EXCELSIOR COLLEGE
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Prepared for:
Excelsior College

Attention:
Dr. Chia-Huan Ho

Prepared by:
Marjorie Darrah, Ph.D.
Roxann Humbert, Ed.D.

ProΣvaluators, LLC
904 Sixth St.
Fairmont, WV 26554

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Special thanks to the nursing faculty and staff at Excelsior College for providing us with the student data and relevant information needed to complete the study. A special thanks to Dr. Ho for always responding to our requests in a timely manner.

Executive Summary

In December 2008, ProEvaluators, LLC partnered with Excelsior College to conduct a study comparing graduates of traditional and non-traditional pre-licensure nursing programs. The seven-month study was designed to compare graduates of Excelsior College's non-traditional, competency-based, nursing program with students from traditional programs in Georgia, New York, Texas and Virginia. The main question under investigation was "Do Excelsior College associate degree (AD) in nursing graduates perform as well as graduates from traditional associate degree nursing programs?" The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze data that would provide evidence that the Excelsior College AD graduates perform as well as other AD in nursing gradates who have been traditionally educated.

The following questions guided the research for this study:

1. Is the demographic make up of Excelsior graduates similar to the demographic make up of graduates from traditional programs?
2. Do Excelsior College graduates acquire the same types of positions and nursing roles upon entry to the RN profession as do graduates from traditional programs?
3. What are the length, types and components of initial orientation required for new RNs in hospitals employing Excelsior graduates?
4. Do Excelsior graduates make a successful transition to the workforce compared to graduates of other programs?
5. How do Excelsior graduates compare to traditionally prepared graduates?
6. What are the overall mentors'/preceptors' impressions of the Excelsior College graduates? Would they recommend that others hire Excelsior College AD program graduates?

The study had three main activities:

1. Phone interviews of nurse educators in medical facilities in Georgia, New York, Texas, and Virginia who employed 2006 and 2007 graduates of Excelsior College.
2. Surveys of mentor/preceptors in medical facilities in Georgia, New York, Texas, and Virginia who employed 2006 and 2007 graduates from Excelsior College.

Executive Summary (cont.)

3. Synthesis of data obtained from Excelsior College Graduate Survey and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing on the demographics of graduates of traditional programs employed in Georgia, New York, Texas, and Virginia.

Key Findings:

Finding #1: The ethnic composition and gender distribution of Excelsior College graduates is similar to that of graduates from other Associate Degree of Nursing programs.

There is no difference in the ethnic composition or gender distribution of the sample of Excelsior College graduates versus the sample of all graduates who took the NCLEX exam.

Finding #2: Excelsior graduates tended to be slightly older than traditional graduates.

The average age of Excelsior graduates was 39.9. The average age of graduates in New York was 34.4, in Texas was 34.1, and in Virginia 34.6.

Finding #3: The length and type of mentor/preceptor programs of facilities in Georgia, New York, Texas, and Virginia hiring Excelsior Graduates varied widely from facility to facility.

All of the facilities have some form of formal orientation program. The length ranged from a few days to over 6 months. Many of the facilities (76.4%) had an extensive Mentor/Preceptor, Internship or Residency program.

Finding #4: Overall mentor/preceptors rated Excelsior graduates slightly higher than traditional graduates.

95% of the respondents rated Excelsior graduates as slightly better prepared for the workforce than traditional graduates.

Mentor/preceptors rated the overall clinical competence of the Excelsior College Associate Degree of Nursing graduates as slightly higher compared to other associate degree graduates (Mean=4.94 with 4.00 indicating they were the same).

Executive Summary (cont.)

Mentor/preceptors rated the critical thinking abilities, nursing competency, and communication skills of Excelsior graduates as slightly higher than other associate degree graduates (Mean of individual questions ranged from 4.50 to 5.33 with a mean of 4.00 indicating they were the same). They rated the graduates particularly high on their sensitivity to differing values/beliefs of clients (mean=5.00) and their effective accesses and uses of health care technology (mean=5.33).

Finding #5: Overall mentor/preceptors rated the Excelsior College nursing program as slightly better than traditional programs.

The respondents indicated that the overall quality of the Excelsior College nursing program was slightly higher compared to other colleges (Mean=4.94 with a mean of 4.00 indicating they were the same).

95% of the mentor/preceptors indicated that given the opportunity, they would hire another Excelsior College Associate Degree of Nursing graduate.

Introduction

Over the past two decades the number of nontraditional, adult education programs has increased dramatically in higher education. However, these new programs have met with criticism and concerns regarding their academic quality and rigor. In addition, an increase in emphasis on assessment has been placed on institutions by accrediting agencies. Programs must demonstrate that learning has occurred between students' enrollment and graduation and that students are successful after graduation.

Several bodies of research set the direction for this study. They include research that compares traditional and non-traditional programs in terms of admissions requirements, student learning, graduation rates, and success after graduation, research related to the shortage of registered nurses, the need for alternative programs, and national and statewide initiatives designed to address the shortage.

Traditional Versus Non-traditional Programs

Various characteristics can be identified to compare traditional versus non-traditional programs. These include, but are not limited to, admission requirements, program format, the demographics of the students attracted to and eventually enrolled in the program, and the success of the graduates. Much research has been completed that compares these components of traditional and non-traditional programs in nursing and other disciplines. A review of selected studies follows.

