered nurses prepared at the associate degree level an opportunity to obtain a bachelors degree in nursing.
- The educational experience at Oakwood provides the opportunity to form lifelong personal and professional relationships with nurses around the world.
- Oakwood nursing graduates fill responsible positions in clinical nursing across the country. Many graduates have completed master's and doctoral programs and are now serving as nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, clinical nurse specialists, nurse administrators, and nurse educators.

What is the difference between approval and accreditation for the Department of Nursing?

- All nursing programs in the US must be approved by the local state board of nursing to offer nursing education leading to licensure; this is **mandatory**.
- Oakwood University Department of Nursing is approved by the Alabama Board of Nursing (ABN).
- Failure to maintain program approval by the ABN will result in program closure.
- Accreditation of programs of nursing, on the other hand, is a mark of excellence that is **voluntary**; nursing programs do not have to be accredited to offer nursing education leading to licensure.
- Oakwood University Department of Nursing was accredited initially by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) in 2005; this was the first time in its history that Oakwood University has had an accredited program in nursing.
- Graduation from an accredited nursing program is of great benefit to graduates: it is required for admission by many graduate nursing programs, it is a requirement for many research grants and scholarships for nurses, and in some states it is a requirement for licensure.
- Oakwood University Department of Nursing is in the process seeking continuing accreditation by the NLNAC during 2010.

Has the Department of Nursing ever lost its accreditation?

- No.
- The Oakwood University Department of Nursing received initial accreditation for its new baccalaureate program in nursing from the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) in 2005; that status has never been revoked or even questioned.
- Initial accreditation from the NLNAC is for a period of five years (2010).
- During 2010 the program is undergoing a review for continuing accreditation by the NLNAC.
- Continuing accreditation from the NLNAC is for a period of eight years.

What is the NCLEX-RN, and why is it so important?

- The National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) is a national examination administered by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN).
- The NCSBN is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to provide a forum for state boards of nursing to act and counsel together on matters of common interest and concern affecting the public health, safety, and welfare, including the development of licensing examinations in nursing.
- The NCLEX-RN is used by state boards of nursing (in Alabama, the Alabama Board of Nursing) to test the entry-level nursing competence of nursing school graduates for licensure as registered nurses.
- Graduates of nursing programs must pass the NCLEX-RN in order to practice nursing.
- Nursing programs, such as Oakwood Department of Nursing, must certify that a person has graduated from their nursing program in order for that person to sit for the NCLEX-RN.
- The NCLEX-RN is a test of basic competency for the safe practice of nursing; it is not a test of excellence.

Why does the Department of Nursing require students to pass an exit examination in order to graduate?

- Oakwood University requires passing an exit examination as a graduation requirement for all seniors, not just nursing students. (See *Oakwood University Bulletin 2009-2011*, page 42.)
- The Department of Nursing requires an exit examination in compliance with Oakwood University policy.
- In addition, most nursing programs in the US use their exit examinations as a means of predicting success on the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN). Nursing exit examinations are developed by testing companies that use the NCLEX-RN test plan to structure the exit examinations. These exit examinations are subjected to extensive national analysis using large numbers of test takers to arrive at predictions of NCLEX-RN success. Thus companies can make claims that predict the likelihood of passing the NCLEX-RN on the first attempt among those who pass the exit examination. Nursing programs choose their exit examinations from those companies who can show a high predicted first time pass rate on the NCLEX-RN among those who pass the exit examination.

What is the relationship between the exit examination and the approval and accreditation of the Department of Nursing program?

