
NLN CNEA Continuing Accreditation Policy

POLICY ON GRANTING CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

Programs holding NLN CNEA initial accreditation status are eligible to apply for reaffirmation and continuation of their accreditation status prior to the expiration of their initial accreditation term. Continuing accreditation may be pursued at any time prior to the last year of the initial accreditation term and should be timed for the process, including the Board of Commissioners' action, to be completed prior to the expiration of the term. The request to pursue continuing NLN CNEA accreditation is to be initiated in writing no later than nine to 12 months of an anticipated on-site program evaluation visit to the NLN CNEA staff by the chief academic nurse administrator of the program being put forth for consideration and the chief executive officer of the institution.

The academic nursing unit personnel are required to submit a self-study report and host an on-site program evaluators' visit in preparation for continuing accreditation consideration by the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners. If the Board of Commissioners determine that the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation have been met, continuing accreditation may be granted for up to a maximum period of ten years with a mid-cycle report due approximately half way through the period for which continuing accreditation has been granted. Continuing accreditation of the program takes effect at the time of the Board of Commissioner's final action on the program.

Continuing Accreditation Decisions

1. **Reaffirm continuing accreditation.** Continuing accreditation may be reaffirmed by the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners when the evidence presented indicates that the program is in compliance with NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation. Continuing accreditation is granted for up to a maximum of ten years and takes effect on the date of the Board of Commissioner's final action on the program's accreditation status. As part of the responsibilities related to continuing accreditation status, the program submits a mid-term report documenting continued compliance with the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation. This mid-cycle report falls in the middle of the accreditation term (i.e., year five of a ten year accreditation term). This report is designed to document the program's ability to continue to meet NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation. All mid-cycle reports are reviewed by the Program Report Review Committee Subcommittee on Mid-Cycle Review for recommendation to the Board of Commissioners regarding the reaffirmation of the program's continuing accreditation status. The NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners has the final authority to sustain or alter the continuing accreditation status of a program at any time during the continuing accreditation cycle depending on the program's ability to document compliance with the NLN CNEA standards of accreditation.
2. **Grant continuing accreditation with quality improvement conditions.** NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation for up to the maximum term of ten years with quality improvement conditions when the program has demonstrated it substantially meets established accreditation standards but has one or

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more identified quality improvement conditions that may impact the program's ability to continue to demonstrate compliance with the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation over the course of the accreditation term. In this instance, the Commissioners will require a focused follow-up quality improvement conditions report within a specified time frame (not to exceed 18 months) of granting continuing accreditation. The purpose of this follow-up report is to document the program's progress in addressing the quality improvement conditions identified in the Board of Commissioners' decision. The required follow-up report is reviewed by the Program Review Committee and a recommendation is sent forth to the Board of Commissioners. Upon review and consideration of the recommendation the Board of Commissioners may act to: (a) grant continued accreditation for up to the remainder of the maximum ten year accreditation term; (b) recommend a focused on-site program evaluation visit be conducted prior to determining the continuation of accreditation status; or (c) withdraw continuing accreditation as the program cannot demonstrate compliance with the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation under which the most recent period of continuing accreditation was granted. The decision to withdraw continuing accreditation is subject to appeal under the applicable policies and procedures of the NLN CNEA.

- 3. Defer continuing accreditation.** The option to defer continuing accreditation may be invoked if there is a question of instability in nursing academic administrative leadership, fiscal instability, changes in ownership, or issues with appropriate program and institutional sanction, approval, or accreditation status that have emerged between the end of the on-site visit and the Board of Commissioners' scheduled deliberation of the program's continuing accreditation decision. The NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners may defer the continuing accreditation decision if it is determined that additional specific information is needed from the program prior to rendering a decision regarding program compliance with accreditation standards. The Commission will inform the program of the nature, scope, specification, and purpose of the information that must be forwarded to NLN CNEA within 60 days of notification of the need for additional information. The chief academic nurse administrator must provide evidence that the changes in circumstances have not negatively impacted the stability of the program or its ability to meet the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation. During this extension the current accreditation status of the program will continue. The final decision regarding reaffirmation of the program's continuing accreditation status will be made by the Commission within 30 days of the receipt of the requested documentation. If the program is unable to provide the requested documentation or if the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners determines that the change has interfered with the program's ability to substantially meet the standards of accreditation, the program's current NLN CNEA accreditation status may be terminated by the Board. As an adverse action, this decision is appealable. If the program wishes to re-enter the accreditation process at a later date they must re-apply for initial accreditation.