A brief scan of admission requirements to nursing programs determined that the following are frequently used as criteria: high school GPA, high school grades in specific math and science courses, previous health care experience, satisfactory scores on standardized tests, CPR certification, and successful completion of an interview. In a study conducted at the Center for Student Success at the University of California on admission policies and attrition rates in California Community College Nursing Programs, the researchers found that overall college GPA, English GPA, core biology GPA, and the number of times a student repeated any of the core biology courses were predictors of student success. Although they found no statistically significant relationship between programs that have selective admission requirements and program success overall, they did find that two of the three California programs with particularly

Introduction (cont.)

diverse student bodies and extremely high on-time completion rates have selective admission practices (Seago & Spetz, 2003).

Program delivery and format also vary widely between traditional and non-traditional programs. Programs differ in delivery methods (traditional classroom learning, competency-based assessment, online courses, etc.) length and location of clinicals, and the use of clinicals versus preceptorship programs.

When comparing traditional versus preceptorships, the research supports the assumption that preceptorship is either equal to, or in some cases better than, the traditional clinical experience and provides a solution to fiscal restraints and budgetary issues in nursing education (Udlis, 2008).

Excelsior College's assessment based non-traditional nursing program has also experienced positive results. They have a "35-year track record that includes above-average NCLEX-RN scores and high employer satisfaction for over 36,000 nursing graduates" (Nettleton & Edwards, 2009).

The type of student attracted to the various types of nursing programs is another key differing factor. Most traditional programs are designed to attract the traditional college students who using the Brenner model of *Novice to Expert* (1984) are considered novices to the nursing profession. While non-traditional programs are designed to attract older, working and often second career or degree seeking students. Excelsior College's prelicensure associate degree (AD) program is designed for individuals with clinical oriented healthcare background. Therefore, they enter the AD program as advanced beginners (Nettleton & Edwards, 2009).

Introduction (cont.)

Nursing Shortage and National and Statewide Initiatives

The shortage of registered nurses (RNs) in the U.S. could reach 500,000 by 2025. (Buerhaus et al., 2008). The Council on Physician and Nurse Supply at the University of Pennsylvania determined that 30,000 additional nurses should be graduated annually to meet the nation's healthcare needs. This is an expansion of 30% over the current number of annual nursing graduates. Some of the contributing factors include: restricted enrollment, increase in average age of RNs, aging populations (AACN Fact Sheet, 2008), and high turnover and vacancy rates (Kovner et al., 2007).

Several national and statewide initiatives have been developed to assist with the shortage. "In contrast to simplistic characterizations, we find nurse development in alternative types of program certifications to be a function of the interaction between the program as implemented, the school context in which participants are placed, and the participants' backgrounds and previous experiences" (AACN Fact Sheet, 2008). It is these factors that will drive the evaluation for this study.

Methodology

To answer the questions, "Is the demographic makeup of Excelsior graduates similar to the graduates of traditional programs" and "do Excelsior College graduates acquire the same types of positions and nursing roles upon entry to the RN profession as do graduates from traditional programs?" data from the Excelsior College's research office was provided to the researchers. In addition, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing provided the raw data from its 2006-2007 RN Continuous Practice Analysis report. Since data used in this report belonged to the individual state's boards of nursing, letters of request were sent to the state boards in Georgia, New York, Texas and Virginia requesting the use of their data. New York, Texas, and Virginia agreed to give their raw data to the researchers.

To answer the question, "What are the length, types, and components of initial orientation required for new RNs in hospitals employing Excelsior graduates?" a phone script and accompanying short survey were developed and administered by the researchers. A list of facilities in Georgia, New York, Texas and Virginia that employed 2003-2007 Excelsior graduates was provided to the researchers by Excelsior College's research office. The survey, conducted by phone, was administered to the Directors of Education or similar personnel who oversee the mentor/preceptor programs at each facility. A total of 97 facilities were contacted in Georgia (n=21), New York (n=30), Texas (n=39), and Virginia (n=7). Of those, the researchers attempted to call each facility at least 10 times in order to complete the short survey.

To answer the questions, "Do Excelsior graduates make a successful transition to the workforce compared to other program graduates?", "What is the overall mentors/preceptors' impression of Excelsior College graduates?", and "Would you recommend that others hire Excelsior College RN program graduates?", the researchers developed and conducted an online Mentor/Preceptor Survey. Two different methods were used to survey the mentor/preceptors. First, Excelsior College provided the researchers with contact information for all 2006-2007 graduates. The graduates were emailed a survey invitation to forward to their mentor/preceptors that included a link to the online survey. The graduates were asked to respond to the email indicating the date and time they forwarded the email to their mentor/preceptor. Two follow-up requests were sent to the graduates

Methodology (cont.)

in an attempt to increase the response rate. In addition, the graduates were given the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a $100 Visa gift card. The email address was used to contact the winner of the gift card. A total of 507 students were contacted by email. Of those, 16 emails were returned as undeliverable and 7 opted out of the study. Of the remaining 484 students, 24 students responded with the date and time they forwarded their email to their mentor preceptors, 8 indicated that they did not have a mentor preceptor, and 16 incorrectly completed the mentor/preceptor survey themselves.

