EXECUTIVE SUMMARY NURSING PROGRAM EVALUATION 2012

This self-administered program evaluation was completed by the Nursing Program Evaluation Committee (PEC) with the assistance of the Institutional Development and Research (IDR) Office and in consultation with the Nursing Program Committee and Nursing Department. As part of the consultation process, students, graduates, relevant faculty, and relevant Vanier College staff were surveyed. Relevant SRAM and PSEP data were extracted by the IDR Office and analyzed. The evaluation examined the cohorts of students entering the program in the Autumn 2005 to Autumn 2010 semesters.

This program evaluation followed the guidelines established in the General Guide to the Evaluation of Programs of Studies by the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial for the “self-evaluation” of programs. The report is divided into seven chapters, each of which is summarized below. The section that follows summarizes the PEC’s recommendations.

Chapter 1: Program Description

The Nursing Program was converted to a competency-based program in 2001 using the program objectives provided by the Ministry of Education Leisure and Sports (MELS). A minor revision took place in 2004, involving the inclusion of an additional competency. Since that time the faculty has made minor modifications to the grid involving a movement of competencies or parts of competencies between courses.

First-semester, first-time enrolments in the program increased steadily from Autumn 2005 to Autumn 2010. Due to limited resources, the program aims for a first-semester enrolment (post-validation) of 96 students. The following characteristics of the incoming cohorts were noted:

- The majority of students were female although the number of males increased steadily over the evaluation period;
- The incoming high school average was similar to that of students in the same program throughout the rest of the Reseau and at other Anglophone colleges;
- Approximately one third of the incoming students were 17 to 18 years of age on admission, followed closely by those in the 21 to 25 year of category, with the proportion of older students declining;
- Mother tongue distribution was similar to that for the College as a whole – 48% Anglophone; 40% Allophone and 12% Francophone.

Program-specific courses in the Nursing Program are taught by teachers from four departments. They include the Nursing, Psychology, Biology and Sociology Departments.

Chapter 2: Relevance of the Program

All Ministry-identified competencies are addressed in the Nursing Program and these are congruent with the Vanier College Mission Statement and the Academic Success Component of the Strategic Management Plan. The majority of current students, teachers and graduates indicated that students in this program were being/are well prepared for work in the healthcare field and for writing the OIIQ professional licensure examination as well as for further study at university. Overall, current students,
graduates and teachers agreed that students in the program were acquiring the knowledge and skills required to meet the program competencies.
Chapter 3: Coherence of the Program

Three common themes run throughout the Nursing Program; they are health, nursing and self-development. In a typical course, the student learns new concepts and experiments with them, first in a simulated situation in the clinical laboratory and then in a real clinical setting. The program is designed to expose the student to increasing levels of complexity as well as to people in each of the different stages of the life cycle. The amount of time allocated to each stage of the life cycle roughly reflects the proportion of nursing care required by persons at that stage in current Canadian society and in the future. A strong emphasis has been placed on the elderly. Faculty expressed the need to alter the sequencing of some program-specific competencies in order to better meet student needs.

The results of this study suggest that approximately 40% of the students in this program are not taking a full course load and most of those are delaying or dropping some of their General Education (GE) courses. The most frequently reported reasons for this include scheduling difficulties and the desire to focus on program-specific courses or reduce their workload. Students reported the value of courses offered during the intersession and summer sessions as well as those offered through Continuing Education.

The majority of students categorized the workload for this program as ‘too heavy’ or ‘heavy’, with the 180.501 and 601 courses rated the highest in terms of heaviness when compared to other program-specific courses. Most teachers offering program-specific courses who responded to the survey also agreed. Together the data suggest that the full course load required to graduate in the prescribed time presents a serious challenge for many students.

In each course, students should receive a clear description of the course competencies and expected workload early in the semester. For the courses offered by the Nursing Department, some of this information is contained in the course outlines and the rest in the course manuals, both of which are given to the students during the first class of each semester. For the remaining program-specific courses offered by the Biology, Psychology and Sociology Departments, all of this information should be presented in the course outlines. A review of the course outlines/course manuals for all of the program-specific courses offered in the Autumn 2010 and Winter 2011 semesters revealed appropriate descriptions of this information in most. It was noted that some of the course competencies as listed in the course outlines are not the same as those listed in the official program grid as presented in CLARA. Although course ponderations were listed in most of the course outlines examined, only a few offered an explanation of these numbers; therefore, students may not have a clear understanding of workload expectations.

