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June 7, 2013

Jason E. Saladiner, EdD.
Director of Innovative Programs
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Dr. Ann Cary
Chair
AACN Membership Committee
One Dupont Circle, NW Suite 530
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Dr. Cary:

I would like to nominate Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC), College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS) for AACN's prestigious Innovations in Professional Nursing Education Award. TAMUCC's eLine Military Program is a modular, competency-based online program designed to provide a pathway to the Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN) for military members and veterans with previous medical experiences and training. The following 3-page nomination demonstrates how the ELM Program meets the criteria for the AACN innovation award. TAMUCC is a public school without an AHC.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Jason E. Saladiner, EdD

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Description of the Programmatic Innovation

Currently, the U.S. is poised to welcome more than 2 million veterans as they return from the Gulf War in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these veterans will benefit from the Post 9/11GI Bill, which will remove most financial barriers to attending college. A large number of these returning veterans have served in medical facilities and/or as field medics. In-the-field medicine is at the cutting edge of healthcare and the experience gained in triage and other aspects of emergency medical assistance should translate to the healthcare field. Throughout their military career, veterans spend months, even years, in classrooms and training exercises. Many military skill sets and specialized training should translate seamlessly into college credit. Unfortunately, although veterans have had valuable, transferable education and training in the military, they do not have recognized degrees or licenses (e.g., BSN or RN) or a mechanism to apply this prior learning towards earning these employable credentials.

In 2010, with the pioneering vision and strategic leadership of Dean Mary Jane Hamilton, PhD, RN, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC), College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS) developed the programmatic innovation, eLine Military Program (ELM) to fill this gap in educational services allowing military personnel, both active duty and veterans regardless of branch of service, a mechanism to receive college credit for training and experience so that they are able to continue their medical careers and lifelong service to the nation as civilians. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funded the ELM program during the period of 2010-2013. The focus of the ELM program is minority students who are underrepresented in the field of nursing, rural students, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to increasing diversity in the field of Nursing, these BSN prepared nurses will help to relieve the alarming nursing shortage in Texas and throughout the nation. Being veterans themselves, ELM graduates will also be uniquely suited to understand the needs and help care for the more than 2 million Gulf War II (Iraq and Afghanistan) veterans, as well as, veterans from other conflicts requiring medical care not received at a VA facility.

Summary of the eLine Military Program

The ELM program is a modular, competency-based online instruction with face-to-face clinical experience that facilitates access to a full curriculum for a BSN degree and a pathway to RN licensure. The individualized Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) developed awards the maximum amount of college credit based on prior learning from military medical training and experiences. The goal of the individualized PLA, given in prerequisite and Nursing Major courses (i.e., Pharmacology, Health Alterations, Fundamentals, Health Assessment, MS1, MSII) and specialty courses (i.e., Peds, OB, Psych) depending on military experience, is to eliminate repeating content already mastered through military service. This innovation provides a customized curriculum for each active duty and veteran student based on the transfer of their Prior Learning from military service into academic credit and ultimately into an employable credential in the most efficient means possible. Additionally, the ELM program provides a circle of care, which includes: individualized case management, connection with support services (e.g. Disability and/or Counseling services for students with PTSD and/or TBI), and job placement.

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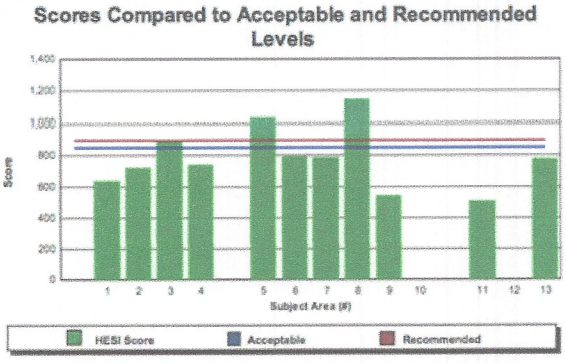
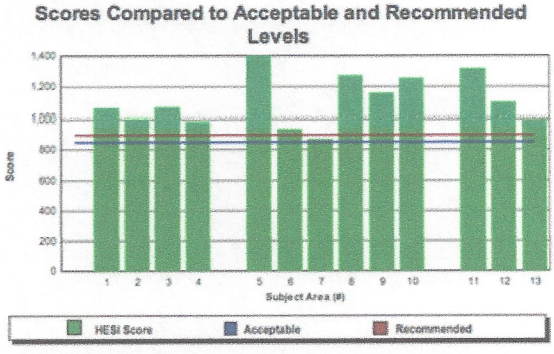
eLine Military Program Outcomes

The following graphic illustrates the PLA process. Figure 1 (left) depicts the PLA results for an ELM student (Fundamentals of Nursing) prior to course content being delivered. PLA results show this student's military experience and training is valuable. Although there are "gaps" in knowledge, to complete the entire course would have this student repeating content already mastered. The ELM student was then prescribed the appropriate modules to fill in the "gaps" without repeating the content. In the post assessment (Figure 2 on the right), not only did the student exceed the acceptable proficiency (see blue line) in all 13 subject areas, this student also exceeded the recommended proficiency (see red line) in 12 of the 13 subject areas without repeating content.