Directors of Education and similar personnel who completed the phone interview were also asked to distribute the survey invitations at their facility. They could choose to have the invitations mailed in the traditional manner so that they could distribute them by hand or to have the invitations emailed so that they could distribute via email. Traditionally mailed surveys each had a unique identifier to insure only one response was collected from each person and so that the researchers could track how many from each facility were completed. Directors who received emailed survey invitations were asked to respond with the number of survey invitations they distributed. These online invitations were adjusted to ask for the state and facility name in order to track how many surveys from each facility were completed. Two follow-up phone calls were made to each facility requesting mailed survey invitations and two follow-up emails were sent to each facility requesting emailed survey invitations to try to increase the response rate. In addition, all respondents to the Mentor/Preceptor Survey were entered into a drawing for a $100 Visa gift card. The email address was used to contact the winner of the gift card. A total of 12 facilities were mailed 336 survey invitations. Five of the 12 facilities actually distributed the survey invitations, two indicated that they were not permitted to distribute the surveys and five never responded. A total of 33 facilities were emailed survey invitations. Four of the facilities responded with the number of surveys they would be distributing, eleven facilities indicated that they were not permitted to distribute the surveys and eighteen of the facilities never responded.

Results

Question 1: Is the demographic composition of Excelsior graduates similar to the demographic composition of graduates from traditional programs?

This section will discuss the demographic composition of Excelsior graduates for the states of New York, Texas, and Virginia as compared to the demographic composition of all students who took the NCLEX test in New York, Texas, and Virginia.

The sample for this part of the study consisted of the following groups:

- Excelsior students who graduated with an associate degree in nursing between January 2006 and December 2007 (New York (n = 139), Texas (n = 332), Virginia (n=48)) who responded to the six month survey that was reported in *Report: Survey of Graduates Receiving the Associate Degree of Nursing (01_08 and 02_09).*
- All graduates from any associate degree in nursing program who took the NCLEX exam in 2006 or 2007 (New York (n=690), Texas (n=792), or Virginia (n=256)) and completed the NCSBN Registered Nursing Activity Form 1.

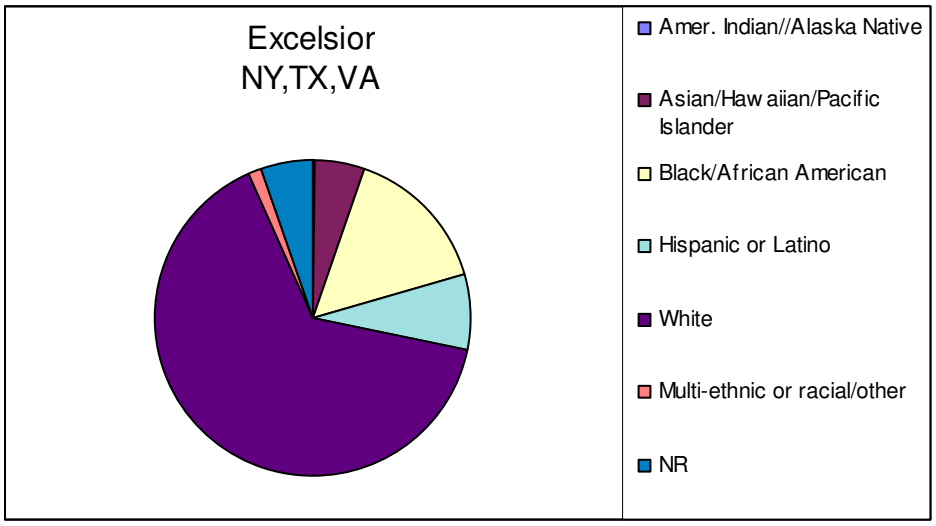
Note: The Excelsior graduates are part of the NCLEX data, but the comparisons are being made to show that the Excelsior graduates have a similar demographic composition to the graduates of traditional programs in the three states, New York, Texas, and Virginia.

Table 1 shows the number and percentage for each ethnic background. In the table, the column representing Excelsior College students in each state was compared against the column of all students in each state from any Associate Degree of Nursing program. The columns were compared using a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test to see if there was a significant difference between the two samples. According to these tests for each pair of comparison columns, there was no difference in the ethnic composition of the Excelsior students versus the sample of all students.

Table 1: Ethnic Background Comparison

Response Option	EC NY n=139	NY n=690	EC TX n=332	TX n=792	EC VA n=48	VA n=256	Excelsior NY,TX,VA n= 519	Combined NY,TX,VA n=1738
Amer. Indian /Alaska Native	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.2%)	2 (0.1%)
Asian/ Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	8 (5.8%)	49 (7.1%)	17 (5.1%)	39 (4.9%)	1 (2.0%)	4 (1.6%)	26 (5%)	92 (5.3%)
Black/African American	15 (10.8%)	81 (11.7%)	60 (18.1%)	74 (9.3%)	4 (8.3%)	38 (14.8%)	79 (15.2%)	193 (11.1%)
Hispanic or Latino	6 (4.3%)	43 (6.2%)	35 (10.5%)	126 (15.9%)	0 (0%)	7 (2.7%)	41 (7.9%)	176 (10.1%)
White	95 (68.3%)	489 (70.9%)	205 (61.7%)	523 (66.0%)	38 (79.2%)	199 (77.7%)	338 (65.1%)	1211 (69.7%)
Multi-ethnic or racial/ Other	2 (1.4%)	22 (3.2%)	3 (0.9%)	18 (2.3%)	1 (2.0%)	2 (0.8%)	6 (1.2%)	42 (2.4%)
No response	13 (9.4%)	6 (0.9%)	11 (3.3%)	11 (1.4%)	4 (8.3%)	5 (2.0%)	28 (5.4%)	22 (1.3%)

Figure 1 shows the similarity in the ethnic background of the Excelsior students compared to all students graduating from Associate Degree of Nursing programs in these three states.