Chapter 4: Teaching Methods

Various teaching methods incorporating traditional methods with the use of technology are used in the non-stage components of the program-specific courses in the Nursing Program. These methods were perceived by both students and teachers as effective. In one particular course, student feedback indicated some concern with the teaching methods used as well as the connection of the course content to the nursing discipline. Student satisfaction rates regarding teaching methods used in stage courses was very high.
A diverse range of initiatives to enhance student success is available for students in this program. There are numerous department initiatives including, for example, several projects with release time provided by the Student Academic Success Program, the nursing peer tutoring program and the Nursing Adjunct Program for students in the first year of the Nursing Program. The Nursing Adjunct Program, offered to academically “weak” students, has shown remarkable success. Nursing students also benefit from a variety of other support services including those offered by Student Services and the Learning Centre, among others.

In general, students felt that the availability of their teachers both inside and outside of the formal learning setting was appropriate. Some concern was expressed, however, with the availability of the clinical instructor during stage. Teachers and some students felt that the 1:8 teacher student ratio in some of the clinical settings was too high.

Chapter 5: Program Resources

Human, material and financial resources are necessary in order for the program to function properly. The number of teachers in the program appears to be appropriate in most cases. The noted exception was in the clinical components of some of the courses where the teacher/student ratio can go as high as 1:8, with a teacher responsible not only for 8 students but potentially up to 24 patients as well. With the changing healthcare system, including, for example, a higher level of patient acuity in the clinical settings and an increased staff nurse workload, the cap of a 1:8 teacher/student ratio, in use since this program was first developed in the 1970s, may now be too high. Also the recent use of part-time teachers who teach only the clinical components of the program is not an ideal situation.

As with most other programs in the College, the minimum level of education required for faculty is a master’s degree. In recent years, for a variety of reasons, the Nursing Department has had difficulty attracting and retaining nursing teachers prepared at the master’s level or higher. To address this situation, applicants are currently able to use their years of clinical practice in lieu of a master’s degree. The result, however, is that only about one-third of the current faculty in the Nursing Department are prepared at the master’s level. All teachers in the Nursing Department have several years of clinical experience and their areas of clinical expertise represent a healthy mix.

Professional and support staff are integral in ensuring that the student needs are met. Most students reported using the services of the Library, computer drop-in facilities, Academic Advising, Counselling and the Learning Centre, and most were satisfied with the services that the staff provided in those areas. Several support services were also offered through the Nursing Department, including peer tutoring, practice sessions in the nursing laboratory and the Nursing Adjunct Program. Again, satisfaction with these services was high with the only concern being that practice times in the nursing laboratory are inadequate. The temporary replacement of the nursing laboratory technician with those less experienced with the position was viewed as a challenge by teachers and students.

In regards to material resources, teachers and students noted some concerns, which included

- the insufficiency of practice time in the nursing laboratory outside of regular class times;
- the state of the nursing laboratory equipment and supplies;
the amount of space available in the LEA/MIO mailboxes;
the shortage of student space for quiet study and group work.

As well, an urgent need for increased financial resources was identified, particularly to address the equipment and supply needs of the nursing laboratory.

Chapter 6: Program Effectiveness

Examination of the application and admissions rates indicates that student recruitment activities for the Nursing Program have been successful. The Communications and Recruitment Office, as well as the Nursing Department, initiate these activities. There has been an increase in the number of student applications and the number of students registered in the program has also increased, reaching the cap of 96 students in the autumn of 2010. Many services are available to assist new students with their integration into the program.

A variety of evaluation methods and tools are used within the program-specific courses. Students found most of these methods to be useful. In terms of equity, few program-specific courses in this program have multiple sections taught by more than one teacher. In the courses offered by the Nursing Department, regular meetings allow for the monitoring of uniformity of the stage components, where multiple sections are taught by different teachers.