- Nursing is a practice discipline. The faculty of a nursing education program has a responsibility, not only to the students of the program, but also to the public who trusts the program to graduate students who are competent to practice nursing.
- State boards of nursing establish minimum first time National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) pass rates for graduates as a condition for continuing approval of nursing education programs.
- The Alabama Board of Nursing Administrative Code, Chapter 610-X-3, Nursing Education Program, 610-X-3-.02 Outcome Standards, mandates that “effective October 1, 2004, graduates, as a composite of first time writers, shall achieve no less than an eighty percent (80%) pass rate on a board selected national licensure exam” (*ABN Administrative Code*). This means that 80% of graduates who sit for the NCLEX-RN must pass it on their **first** attempt. Prior to October 2004 the first time pass rate was 75%.
- Not only has the required pass rate been increased, the difficulty of the NCLEX-RN and the complexity of its test items is constantly increasing. Failure to maintain the required pass rate will lead to program warning, probation, and closure.
- There is discussion as to the possibility of raising the first time NCLEX-RN pass rate to 85% in Alabama.
- The National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) requires that nursing programs maintain a first time NCLEX-RN pass rate at or above the national mean (average). The national mean is calculated each year for candidates educated in the US and for all candidates. The table below shows the comparison of Oakwood pass rates with these national means.

Oakwood NCLEX-RN First Time Pass Rates Compared With National Means

National NCLEX-RN First Time Pass Rates (%)			Oakwood Pass Rates (%)
	US Educated Candidates	All Candidates (US and international)	
2005	87.3	73.0	100
2006	88.1	73.8	100
2007	85.5	69.4	100
2008	86.7	69.9	81.81%**
2009*	89.52	73.73	83.33%***

*2009 pass rates through June 2009

** Of the 11 graduates in 2008, 9 passed on the first attempt and 2 failed.

***Reflects only those among the 12 graduates (2009) who had taken the NCLEX-RN as of February 2010 (6 took the NCLEX-RN: 5 graduates passed, 1 failed).

NCLEX Statistics From NCSBN, 1/17/06; 1/16/07; 1/23/08; 1/15/09; 7/16/09.

Which exit examination does the Department of Nursing use?

- The Department of Nursing uses the Health Educations Systems, Inc. (HESI) Exit Exam (E²) RN version as its exit examination. The HESI examination is a computerized test designed to evaluate student and program outcomes and provide an evidence-based rationale for curriculum development and modification.
- The HESI E² was developed to assess the student's readiness for the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) through the evaluation of individual strengths and weaknesses and the prediction of NCLEX-RN outcomes. The HESI E² matches the latest NCLEX-RN test plan and includes the latest alternate item question formats that are found on the NCLEX-RN. Personalized remediation content is available.
- The HESI E² is the most widely used exit examination for nursing in the US, and it is the best predictor of success on the NCLEX-RN. Students who pass the HESI E² have a 97.82% probability of passing the NCLEX-RN on the first attempt.
- The HESI E² is a 150-item comprehensive examination that is administered in NU421 Nursing Seminar in the last semester of the senior year. Multiple versions of the HESI E² are available, so that different versions may be used if re-testing is necessary, thus allowing evaluation for remediation between tests.
- The policy governing the departmental exit examination is published in the *Nursing Student Handbook* on page 55. Successful performance on the exit examination, defined as a score of 900 on the HESI E² examination, is a course requirement in NU421 Nursing Seminar.
- Students are allowed three opportunities to pass the exit examination. A deferred grade (DG) is assigned until the student has passed the exit examination.
- Failure to pass the exit examination on the third attempt will result in the student's dismissal from the program. Students may appeal for additional opportunities to pass the exit examination.

Why is the passing score on the exit examination so high?

- The passing score on the HESI E² for the Oakwood University Department of Nursing is 900. This is the passing score that is recommended by the makers of the test.
- Some programs use 850, which is the "minimally acceptable level" according to the company that makes the test.
- Small programs, such as Oakwood's, where the risk associated with each individual student is much greater, are especially advised to use 900.

Since the Department of nursing program produces small numbers of graduates, does this indicate that its high NCLEX-RN pass rates do not mean as much as they do in larger nursing programs?

- No. It means just the opposite.
- In a small program such as at Oakwood University, each student represents a substantial proportion of the total percentage contributing to the NCLEX-RN pass rate. For example, if a program has only 10 graduates during an academic year, if more than 2 students fail the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) on the first

attempt; the program has not achieved the Alabama Board of Nursing (ABN) pass rate of 80%. Each student in this example accounts for 10% of the score.