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4. **Deny continuing accreditation.** Continuing accreditation may be denied by the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners when a program fails to comply with the NLN CNEA Standards for Accreditation based on the assessment of the self-study, the on-site program evaluation report, and recommendation of the NLN CNEA Program Review Committee. As an adverse action, a denial decision is subject to appeal under the applicable policies and procedures of the NLN CNEA.

If the Appeal Panel upholds the determination of denial of continuing accreditation, the official date of accreditation withdrawal is consistent with the date of the Board of Commissioners' action in response to the appeals panel decision. Following final action on denial of the program's continuing accreditation, the academic nursing unit is responsible for removing all information regarding NLN CNEA accreditation information from its published print and electronic program materials. The NLN CNEA staff removes the program from its digital and printed directories and any other related materials, and notifies all appropriate parties of the decision to deny accreditation. In such cases where an official representative of the program and or its governing organization uses a public forum to take issue with this or any other adverse action, the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners' chair may publicly address the action taken and the supporting rationale as it relates to the NLN CNEA standards of accreditation. If continuing accreditation is denied, a program may initiate the initial accreditation process after a one year wait period.

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PROCEDURES FOR SEEKING REAFFIRMATION OF CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

Programs previously receiving NLN CNEA accreditation must seek reaffirmation and continuation of their accreditation status within one year of the expiration of the designated accreditation term. The chief academic nurse administrator initiates the reaffirmation of continuing accreditation process by formally declaring the academic nursing unit's intent to seek NLN CNEA continuing accreditation for one or more programs. The filing of this request formally notifies the NLN CNEA staff of intent to reaffirm continuing accreditation and the time line within which the on-site program evaluation visit is being requested. It is the responsibility of the program to submit its intent to seek continuing accreditation on a time line that will assure continuation in the program's accreditation status with no lapses in term coverage. The NLN CNEA staff is available to provide guidance to facilitate program personnel through this process.

Requesting Delay in Seeking Reaffirmation of Continuing Accreditation

The chief nursing academic administrator may make a formal written request for a delay in entering into the continuing accreditation process for up to 6 months if there has been substantive change in leadership of the nursing program or governing institution or other substantive changes that may have an impact on the timeframe identified by the NLN CNEA staff for completing the accreditation process. This request will be reviewed by the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners' Executive Committee to determine if the rationale for the requested extension warrants the granting of an extension. The Executive Committee will notify the chief nursing academic administrator of its decision to grant this request and the NLN CNEA staff will coordinate adjustments in times for the self-study and the on-site program evaluators visit accordingly. A delay will be granted no more than once during the current term of NLN CNEA accreditation status.

STEPS TO SEEKING REAFFIRMATION OF CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

There are three steps to the process of seeking reaffirmation of continuing accreditation from NLN CNEA: 1) formal notification of intent to proceed with the reaffirmation accreditation process; 2) submission of the self-study; and 3) participation in an on-site program evaluation visit.

STEP ONE: FORMAL WRITTEN REQUEST

A formal written request is initiated jointly by the chief academic nurse administrator and the chief executive institutional officer and submitted to NLN CNEA indicating intent and commitment to pursue reaffirmation of continuing accreditation and the desire to schedule an on-site program evaluation visit. Once NLN CNEA staff has received the formal request and the required accreditation fees, the NLN CNEA staff will work with the chief academic nurse administrator in completing the remaining two steps of the process within the required timeline. ***The formal written request must be received by NLN CNEA anywhere from nine to twelve months prior to the time of scheduling the on-site visit.***

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The following information must accompany the request to initiate the review process:

- a. State Board of Nursing (SBN) program approval/accreditation status and date of last review;
- b. Governing institution accreditation status by a U.S. Department of Education recognized regional or national accrediting body and dates of last and next review. In cases where a SBN approved program resides in a vocational facility, hospital, other healthcare facility, or virtual platforms, the parent institution needs to provide documentation of accreditation from a regionally or nationally recognized accrediting agency.

Once these requirements have been reviewed by the NLN CNEA staff and found complete, the staff will contact the chief academic nurse administrator to establish the time frame for the completion of actions needing to be taken for a program to be considered for continuing accreditation.