For the period of this evaluation, data on the graduation rates in the prescribed time (three years) was available for the 2005 to 2007 cohorts. On average, 31.9% of the students from these three cohorts graduated in the prescribed time. This rate was similar to the rate for students in the same program offered in other colleges in the Reseau (32.5%). For the percentage who graduated within the prescribed time plus two years (five years), data was only available for the 2005 cohort. The rates for Vanier vs. the rest of the Reseau were also similar (Vanier: 47.5% vs. the Reseau: 52.0%).

In order to obtain a licence to practice nursing in Quebec, graduates of all nursing programs in the province (including college programs, baccalaureate programs and even some master’s programs) must pass the provincial licensure examination. Most of the graduates whose cohorts were examined in this evaluation would most likely have written the examination in September of 2008 to 2010; most of these graduates would have been part of the Autumn 2005 to Autumn 2007 cohorts. The pass rates for Vanier graduates for the 2008 to 2010 September licensure examination are similar to those graduating from nursing programs throughout the rest of the Reseau (Average percent passed – Vanier: 79.8 ± 4.18 SEM; Reseau: 80.1± 1.53 SEM).

Chapter 7: Program Management

Program management originates with the Faculty Dean who is the program liaison with the Academic Dean and higher College bodies. The Faculty Dean then communicates mainly with the Department Coordinator, who is responsible for various planning, organizational and administrative activities. More specifically, the Departmental Coordinator oversees departmental responsibilities such as allocating courses to teachers and maintaining the utility and coherence of the courses offered in their disciplines. This work is completed in conjunction with the different active committees within the Nursing Department. A Clinical Coordinator is responsible for stage placements, a laboratory technician
coordinates the laboratory activities and an OSCE technician coordinates the OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) sessions for the department.

The Nursing Program has two main methods of evaluation: ongoing – where Key Performance Indicators (KPI) extracted annually from SRAM data by the IDR Office are reviewed, and the more in-depth, formal self-program evaluations conducted at least every ten years.

Overall, due at least in part to a strong commitment by the faculty, the department is structured well to ensure effectiveness.
GLOBAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Program Evaluation Committee (PEC) made several recommendations for the Nursing Program. These recommendations are based on the analyses of the findings presented in this report as well as input from the Nursing Department and the Nursing Program Committee following their reviews of this report. An overview of these recommendations is presented below.

1. The PEC recommends that the program continue and expand its efforts to attract students most likely to succeed in the program and to support those in the program to increase their chances of academic success.

   **Rationale:**
   
   While the number of applications to the program increased significantly over the evaluation period, the number of new student registrations increased to the maximum of 96. The increase in the number of new registrations was probably due to the revised Standing and Advancement Policy, which no longer gave priority to students with a grade less than 55% in their first-semester nursing course to re-enter the program. This left more space for students new to the program, who presumably would have a greater chance of success in the program. It was agreed that this policy should be maintained.

   Several other measures were mentioned in this study where improvements could be made to attract academically stronger students. Some of these measures included updating the Nursing webpage, in particular the Nursing Events and Announcements of Student Accomplishments sections, the development of student focus groups to generate ideas for enhancing the program to appeal to academically stronger students, developing a closer relationship between the Nursing and Communication and Advancement Departments (for recruitment purposes) and having graduates become more active in recruitment activities.

   Some of the programs and activities already in place to support student success have proven to be successful and these should be maintained, for example the Nursing Adjunct program.

2. The PEC recommends that the program continue to monitor student characteristics on an ongoing basis and adjust the curriculum and teaching/learning strategies to meet changing student needs.

   **Rationale:**
   
   It was noted in this study that the student population changed significantly over the evaluation period, particularly the age of the incoming students and the gender distribution. Such changes may require adjustments to the way the curriculum is presented and the teaching/learning strategies used.