- On the other hand, if the program has 100 graduates, over 20 students must fail the NCLEX-RN in order to put the program in jeopardy. Each student in this example accounts for only 1% of the passing score.
- Thus the relative weight of each student is much greater in small programs, making the margin for error in such programs much greater.
- In small programs the relative weight of each individual student means that the faculty must invest significantly in the preparation of each student and must pay very careful attention to ensuring that each graduate is likely to pass the NCLEX-RN on the first attempt. The very survival of the program depends on this issue. Smaller programs are much less able to take the risk that large numbers of students will fail the NCLEX-RN.
- This is why a high NCLEX-RN pass rate in a small program is a much greater accomplishment for a small program than for a large one, not the contrary.
- This disadvantage to small programs was recognized by the ABN when the chair of the Oakwood Department of Nursing was invited to address them in the summer of 2008 on issues related to small, historically black, private, and church-related nursing programs. The ABN acknowledged the increased burden for a small program to maintain a high NCLEX-RN pass rate when compared to large programs. ABN members discussed the possibility of a prorated pass score requirement to recognize the undue pressure on small programs, but no changes have been made to date.

Why are nursing students required to take so many courses?

- Oakwood University requires students to complete 128 credit hours in order to graduate; nursing students must complete 132-133 credits in order to graduate.
- In a professional discipline, such as nursing, students must not only complete the courses necessary to obtain a liberal arts degree, but must also take both the theory and clinical courses necessary to ensure that they graduate as safe practitioners of nursing. This protects members of the public who depend on nursing programs to produce competent nurses. Baccalaureate degree nurses are expected to assume leadership positions in the health care system, so they must meet high liberal education and nursing education standards.

Why does it take four academic years for students complete the nursing program?

- The curriculum in nursing at Oakwood University is sequential, i.e., each academic year builds on the previous year. So, the student must have the knowledge gained in the freshman year before he or she is ready to progress to the sophomore year, and so on.
- Because of the small size of the faculty, nine including the chair, the curriculum can only be taught once a year. Courses are taught either only in the fall semester or only in the spring semester, and there are no summer courses. Thus the program cannot be accelerated, and students whose progression is delayed must wait a year in order to re-enter the course sequence.
- In recognition of the fact that some students may need more than four years to complete the nursing program, a five-year curriculum plan has been developed. This allows students who need more time to be successful to progress through the program at a slower pace.

Does the faculty of the Department of Nursing want students to succeed? If so, why is the program so difficult?

- As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian program Oakwood University Department of Nursing must meet a standard higher than that among the many excellent secular programs in nursing across the country.
 - The program is committed to the integration of faith and learning. This means that in its theoretical and clinical teaching the student is provided the tools and opportunity to critique secular knowledge from the perspective of biblical faith. This valued-added component of the nursing program adds content to the curriculum and a higher standard to the evaluation of the student.
 - One of the primary goals of the nursing program is the spiritual formation of the student. This focus on character development means that the student is exposed to higher moral expectations than what may be acceptable in a secular program.
- The faculty of a nursing education program has a responsibility not only to the students of the program, but also to the public who trusts the program to graduate students who are competent to practice nursing. Nurses are called to make critical patient care decisions on a daily basis, and the consequences of mistakes have life and death implications. There is ongoing concern in the health care delivery system about the number of health care errors that cause patient complications and even deaths. Nursing education programs such as Oakwood must ensure the competence of its graduates as a matter of public trust.
- The acuity (level of illness) of patients both in the hospitals and among those who need nursing care at home is increasing; thus creating a demand for greater educational preparation and a higher level of practical skill among graduates of nursing programs.
- It is harder to pass the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) than ever before.
 - Several years ago new more difficult types of items were added to the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) at the same time the passing standard was raised by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). This means it became much harder for nursing program graduates to pass the examination.
 - This change made it even more important for the Oakwood University Department of Nursing to ensure that graduates were able to pass the NCLEX-RN on their first attempt, because the approval and the accreditation of the program is dependent on this percentage.
 - On April 1, 2010 the passing standard for the NCLEX-RN will again be raised by the NCSBN. According to NCSBN policy, NCLEX passing standards are reevaluated once every three years to accommodate possible changes in entry-level nursing practices.
 - The NCSBN determined that safe and effective entry-level registered nursing practice requires a greater level of knowledge, skills, and ability than it did three years ago. The passing standard was increased in response to changes in US

