

NLN PRE-RN EXAMINATION

OBJECTIVES:

1. To describe the purpose of the exam.
2. To describe how to prepare for the exam.
3. To explain the registration process for the exam.
4. To describe the restrictions for the exam.
5. To describe the scoring of the exam.
6. To describe how the exam results are utilized for entrance into the nursing program.

RESOURCES:

www.nln.org

National League for Nursing. (2004). *Review Guide for RN Pre-Entrance EXAM* (2nd ed.). Boston: Jones and Bartlett.

PURPOSE OF THE EXAM

Community Colleges are required to have an objective mechanism to screen and accept nursing student into the programs. Using standardized exams is a common method used by most nursing programs. The College of Lake County (CLC) uses the NLN Pre-RN exam as the primary admission criteria for nursing.

The exam is offered at CLC on specific scheduled dates and times throughout the year, but is also offered at other times and dates at select colleges in the area. The NLN exam is a general studies exam similar to the ACT or SAT exams that are completed during high school. There are three (3) portions to the exam which include verbal, math and science. Each of the three tests is completed separately and each portion is a timed examination. The examination is proctored by a representative from the testing center.

The exam allows individuals interested in entering the nursing program the ability to prove their competency in the verbal math and science areas. Currently there are no time limits for courses used toward the nursing degree and the NLN exam allows individuals to prove their competence in the areas that are fundamental to success in a nursing program.

PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

Preparation for the exam is essential since there are screening deadlines for admission into the Nursing program in addition to restrictions regarding how often the exam can be taken. It would be ideal to only take the exam once and attain a competitive score for entrance into nursing. Students who prepare for the exam are often more successful in attaining higher composite scores the first time over student who do not take the time to prepare. Everyone has different

strengths and weaknesses so for the NLN exam it is important to review even in the areas of strength but to also take extra time to prepare in weak areas.

There are many books available to prepare for the exam. The NLN offers their own study guide for the exam which includes practice tests (see resources). Any of the study guides are useful to prepare you for the exam. It is also very important to complete the prerequisite courses for nursing (Biology, Chemistry, and Math) prior to taking the NLN exam. Remember you may only have one opportunity to take the exam so take the time to prepare.

ADDITIONAL STUDY HINTS: This information has been provided by students who have taken the exam in the past and who have a variety of backgrounds and length of time since the prerequisite course were completed.

VERBAL: The verbal portion of the exam is the most challenging for the majority of nursing candidates. The verbal portion of the test includes vocabulary and reading comprehension. Vocabulary is always challenging so try to read the “word of the day” available in the local newspapers. Another hint provided by a nursing student was the book “Vocabulary for Dummies”. This book is available in most bookstores.

Reading comprehension is also challenging and since the NLN exam is a timed test, many students do not finish the verbal section due to the time limit which causes a lower score. It is important for each individual to determine how he/she best comprehends when reading. When practicing reading comprehension it is essential to understand the best way for you to comprehend and answer the questions. If an individual needs to reread the paragraph several times to answer the questions, time is lost and this could result in a lower exam score. It is best to practice reading and answering questions and time yourself to find what works best to fit your style.

MATH: The math portion of the exam incorporates many areas of math from basic addition and subtraction through fractions, decimals, geometry and algebra. The amount of review required will depend upon when the student last completed math courses. Basic college level algebra and geometry books are a good resource to refresh the math skills.

SCIENCE: The science portion of the exam includes biology, chemistry, physics and anatomy. Although completing anatomy and physiology course is not required before taking the NLN exam, in many instances it may be helpful. Physics is not required for nursing and the questions are basic knowledge. If science courses were completed some time ago a review of general college level biology and chemistry text books may be needed.

EXAM REGISTRATION

The NLN exam is offered periodically throughout the year at CLC. The exam schedule is available on the nursing web page www.clcillinois.edu/credit/programs/nur.asp, the Nursing Education Office, the Biological and Health Sciences Office and the Testing Center. The cost of the exam is currently \$50.00. Students need to pay the fee at the Cashier’s window prior to scheduling the exam. A CLC ID number is required for all students registering for the exam. The cashier will provide a receipt for payment. The students next need to personally go to the Testing Center with the receipt and schedule the desired test date. A CLC ID number is also required to schedule the test.

TESTING RESTRICTIONS

The NLN is a proctored and secured exam and all instructions from the exam proctors must be carefully followed. Students who fail to follow the instructions from the proctors may be asked to leave the testing area and their exam will not be valid. Students caught cheating on the exam will be asked to leave the testing area and their score will not be valid.

Students may not take the NLN more than **once** in a six month period. In other words students must wait at least six months between the dates of the examination. Scores from the NLN exam will only be utilized for entrance into the nursing program if the exam dates are at least six months apart. If the exams are not taken within the scheduling guidelines then only the results of the first exam will be considered for screening. If the exams are taken within the guidelines then the highest score will **ALWAYS** be used for screening. Note that it is impossible for test dates to be exactly six months apart so for the purpose of the six month restriction the screening committee will review the month that the test was taken and not the actual date of the test. These restrictions also apply to exams taken at agencies other than CLC.

SCORING OF THE EXAM

First the raw score for the test items is determined. This is the number of items that were answered correctly. The highest possible raw score for each test is indicated on the test report.

The composite score is based upon the performance on the entire exam, but is not the sum of the items answered correctly. The composite score is a standard score which is a weighted combination of the scores on the individual tests.

The percentile score does **NOT** indicate the percentage of items that were answered correctly. Percentiles range from 0-99% and indicate what portion of applicants to similar nursing programs earned raw scores lower than you. For example, if the test report shows an 84% for a raw score of 49 on the verbal test, this means that 84% of the comparison group received a raw score of 49 or less.

Percentiles above the 50% indicate better than average performance and percentiles below 50% indicate poorer than average performance. But as indicated above, the percentiles used for acceptance into the nursing program change with each new group of students who are screening for the nursing program.

The most important thing to remember is that each a minimum score is required for each content area and for the overall composite percentile to be considered for the nursing program.

USING THE EXAM RESULTS FOR ENTRANCE INTO NURSING

Upon completion of the NLN exam students will receive their scores. Exam results are mailed directly from the NLN to the student and the college within 10 days following the exam date. If students do not receive the results within that time frame they need to contact the NLN.

The exam will be scored in each individual category (verbal, math and science) and will have an overall composite percentile score which is the score used for screening into nursing. The exam needs to be taken prior to any screening deadline, regardless of where the exam is taken.

There are minimum acceptable percentile scores required for entrance into the nursing program. The minimum score for each individual test is the 30th percentile. The minimum composite percentile score for the exam is the 40th percentile. The minimum score must be attained in each content area as well as the overall composite percentile in order to meet the requirements for entering the nursing program.

Since the pool of applicants is different with each screening period the scores for entrance into the Nursing program are also different with each screening. Once the screening deadline has passed the applicant pool is ranked based upon the **COMPOSITE PERCENTILE** NLN exam score, provided all of the additional screening requirements are met. The highest composite percentile on the exam is 99%. Applicants are ranked beginning with 99% and down. The candidates are selected based upon the score of the exam. The 60 students with the highest composite percentile score, beginning with 99% who have all of the other entrance requirements met are accepted in to the nursing program for that screening period.