3. The PEC strongly recommends that nursing teachers trained at the baccalaureate level in particular be encouraged through various incentives to continue their education in the field of nursing and/or in the education discipline.
Rationale:

Findings from this study revealed the difficulty that the Nursing Department is facing in attracting and retaining nursing teachers prepared at the master’s degree level or higher, a requirement for hiring to the department and most other departments in the College. As a result, approximately two thirds of the Nursing Department faculty hold a baccalaureate in nursing as their highest degree. Although these teachers have several years clinical experience, this does not totally compensate for a higher level of preparation.

4. The PEC recommends that the program examine and resolve the course competency and student workload issues noted in this evaluation.

Rationale:

Over the years there have been a number of minor revisions to the curriculum involving a redistribution of some of the competencies. These moves have led to some discrepancies between the official program grid as presented in CLARA and what is actually delivered.

Some teachers have noted problems with the distribution of some of the program-specific competencies, in particular, competency O1QF (To use ethics and values of the profession to understand one’s own role), O1Q5 (To establish a partnership with the person) and O1QB (to assist the person in maintaining and improving their health) throughout the program. These competencies need to be re-distributed to better meet the needs of the students.

Another major finding of this study was the heavy workload expected of the students in this program. Many students are attempting to cope by taking intersession and summer courses or increasing the number of semesters to graduation. It was noted that Semester 5 seems to be particularly heavy. A re-distribution of competencies may also be required to better equalize the workload between semesters, as well as offering more intersession and summer sessions General Education (GE) courses, double credit courses and possibly online GE courses that may have a better fit with these students’ busy schedules. Teachers should also be reminded of the importance of considering the course ponderation when assigning homework to their students.

5. The PEC recommends that the program, in collaboration with the Registrar, develop the means to assist students to follow the sequence of courses as presented in their program grid, particularly with respect to the GE courses.

Rationale:

The findings of this study suggest that a significant proportion of students in the Nursing Program are not following their grid with respect to their GE courses. Of those students who reported delaying or dropping GE courses, approximately half reported doing so because of registration or scheduling conflicts or difficulties. This problem needs to be reviewed at the Program Committee level (with full representation from the four General Education Departments) in consultation with the Registrar, a process that has already begun.
Other options that could be considered are to increase the number of GE courses available for students in this program during the inter- and summer sessions, via Continuing Education, as well as alternative course offerings such as online and double credit courses.

6. The PEC recommends that all teachers in the program be supported and encouraged to continually upgrade their teaching/learning activities and tailor them to best meet the learning needs of the current student population.

Rationale:

Overall, the student assessments of the teaching methods used in the majority of program-specific courses in this program were very positive. There were a few areas, and one course in particular, where findings suggest that improvements are needed.

Also, although there are numerous professional development activities available to teachers in the Nursing Program, sometimes their timing is not appropriate, for example those activities offered during Universal Break. The upgrading of nursing skills is also an area that could be improved. Perhaps the Nursing Department could work with the Pedagogical Development Office to examine ways of overcoming these shortfalls. Professional development funds that meet the needs of teachers would also help.

The Nursing Department has always strived to hire teachers on a full-time basis to teach both the theoretical and clinical components of the discipline, a situation that promotes continuity and equity in the delivery of course content and assessments. With the current healthcare situation in the province, this goal has been increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. As a result, the department now has five teachers on faculty who teach only the clinical components and strictly in the clinical settings. Due to the part-time nature of this work, these teachers can rarely attend team or faculty meetings, and some reported feeling isolated. Ways to better support these teachers need to be developed. Some suggestions are sharing the meeting minutes with the part-time teachers or perhaps a full-time teacher in the same course meeting with the part-time teachers at regular intervals throughout the semester.

7. The PEC recommends that a study be conducted to determine an acceptable teacher/student ratio in the clinical settings from pedagogical and safety perspectives as well as the impact on allocation.

Rationale:

Feedback received from teachers and students in this evaluation suggest that the teacher/student ratios in the clinical settings are too high. Since this program began in the early 1970s, the maximum teacher/student ratio has been 1:8. However, the healthcare system has changed dramatically, particularly over the last two decades. The level of patient acuity on the regular units as well as the workload of the nursing staff have increased markedly. As a result, students and their teachers today are now dealing with patients who are much sicker and staff nurses are less able to assist the
students than previously was the case. Therefore, it appears that the maximum teacher/student ratios of 1:8 may no longer be adequate. In fact, some units will no longer accept ratios higher than 1:6. Clearly, the teacher/student ratio in the clinical setting is a situation that requires further study, perhaps in collaboration with other nursing programs in the Reseau.