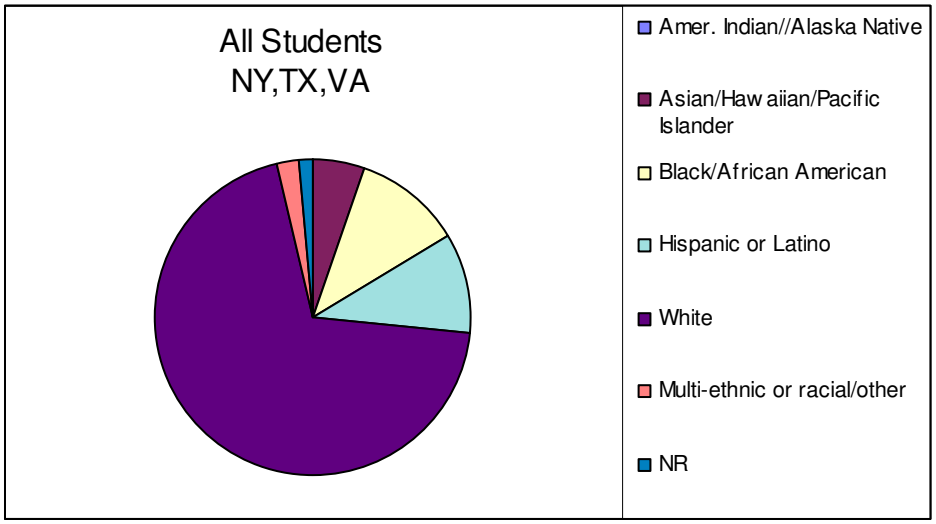


Figure 1: Ethnic Background Comparison

The gender comparison can be seen in Table 2. In the table, the column representing Excelsior College students in each state was compared against the column of all students in each state from any Associate Degree of Nursing program. The columns were compared using a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test to see if there was a significant difference between the two samples. According to these tests for each pair of comparison columns, there was no difference in the gender distribution of the Excelsior students versus the sample of all students.

Table 2: Gender Comparison								
Response Option	EC NY n=139	NY n=690	EC TX n=332	TX n=792	EC VA n=48	VA n=256	Excelsior NY,TX,VA n= 519	Combined NY,TX,VA n=1738
Male	26 (18.7%)	101 (14.6%)	71 (21.4%)	122 (15.4%)	4 (8.3%)	26 (10.2%)	101 (19.5%)	249 (14.3%)
Female	113 (81.3%)	583 (84.5%)	261 (78.6%)	660 (83.3%)	44 (91.7%)	226 (88.3%)	418 (80.5%)	1469 (84.5%)
NR		6 (0.9%)		10 (1.3%)		4 (1.5%)		20 (1.2%)

The age comparison can be seen in Table 3. In the table, the columns representing Excelsior College students in each state were compared against the column of all students in each state who took the NCLEX exam from any Associate Degree of Nursing program. The average ages were compared using a z-test to see if there was a significant difference between the two groups. According to these tests for each pair of comparison columns, there is a significant difference in the ages of the students in the Excelsior sample compared to the entire group of students from all Associate Degree of Nursing programs who took the NCLEX exam. In other words, there is evidence to say that the Excelsior students are on average older compared to students in all programs.

Table 3: Age Comparison								
	EC NY n=139	NY n=690	EC TX n=332	TX n=792	EC VA n=48	VA n=256	Excelsior NY,TX,VA n= 519	Combined NY,TX,VA n=1738
Average	40.7	34.4	39.5	34.1	40.6	34.6	39.9	34.3
St. Dev.	8.56	8.76	8.86	8.94	8.64	9.21	8.76	8.90
Range	24-67	19-61	24-65	20-63	22-57	20-62	22-67	19-63
p-value	< .001		< .001		< .001		< .001	

Question 2: Do Excelsior College graduates acquire the same type of positions and nursing roles upon entry to the RN profession as do graduates from traditional programs?

This section will discuss the types of positions and work settings that Excelsior graduates reported on their six month survey, as compared to positions and work settings that all students who took the NCLEX exam in New York, Texas, and Virginia have reported being employed in at the time of taking their exam. The data comes from two different types of sources so it is not directly comparable, but can be used to give some general understanding of the similarities between the two groups.

The sample for this part of the study consisted on the following groups:

- Excelsior students who graduated with an associate degree in nursing between January 2006 and March 2007 (n=564) and between April 2007 and March 2008 (n=396) who responded to the six month survey that was reported in *Report: Survey of Graduates Receiving the Associate Degree of Nursing (01_08 and 02_09).*
- All graduates from any associate degree in nursing program who took the NCLEX exam in 2006 or 2007 (New York (n=690), Texas (n=792), or Virginia (n=256)) and completed the NCSBN Registered Nursing Activity Form 1.

