



**Revisiting AACN’s Essentials Series:
Re-Envisioning Nursing Education
April 2020**

Frequently Asked Questions

The AACN Essentials Revision Task Force is committed to transparency and providing updates on the progress of the Task Force, ensuring that the membership is kept well-informed related to process and outcomes. This Frequently Asked Questions document was prepared by the Task Force Leadership to provide further clarification.

Why are the Essentials Series being revised?

- The Board of Directors of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) established the Futures Task Force in 2014 to develop recommendations “regarding potential new efforts that can be implemented to support the mission of the organization and assure support for the development of a nursing workforce for the future.”
- The Future Task Force recommended that AACN must be the catalyst for excellence and innovation in nursing education that will improve health and health care.
- To this end, AACN’s Vision for Nursing Education Task Force was convened and finalized a White Paper, *AACN’s Vision for Academic Nursing*, in January 2019. A comprehensive environmental scan, informed by multiple stakeholders and review of available literature, was completed providing evidence that the Essentials Series must be updated to reflect future needs of the nursing workforce and healthcare delivery as well as trends in higher education.

Why are all the Essentials documents being revised at the same time?

- The goal is to ensure that the documents are aligned, specifically the leveling of expected competencies to reflect incremental advancement in education and experience and reflect the same healthcare environment or context.

Why is there a primary focus on competency-based education?

- This is an overall trend in higher education, as academic leaders across disciplines are calling for transition to programs that are predicated on mastery of competencies. There also is growing consensus in health professions education for competency-based education.
- The current model for nursing educational experiences often fails to ensure attainment of competencies or a lack of common understanding of what expected competencies are. There is inability to control available learning experiences for

each student; hours may be logged, but there is no assurance of equitable experiences or that competencies are achieved.

- Employers desire assurance that students and graduates have expected competencies-- the ability “to know” and also “to do” based on knowledge.

Why is the Task Force using a Domain/Competency framework from medical education?

- The Task Force strongly recommends reading the primary reference: Englander, R., Cameron, T., Ballard, A., Dodge, J., Bull, J., & Aschenbrener, C. (2013). Toward a common taxonomy of competency domains for the health professions and competencies for physicians. *Academic Medicine*, 8(8), 1088-1094.
- Rationale: The Englander article presents an interprofessional approach to a taxonomy of competency domains. A taxonomy or classification structure promotes a common language and facilitates interprofessional education and collaborative practice. Using common domains allows competencies to be understood, mapped, or linked. However, in the summer of 2019, the task force modified Englander’s Domains to make the domains more current and to reflect the unique contribution of nursing. For example, the domains of Population Health, Scholarship for Nursing, Quality and Safety, and Information and Communication Technologies were added.
- The ability to visually see competencies mapped to a domain framework and to engage in dialogue with a shared language/perspective should promote shared understanding of how each profession contributes as a part of the team to healthcare delivery. This will enhance understanding of the unique contribution of nursing as well as the contributions that each healthcare profession brings to team-based care.

There are a number of documents used in nursing/healthcare education that already have competencies identified. How are these being incorporated?

- Please note the robust list of documents being used as references/resources for the Task Force’s work (see attached.) To ensure understanding of the breadth of perspective that must be considered within a competency, these have been reviewed carefully to inform the competency statements. The goal of the Task Force is to develop competencies that explicate the “practice of nursing,” including the incremental leveling that occurs as education advances. These competencies must be demonstrated by all graduates of baccalaureate and higher degree nursing education programs.
- There also are relevant and important documents that address competencies for specific roles or settings where nursing practice may occur. Role competencies (such as APRN, Genetics/Genomics, Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL), Nurse Administrator, Public Health Nurse, etc.) are the competencies unique to the specific role or specialty. Delineation of the specific role or specialty competencies is not part of this AACN Essentials revision process.

How is the Task Force approaching its work?

- The first order of business for the Task Force was to establish an understanding of its charge - to focus on the “future,” to use fresh thinking informed by the Vision for Academic Nursing white paper, and to “act boldly.” This required all members to engage intentionally in “unfreezing” – shedding our preconceptions and assumptions.

- There was early consensus within the task force that we needed to hone our skills and focus on using a domain framework, reaching consensus on definitions, developing competency statements, and leveling competencies in the context of advancing nursing education and practice. To do this well, we needed to have the shared experience of developing and agreeing on “entry into nursing practice” competencies mapped to the domains.

What is the expected final product, e.g., will there ultimately be three documents, representing the Essentials for each degree level?

- The Task Force has devoted thoughtful consideration to this question, leading to several proposed options. While there is no decision at this time as to the format or number of documents, Essentials and curricular recommendations will be developed for baccalaureate, master’s, and Doctor of Nursing Practice programs. It is important to know that the Task Force is made up of individuals that represent diversity in terms of knowledge, expertise, and experience – members are well represented. This ensures that the final product will have broad appeal and meet the intended purpose: to provide the elements and framework to build nursing curricula in a meaningful way that provides clear direction.
- The new re-envisioned Essentials will have a new format. Specifically, there will be an introduction, 10 Domains and 10 Domain Descriptors, 10 Contextual Statements, Competencies, Entry-Level into Professional Nursing Education Sub-competencies, and Advanced Level Nursing Sub-competencies. In addition, there are plans for a glossary, references, and a tool kit.

What are the Concepts Across and Within the Domains?

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Social Justice
- Determinants of Health
- Communication
- Ethics
- Policy and Advocacy
- Innovation

What if we are considering or currently engaged in a curricular revision?

- If you are currently undertaking or are considering curriculum revisions or updating, AACN’s *Vision for Academic Nursing white paper* (<https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/News/White-Papers/Vision-Academic-Nursing.pdf>) would be an excellent review – not as requirements but to inform visionary thinking for future program direction.

When will the new Essentials go into effect?

- The goal is for the work of the AACN Task Force to be completed in 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the work may have to be completed in 2021.
- Once the new Essentials are finalized, they will be presented to the AACN membership for approval.
- After the Essentials have been approved by the AACN membership, programs should feel free to make any needed adjustments to their curricula, courses, etc.

(Response From CCNE) Will the new Essentials be applicable for our next accreditation review by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE)?

- The answer to this question depends on several factors. Once the AACN membership approves the new Essentials, the documents would need to be reviewed by CCNE, which is the autonomous accrediting arm of AACN.
- CCNE is governed by a Board of Commissioners, which has the authority to approve CCNE policies, procedures, and standards.
- The CCNE *Standards for Accreditation of Baccalaureate and Graduate Nursing Programs* (2018), which went into effect on January 1, 2019, requires the current Essentials documents (2008 Baccalaureate Essentials, 2011 Masters Essentials, and 2006 DNP Essentials).
- CCNE reviews and considers revisions to its accreditation standards every five years or sooner, if needed. The next regular review of the accreditation standards is scheduled to begin in 2022. However, the CCNE Board may decide that an earlier review is necessary.
- In the meantime, programs hosting a CCNE evaluation or submitting a report to CCNE through 2021 should plan to address the current Essentials documents (listed above).
- CCNE will provide notice when its accreditation standards are under revision and will seek input from its community of interest throughout the standards revision process.