The ELM Program has awarded full credit for military service for the following courses: Communication (3 credit hours), A&P I (4 credit hours), A&P II (4 credit hours), Microbiology (4 credit hours), Pharmacology (3 credit hours), Pathophysiology (3 credit hours), Psych (5 credit hours) totaling 26 credit hours or about 21% of the BSN degree. Additionally, students have been awarded partial credit in Fundamentals (6 credit hours), Health Assessment (4 credit hours), MS I (6 credit hours), MS II (6 credit hours), Research (3 credit hours), and Leadership (6 credit hours). This partial credit award covers an additional 31 credit hours or 54% of the Nursing Major Courses (25% of BSN degree). This innovative model to date has awarded credit in approximately 45% of the BSN degree for military training and experience.

Over the course of the last three years, the ELM Program has developed and implemented a very comprehensive veteran retention initiative. Jason E. Saladiner, EdD, Director of Innovative Programs at TAMUCC, developed an Isolation/Integration Conceptual Model for online communication, which has served as a guide for the virtual classroom experience and communication efforts. In this conceptual model an individualized approach has proven to have a greater impact than a group approach when utilizing asynchronous communication. For example, an individual approach to asynchronous communication (i.e. text message) will have a greater impact on the student than an asynchronous group approach (i.e. listserv). With synchronous communication, we propose the opposite to be true. An individual approach to synchronous communication (i.e. SKYPE) has shown to have less impact on the students' integration than a synchronous group approach (i.e. WebEx). Under this conceptual model, ELM students are intentionally placed in scenarios to synchronously engage and connect with the faculty and their peers, unlike traditional online programs.

Students are more likely to succeed in an environment where (a) they have high

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expectations placed on them, (b) they receive academic and social support, (c) they receive frequent feedback and assessment and (d) when they have high levels of involvement with others, especially in the classroom (Tinto, 2012). Integrating technology in the academic experience, the ELM Program is intentionally structured to meet Tinto's conditions for students' success. The virtual classroom experience is delivered synchronously, however, the virtual session is not a lecture. It is a collaborative synchronous session (via WebEx) that provides (a) the student with expectations for the week (time will vary by course), provides (b) an engaging environment that is conducive to both student support and (c) academic feedback while (d) collaborating with faculty and peers. The ELM virtual experience fosters student success in ways the typical online experience cannot without violating assumptions of online education (e.g. can be completed asynchronously, flexible). Not every student desires or has the ability to participate in all synchronous sessions. All synchronous sessions are archived providing the student with access to the session (asynchronously) when desired. From the student that desires a synchronous engaging academic experience, to the student that prefers an asynchronous academic experience, the student is able to engage the faculty and other students at whichever level is appropriate for the maximum student success.

Replication and Dissemination

As a pioneering institution in veterans to nursing education, TAMUCC-CONHS received a supplemental HRSA grant to explore barriers to veteran student success in 2011. One of the objectives of the grant was the creation of a Vets-To-Nursing Group led by Patricia Conard, PhD(c), RN. This collaborative workgroup has been tasked with dissemination our findings for replication. In the report released from the White House, Executive Office of the President (2013, February) titled "The Fast Track To Civilian Employment: Streamlining Credentialing and Licensing For Service Members, Veterans, And Their Spouses; the eLine Military Program received a Program Spotlight. Additionally in this report, HRSA released a funding opportunity announcement to support Veteran to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (VBSN) programs. Our consulting team, comprised of Dr. Mary Jane Hamilton, Dr. Bunny Forgione, Dr. Jason E. Saladiner, and Patricia Conard has presented to numerous schools around the country wishing to replicate the eLine Military Program including: City of New York (CUNY), Arizona State University (ASU), University of South Mississippi (USM), Texas Tech University (TTU), University of Hawaii (UH), University of Connecticut (UC).

Conclusion

The eLine Military Program has developed and implemented many strategies to maximize veteran students' integration (i.e. academic, social, and professional) in an effort to increase student success and retention. To date, the eLine Military Program has a retention rate above 90%. The ELM has (3) projected graduates representing the Army (male, Caucasian veteran), Navy (male, Hispanic, Active duty) and Air Force (female, Hispanic, veteran) for Summer 2013. Additionally, eLine Military students have not only progressed in the program, but all (3) potential graduates have excelled academically and were recently (May 2013) inducted into the Sigma Theta Tau International honor society.