In the 2008 report (graduates from January 2006 and March 2007), 306 Excelsior College survey respondents provided additional information about current employment. The majority listed themselves either as RN's or staff RN's (58%). Eighteen percent were in managerial positions, 9% were in some form of emergency medicine, and another 9% worked in specialized areas such as endoscopy, pulmonary rehabilitation, geriatrics, phlebotomy, renal nursing, oncology, etc. Four percent listed themselves as critical or intensive care nurses. The remaining respondents listed nursing education, counseling, and office nursing, with 2 indicating they were still working as LPN's, and 5 respondents indicating careers other than nursing. Non-nursing careers appeared to be mostly government related (shipbuilding, operations security, homeland security, fire department training officer), and one person stated that s/he is an engineering technician (Savidge, 2008).

In the 2009 report (graduates from April 2007 and March 2008), 281 Excelsior College survey respondents provided additional information about current employment. The majority listed themselves either as RN's or staff RN's (71.5%). Some of the registered nurses worked in emergency rooms and in specialty areas such as Child Psychiatry Triage, acute dialysis, cardiac catheterization, critical care or emergency medicine. Ten percent were in managerial positions. The remaining respondents listed nursing education, counseling, or office nursing, and four respondents indicated careers other than nursing (such as fire captain paramedic, health insurance manager, and security) (Savidge et al., 2009).

The students taking the NCLEX exam in 2006 and 2007 from the states of New York, Texas, and Virginia were asked if they were currently working as an RN in the US or its territories. 1,684 out of 1,738 (97%) responded that they were working as an RN. The respondents were then asked to choose among 21 categories to classify their current employment position. The 1,738 respondents sometimes chose more than one classification to describe their current position. Approximately one third of the respondents indicated that they worked in a medical-surgical unit (35.6%) or in a critical care position (33.7%). A smaller portion of students

reported working in pediatrics or nursery (6.2%), nursing home (3.9%), labor and delivery (3.7%), operating room (3.7%), psychiatry (3.5%), postpartum unit (2.8%), home health (2.7%), rehabilitation (2.0%), outpatient (1.3%), hospice care (1.2%), or other long-term care (1.2%). Other employment setting categories with less than 1% are listed in Table 4, which shows the break-down of responses by state and also combined.

Table 4: Employment Setting for Students (NCLEX data 2006-2007, NY, TX, VA)

	NY	TX	VA	Combined	Combined Percentage
Medical-surgical unit	291	252	75	618	35.6%
Critical care	196	286	103	585	33.7%
Pediatrics or nursery	33	59	15	107	6.2%
Nursing home	36	19	12	67	3.9%
Labor and delivery	13	38	14	65	3.7%
Operating room	27	31	7	65	3.7%
Psychiatry	34	20	7	61	3.5%
Postpartum unit	12	27	10	49	2.8%
Home health	16	28	3	47	2.7%
Rehabilitation	19	12	4	35	2.0%
Outpatient clinic	8	10	5	23	1.3%
Hospice care	9	10	1	20	1.2%
Other Long Term Care	12	6	2	20	1.2%
Physician/APRN/Dentist	13	2	0	15	0.9%
Subacute unit	7	5	1	13	0.7%
Student/school health	4	6	0	10	0.6%
Prison	2	3	1	6	0.3%
Occupational health	0	3	0	3	0.2%
Public health	1	2	0	3	0.2%
Transition care unit	2	0	1	3	0.2%

Question 3: What are the length, types and components of initial orientation required for new RNs in hospitals employing Excelsior graduates?

The data to answer this question was collected from Directors of Education or similar personnel at facilities in the states of Georgia, New York, Texas, and Virginia where Excelsior College graduates were employed. Ninety-seven (97) facilities were contacted and then information about the program was collected from 55 facilities.

The Directors of Education or similar personnel were asked the following two-part question:

Question 1a: What are the length, type and components of the initial orientation required for new Associate Degree of Nursing graduates?

Question 1b: Is there anything else about your orientation program that helps new graduates transition to the workforce that you would like to share?

After collecting the information, the responses were analyzed to see the most common responses and were summarized into common categories. The information collected from each organization was then coded with these common categories and summarized in the following tables and graphs. Table 5 and Figure 2 show a summary of the length of the orientation programs.

Table 5: Length of Orientation

Length of Orientation	GA	NY	VA	TX	TOTAL
a.) < 2 weeks	4	0	1	5	**10**
b.) 2 - 5 weeks	1	1	0	0	**2**
c.) 6 - 11 weeks	2	3	1	2	**8**
d.) 3 - 6 months	2	7	0	6	**15**
e.) Over 6 months	1	2	0	3	**6**
f.) Variable depending on background or department	2	4	1	6	**13**
g.) Length of time unknown	1	0	0	0	**1**
TOTAL	13	17	3	22	**55**