health care delivery and nursing practice that have resulted in the greater acuity of clients seen by entry-level registered nurses.

What does the Department of Nursing faculty do to help students in their academic program?

- The Department of Nursing has an enviable record of student advisement and support among the academic departments of the university. Nursing faculty spend a number of hours outside of the mandated 10 office hours mentoring students individually and in groups.
- The director of the audio-visual laboratory tutors students and assists them to form study groups.
- The Department of Nursing has a Remediation Committee that oversees and supports an individualized program to assist any student who experiences academic difficulty.
- Students participate in a program of testing (ATI) that is integrated across the curriculum. Tests are administered every semester that students must pass in order to progress. A comprehensive remediation and re-testing program is provided by ATI to ensure that students have mastered the content at each level before they move on.
- The department has a structured plan of learning contracts that is used to make a formal agreement with any student who has academic problems to ensure that nursing content is mastered before the student progresses in the program. (See the *Nursing Student Handbook*; it is on the Department of Nursing webpage on the Oakwood University website.) Instructors and nursing advisors work with students on an individual basis to develop learning contracts and assist students to complete them.
- Department faculty have assisted students outside the regular academic setting in many ways.
 - Personal financial contributions of up to \$1000 at a time to support student tuition costs.
 - Purchasing textbooks for students.
 - Providing housing for students.
 - Providing transportation for students.
 - Providing food for students.
 - Direct and anonymous donations of cash to needy students.
 - Giving or loaning books to students from their personal libraries.
 - Sponsoring group meals for students in the department.
 - Providing fruit and other goodies for students during exam week.
- The faculty prays for the students as a group and for individual student needs and academic progress on a weekly basis. Each class and individual students with special needs are listed in the departmental prayer journal. Special prayer is offered for students who are scheduled for exit and other examinations.
- All instances of the faculty implementing exceptions to stated policy have been to the benefit of students; never to their detriment.

What happens if a student cannot pass the exit examination?

- Department of Nursing faculty advise students who do not pass the exit examination with regard to career options in nursing or in other health professions.

- Students who do not pass the exit examination have several options
 - A Bachelor of Science degree in Health Science at Oakwood University.
 - A degree in nursing from a non-traditional (multiple entry/multiple exit) program
 - A degree in another discipline from Oakwood University or another institution of higher learning.
- Students who do not pass the exit examination are advised to sit for the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN) so they can find gainful employment in nursing while deciding on career options.

Where can I get more information?

- Go to the Oakwood University Website and access the Department of Nursing page.
 - www.oakwood.edu. Look under Academics and then for the Department of Nursing.
- Call, write, email, fax the Department of Nursing
 - Oakwood University
Department of Nursing
7000 Adventist Blvd.
Huntsville, AL 35896
256.726.7287
256.726.8338 (fax)
www.nursing@oakwood.edu
- Contact related organizations
 - Alabama Board of Nursing
RSA Plaza, Suite 250
770 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36104
800.656.5318
www.abn.state.al.us
 - National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission
3343 Peachtree Road, NE, Suite 500
Atlanta, GA 30326
404.975.5000
404.975.5020 (fax)
www.nlnac.org
 - National Council of State Boards of Nursing
111 Wacker Drive, Suite 2900
Chicago, IL 60601-4277
312.525.3600
312.279.1032 (fax)
Info@ncsbn.org