8. **The PEC recommends that the nursing laboratory facilities be upgraded to better meet the needs of the students.**

   **Rationale:**

   Feedback received from teachers and students in this evaluation suggest that materials and equipment are lacking. The Nursing Department is currently working with the Faculty Dean to attempt to resolve this situation as quickly as possible. This process involves the production of a detailed list of materials and supplies required along with their cost estimates. The program committee should continue to monitor this situation until the problems have been resolved.

   The results of this study also suggest that the practice times available to students outside of the regular lab periods are not adequate. This may be due, at least in part, to the staffing changes in the lab technician position in the semester that the survey was conducted. Nevertheless, this is a situation that should continue to be monitored closely and adjusted as necessary.

9. **The PEC recommends that efforts be made to minimize the impact of staffing changes in the technical positions within the Nursing Department.**

   **Rationale:**

   The results of this study suggest that the temporary staffing change that occurred in the lab technician position during this evaluation had a significant and negative impact on the functioning of the laboratory. Steps should be taken to reduce such impacts in the future, not only for the laboratory technician position but for the OSCE technician position as well. If it has not already been done, it is suggested that the daily duties of the technical staff be documented in the form of a manual, similar to the ones available for teachers and the coordinator.

10. **The PEC recommends that resources for the program be reviewed.**

    **Rationale:**

    Students in this study reported a lack of accessibility to computers either within the Nursing Resource Room or around the Vanier community.

    Students reported a shortage of quiet study space as well as space for group work. There were suggestions that this space could be located in the Library.

    Teachers noted that some of the material in the Library was out of date and that closer ties with the Library staff, perhaps with a meeting at least once a year, may help.
Course outlines can also be viewed as an important resource for students. Evidence from this study showed that some of the course outlines are missing information required by the course outline policy.

Although students are using the counselling services and services of the Learning Centre, it is possible that some students are falling through the cracks. A more formal system of referral and follow-up may help this situation.

The findings of this study corroborate the findings of the recent evaluation of the College’s policy entitled the Institutional Policy on the Evaluation of Student Achievement (IPESA), which showed that most teachers and students are not aware of this important policy.

11. The PEC recommends that the Nursing Program Committee review the results of the nursing licensure examinations on an annual basis.

   Rationale:

   It was noted in this study that the scores of the Vanier graduates on the practical component of the licensure examination declined from September 2008 to September 2009, but started to recover in 2010. Future results should be monitored closely. Downward trends over more than one cohort may warrant an in-depth study of the students’ preparation for the examination.

12. Finally, the PEC recommends that the Nursing Program undergo a formal program evaluation at least every five years, that a formal mechanism be put in place to act on the recommendations of these evaluations, and that the data for ongoing evaluations be adjusted to better meet the needs of the program.

   Rationale:

   The results of this study have shown that not only does the student population change rapidly, so do the needs of society. In order to prepare students to meet these needs, the program needs to be adjusted more frequently than every ten years and the objective data provided by ongoing and more in-depth formal program evaluations can assist with this process.
The Nursing Program Evaluation Committee wishes to thank the following contributors to the report:

♦ Students, graduates, staff, and faculty members of the Nursing Program who took the time to complete the questionnaires and provided their invaluable input and feedback.

♦ The Registrar, Admissions and Information Technology Departments, in particular, Tom Ingerman, Larry Callahan, and Ross Tzkanov, for providing advice and access to almost inaccessible data.

♦ The departments who recently undertook program evaluations before this one for providing excellent sample evaluation reports.

♦ Pit F. Lan Chow Wing, Conseiller Pédagogique, of the Institutional Development and Research (IDR) Office, acted as advisor to the Nursing PEC on all matters pertaining to this evaluation and provided the MELS and College statistics as well as coordinating all surveys.