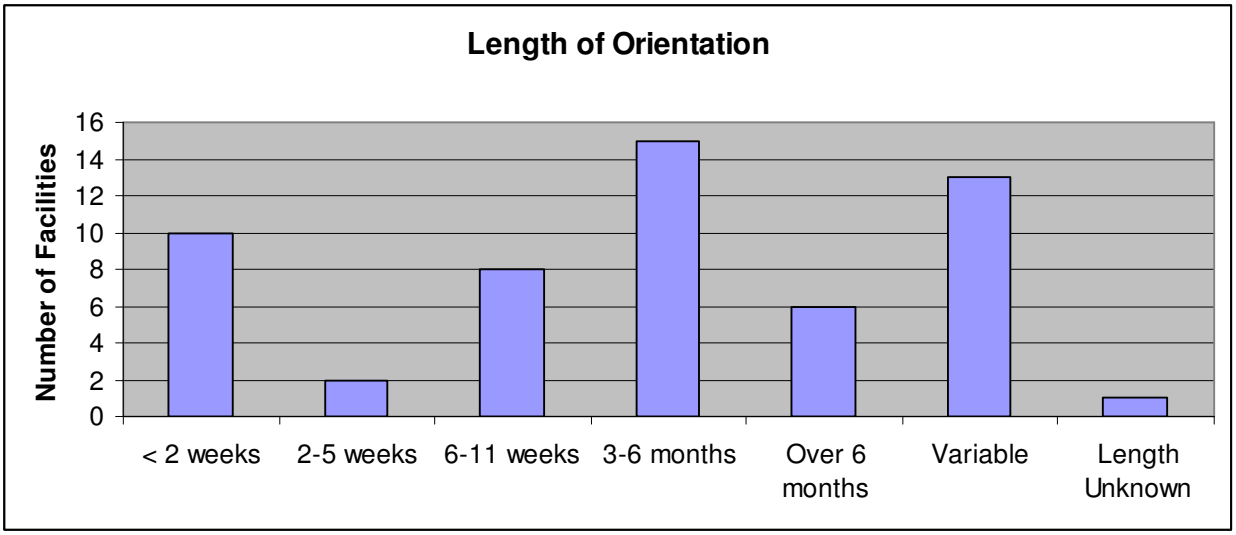


Figure 2: Length of Orientation

Table 6 and Figure 3 show a breakdown of the types and components of orientation that new nursing hires get at the facilities contacted in the four states. Facilities may offer more than one type or component.

Table 6: Types and Components of Orientation

CATEGORIES	GA	NY	VA	TX	TOTAL
1: No Formal Orientation	0	0	0	0	**0**
2: General/Employee Orientation	6	7	1	7	**21**
3: New Graduate Orientation	1	1	1	1	**4**
4: Classroom Training	4	9	1	6	**20**
5: Clinicals	5	6	2	3	**16**
6: Specialty/Unit/Area Specific Training	3	8	2	11	**24**
7: Internship/Apprenticeship	2	0	0	3	**5**
8: RN/Coach/Mentor/Preceptor	7	13	1	12	**33**
9: Residency	2	0	0	2	**4**
10: Computer System Training	5	1	1	2	**9**
11: Miscellaneous	1	3	0	1	**5**
TOTAL	36	48	9	48	**141**