STEP TWO: SELF-STUDY SUBMISSION

The submission of a self-study document that addresses the program(s) ability to meet NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation is required prior to the on-site program evaluation visit. The NLN CNEA Program Review Committee relies on informational accuracy and completeness in the presentation of self-study materials. Information must be relevant and substantive in its ability to support the program's demonstration of meeting the quality indicators designated within each accreditation standard. Reflected in the self-study should be examples of a commitment to the process of continuous quality improvement. The self-study report including supplemental appendices is electronically submitted to the NLN CNEA office *no less than eight weeks prior* to the previously scheduled on-site program evaluator team visit.

STEP THREE: ON-SITE PROGRAM EVALUATION VISIT

An on-site program evaluation visit by an appointed on-site program evaluation team is the third step in the accreditation process. The on-site program evaluation team holds current knowledge of higher education, professional nursing standards and expectations, relevant practice issues and practice expectations. The chief academic nurse administrator, in consultation with faculty, vets on-site program evaluators prior to the scheduled on-site visit and can request the replacement of a visitor if there is a perceived conflict of interest noted by the chief academic nurse administrator. The number and composition of on-site program evaluators is determined by the size of the program, number of educational sites, type and number of programs under review, and the integration of distant/distributive and/or innovative educational options.

The length of the on-site program evaluation visit is also determined by the characteristics listed in the previous paragraph. However, visits are normally completed within a three day

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time span. Exceptions to this common practice are negotiated with the NLN CNEA executive director and the chief academic nurse administrator. The purpose of the on-site visit is to validate and clarify information contained in the self-study, and to provide a concise systematic observational validation of the ability of the program(s) under review to meet the published accreditation standards in place at the time of the visit. On-site program evaluation visits are conducted within a defined biannual timeframe (fall and spring).

THIRD-PARTY COMMENTS

NLN CNEA expects the engagement of communities of interest in the accreditation process including faculty, students, administrators, alumnae, and community as an indication of stakeholder commitment to program quality and integrity. As part of the self-study process, the academic nursing unit is required to communicate information regarding the NLN CNEA accreditation process and established timetable to their defined community of interest.

Following the formal written request to pursue continuing accreditation and prior to submitting the self-study report, the program is required to publicly post a notice informing students, communities of interest, and other members of the public of their rights and responsibilities to submit comments directly to the NLN CNEA staff regarding the program(s) under review. The program must submit evidence of such posting when submitting the self-study. Third-party comments will be shared with the on-site program evaluation team, and considered by the NLN CNEA Program Review Committee during the review process. The comments will be shared with the chief academic nursing officer who be given an opportunity to respond to the comments if desired. Third-party comments and a program's response are not part of the self-study but are considered additions to the self-study materials submitted for review. Third-party comments must be received by the NLN CNEA no later 14 days prior to the on-site visit.

REVIEW AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The NLN CNEA Program Review Committee meets three times a year to deliberate and recommend accreditation status for programs that have submitted a self-study and hosted an on-site program evaluation visit. Prior to the scheduled Program Review Committee meeting, a program may submit additional documentation that is factual and believed to be relevant to the published standards or clarifying factual comments made in response to the on-site program evaluators' team report. The Program Review Committee will review the self-study, the report from the on-site program evaluator's visit, and any other relevant materials pertinent to the program(s)'s request for continuing accreditation. The Program Review Committee will provide the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners with a written analysis of the program's ability to meet the intent of the quality indicators for each CNEA standard. This analysis is accompanied by a recommendation regarding continuing accreditation and forwarded to the Board of Commissioners for a final action and accreditation decision.

The NLN CNEA Commissioners, after review of documents generated through the review process, are accountable for the final accreditation outcome. Each program submitted by the academic nursing unit is judged on its merit and final accreditation decisions may differ given

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each program's ability to meet the NLN CNEA published standards. When continuing accreditation is granted by the Board of Commissioners this accreditation status is effective on the date of the Board of Commissioner's decision.

PUBLIC NOTICE OF ACCREDITATION STATUS

For programs receiving continuing accreditation from NLN CNEA the nursing academic unit may use the following public statement:

"The (insert name of the institution and program(s) is accredited by the National League for Nursing Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation (NLN CNEA), located at 2600 Virginia Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20037."