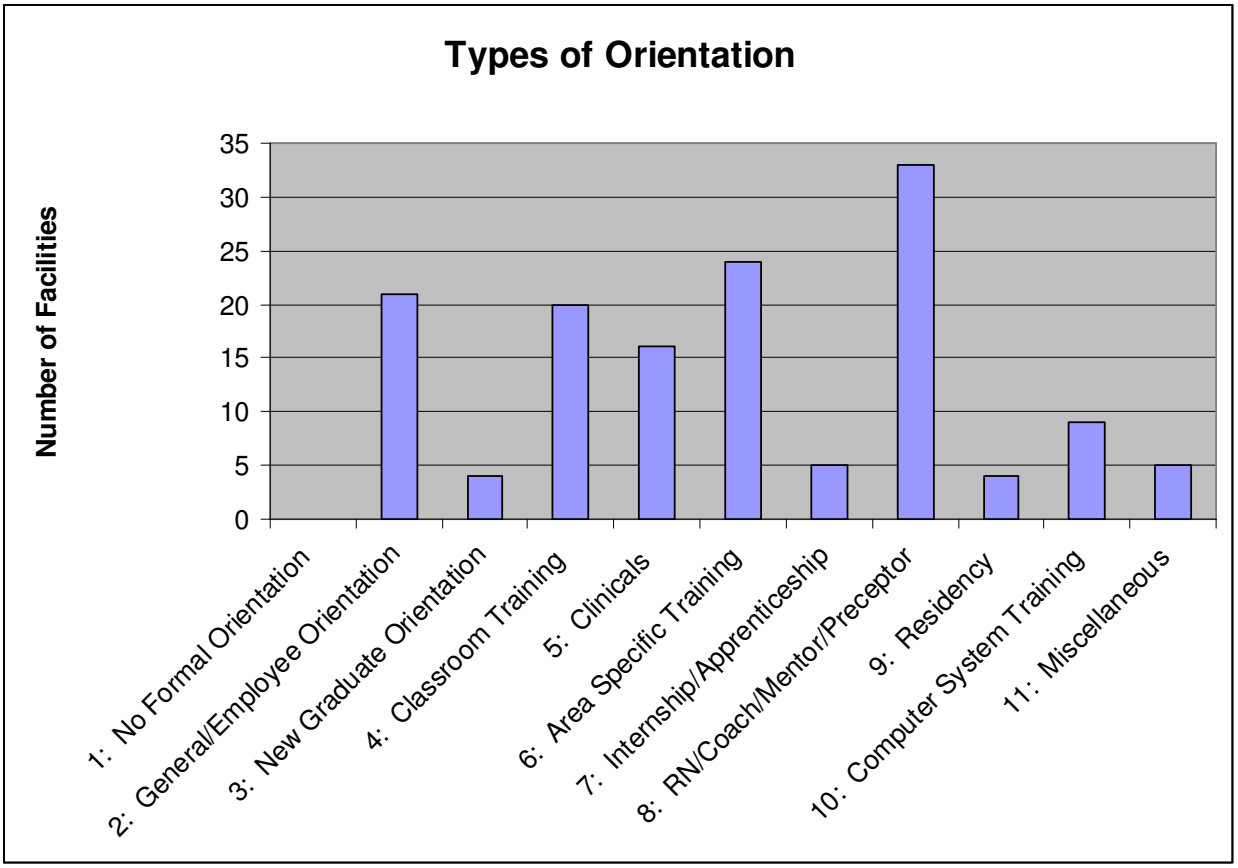


Figure 3: Types of Orientation

Question 4: Do Excelsior graduates make a successful transition to the workforce compared to other program graduates?

The results of the mentor/preceptor survey were used to answer this question. A total of 59 surveys were attempted online. Of those surveys only 18 were completed by mentor/preceptors who were familiar with an Excelsior graduate. The rest of the respondents were either not familiar with an Excelsior graduate or did not complete the entire survey. In addition, sixteen students completed the survey instead of forwarding it to their mentor/preceptors. The number of received and usable surveys can be found in Table 7. The breakdown by state can be found in Table 8.

Table 7: Mentor/Preceptor Survey Information	Sent	Received	Usable
Number of Surveys Mailed	336	18	7
Number of Email Invitations Sent	33	15	5
Number of Surveys Sent to Students	507	26	6
Total	NA	**59**	**18**

Table 8: Usable Surveys Received by State	Number	Percent of Total
Georgia	5	28
New York	8	44
Texas	4	22
Virginia	0	0
Other (Oklahoma)	1	6
Total	**18**	**100**

When asked to rate Excelsior College AD in nursing graduates' transition to the workforce, the respondents rated the Excelsior graduates as slightly higher than AD graduates from other colleges. (See Table 9)

Table 9: Mentor/Preceptors Rating of Excelsior College's Program and Graduates		
Question	**Mean**	**SD**
How would you rate Excelsior (formerly Regents) College Associate Degree (AD) nursing graduates' transition to the workforce compared to AD graduates from other colleges?	4.89	1.28
Range – 1 (much lower) to 4 (the same) to 7 (much higher)		

Question 5: How do Excelsior graduates compare to traditionally prepared graduates?

Mentor/preceptors were asked to rate the critical thinking abilities, nursing competency, and communication skills of Excelsior graduates and traditionally prepared graduates. Mentor/Preceptors were asked nine questions related to nursing graduates' critical thinking abilities. For all questions, the respondents rated the Excelsior graduates as slightly higher than traditionally prepared nurses. (See Table 10)

Table 10: Mentor/Preceptors Rating of Excelsior College Graduates' Critical Thinking Abilities

Question (N=18)	Mean	SD
Accurately identify problems or issues	4.83	1.34
Analyze and synthesize complex patterns of data to develop judgments	4.67	1.46
Distinguish between credible and non-credible sources of information	4.83	1.04
Generate alternative solutions for problems	4.89	1.28
Make reasonable inferences from data/information	4.83	1.29
Analyze an issue or problem from more than one perspective	4.78	1.40
Not afraid to question judgments made by others	4.91	1.25
Distinguish statements of fact from value judgments	4.83	1.15
Generate reasonable hypotheses based on the analysis and synthesis of information	4.50	1.25

Range – 1 (much lower) to 4 (the same) to 7 (much higher)

Mentor/Preceptors were asked to rate Excelsior College graduates with nurses they knew who received the same degree from other colleges on thirteen nursing competencies. For all competencies, the respondents rated the Excelsior graduates as slightly higher. (See Table 11)

Table 11: Mentor/Preceptors Rating of Excelsior College Graduate's Nursing Competencies

Question (N=18)	Mean	SD
Applies principles, theories, and concepts from the sciences and humanities in the practice of nursing	4.72	1.23
Is sensitive to differing values/beliefs of clients	5.00	1.24
Prioritizes, plans, and implements quality care	4.94	1.30
Evaluates client responses to nursing interventions and alters care plans	4.89	1.23
Uses research findings to guide nursing care	4.78	1.31
Accesses and uses health care technology effectively	5.33	1.24
Exercises sound clinical judgment	4.89	1.28
Uses data driven outcomes to evaluate and improve the care of clients	4.67	1.19
Exhibits ethical behavior in all professional contacts with clients, peers, and society	4.56	1.04

Makes nursing decisions autonomously	4.83	1.50
Develops goal directed interactions in collaboration with clients	4.78	1.31
Applies knowledge of development across the life span in delivery of nursing care	4.72	1.13
Practices from within a legal and ethical framework	4.65	1.22
Range – 1 (much lower) to 4 (the same) to 7 (much higher)		

Mentor/Preceptors were asked nine questions related to nursing graduates' communication skills. For all questions, the respondents rated the Excelsior graduates as slightly higher than other nurses they knew who received the same degree from other colleges. (See Table 12)

Table 12: Mentor/Preceptors Rating of Excelsior College Graduate's Communication Skills

Question (N=18)	Mean	SD
Considers clients' values and beliefs when planning for and providing care	4.61	1.20
Supports clients' effective coping behaviors	4.72	1.13
Collaborates with members of the health care team to develop an interdisciplinary plan of care	4.61	1.14
Uses a variety of strategies to communicate with diverse groups and disciplines	4.83	1.20
Establishes a network of community relationships in order to provide continuity of client care	4.72	1.23
Creates appropriate systems and tools of communication across the continuum of care with clients and other members of the health care team	4.67	1.10
Uses appropriate means of communication with clients and other members of the health care team	4.61	1.09
Actively listens to clients and colleagues	4.72	1.18
Helps clients negotiate the health care system	4.78	1.11
Range – 1 (much lower) to 4 (the same) to 7 (much higher)		

Question 6: What are the overall mentors/preceptors' impressions of the Excelsior College graduates? Would they hire another Excelsior College AD program graduates?

The survey respondents indicated that the overall quality of the Excelsior College nursing program was slightly higher than that of other colleges (Mean=4.94). Likewise, they rated the overall clinical competence of the Excelsior College Associate Degree of Nursing graduates as slightly higher compared to other associate degree graduates (Mean=4.94).

Table 13: Mentor/Preceptor Ratings of Excelsior College's Program and Graduates

Question	Mean	SD
How would you rate the overall quality of the Excelsior (formerly Regents) College nursing program compared to other colleges?	4.94	1.16
How would you rate the overall clinical competence of the Excelsior (formerly Regents) College AD graduates in relation to other colleges' AD graduates?	4.94	1.43

Range – 1 (much lower) to 4 (the same) to 7 (much higher)

In addition, ninety-five percent of the respondents indicated that they would recommend the Excelsior nursing program to others and given the opportunity they would hire another Excelsior College Associate Degree of Nursing graduate.

Table 14: Mentor/Preceptor Ratings of Excelsior College's Program and Graduates

Question	% Yes	% No
Based on your experience with Excelsior (formerly Regents) College AD graduates, would you recommend the Excelsior nursing program to others?	95%	5%
Given the opportunity, would you hire another Excelsior College (formerly Regents College) AD in nursing graduate?	95%	5%

The mentors/preceptors were also asked to identify areas of strength and weakness of Excelsior College graduates. Table 15 and Table 16 below include the list of strengths and weaknesses identified by the respondents.

Table 15: Areas of Strengths of Excelsior College Graduates Identified by Mentors/Preceptors
The students that I've worked with have an exceptional ability to adapt to their given environment and are able to think quickly on their feet.
Excellent critical thinking skills; remains calm and handles emergencies competently
Students are independent learners, and very motivated to become an RN.
Ability to work independently
Clinical skills
Eager to work

Most come to nursing form a Paramedic background, which gives them a strong critical care base and excellent assessment skills as compared to conventional graduates. Clinicals Strong assessment skills. Previous experience as LPNs provides a good starting point and better familiarity with hospital setting. Have healthcare background Flexibility Independent , organizational skills They have to know that they have learned what they need to know. They have to be familiar enough with the subjects studied to know that they have covered what they are supposed to learn for each area. They have to be self starters in order to be able to complete the course of study. For existing LPN's with experience, it allows for speed to complete the course requirements and get them working to fill staffing needs Dedication to the profession since many are married with family and are working in addition to going to school

Table 16: Areas of Weakness of Excelsior College Graduates Identified by Mentors/Preceptors
I'm not quite sure about the theory content and if it is sufficient. Perhaps more exposure to administrative needs in nursing The weakness we see consistently is in the grads with non-nursing backgrounds. Transitioning to Med/ Surg jobs. They seem to have the largest learning curve as the job is so much different. Overall however, they are all very strong providers that are well prepared to enter the nursing environment. Poor time management, although this is normal for new grads. Lack the group education setting to adjust to other nurses in a clinical setting No live interactions for didactic component Not enough clinical experience Lack of support people to guide during intensive study I do not feel that the clinical piece is adequate for people without experience. As stated above, if the nurse has experience in the hospital setting as an LPN and has been precepted well, they are functional as graduate nurses from other programs. Not as much clinical time

Conclusion

This study compared AD graduates from Excelsior College's competency-based nursing program with AD graduates from traditional nursing programs. In addition, the study sought to identify the length and types of mentor/preceptor programs that Excelsior College graduates had after graduation.

The study found that when comparing the Excelsior College AD in nursing graduates in our sample to all associate degree graduates in our sample, there was no difference in the ethnic composition or gender distribution. However, there was a significant difference in the average ages of the two samples. The Excelsior College graduates were older on average than the students in the sample of all students who took the NCLEX test. This was likely due to the fact that Excelsior College students are professionals already working in the healthcare field when they start their degree program with Excelsior College. Upon completion of their associate degree from Excelsior College, graduates in our sample acquired the same types and level of employment as traditionally educated students.

In addition, it was determined that all facilities contacted during the course of this study that, at some point, employed an Excelsior College graduate had some form of formal orientation program. The length ranged from a few days to over six months. Almost all (95%) of the mentors who responded to our survey rated Excelsior graduates as slightly better prepared for the workforce than traditionally educated graduates. These same mentors also rated the overall clinical competence of the Excelsior College AD in nursing graduates as slightly higher compared to other associate degree graduates. Overall, the study reveals that Excelsior College students are transitioning into the workforce as well or better than the average associate degree nursing graduate.

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