Dr. James Rogers
Southern Association of Colleges & Schools
Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097

Dear Dr. Rogers:

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi will be initiating a significant change in existing technology-based delivery systems in its distance learning nursing program.

The School of Nursing and Health Sciences at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is ready to deliver the courses comprising the generic nursing major through distance education technology. Our 1998-1999 Self-Study reported that the RN-BSN major is offered via distance technology. This proposed initiative extends the undergraduate nursing majors available through distance education methods. This technology-based instruction methodology has been developed with the assistance of grant funding from the Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education and in partnership with the Department of R.N. Education at Del Mar College.

After reviewing the SACS Commission on Colleges Procedure Two of the Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi believes that this action requires TAMU-CC to notify the Commission on Colleges prior to implementation by the institution. TAMU-CC would like to begin implementation in summer 2003. A summary of this program is included in this packet as Attachment A. This curriculum delivery method, e-Line (Electronic Learning in Nursing Education), does not change the program mission and goals, does not increase or decrease program length, does not add a transition or bridging option and does not add alternative programs of study. Didactic and clinical experiences will be supervised by qualified full-time and adjunct clinical faculty who meet all credentialing requirements.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents approved Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Distance Education Strategic Plan in 2001 (See Attachment B). When an institution has an approved distance education plan, the THECB grants approval for an institution to offer courses by distance education that are in the institution's approved course inventory. This plan was also submitted as a part of the TAMU-CC August 2001 Follow-up Report to SACS. Under the current Texas Board of Nurse Examiners guidelines, this curriculum delivery method does not require separate approval. Both the Texas Board of Nurse Examiners and the THECB have been involved with this project at the initial proposal stage and during the development of this delivery system (See Attachment C). Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi continues to have regular conversations with staff members from both agencies to inform them of the progress of this project.
Dr. James Rogers  
SACS Commission on Colleges  
March 28, 2003  
Page 2  

Health care delivery is facing the worst shortage of registered nurses in modern health care. Enlarging the current pool of graduates is essential to produce the nursing evolving health care needs of the population. Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi believes that e-Line will make a significant impact in alleviating the nursing shortage in South Texas.

Please let me know if there is any additional information that you need from us so that we may proceed with our implementation timetable.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Robert R. Furgason  
President

RRF/njc

Enclosures:  
Executive Summary e-Line Program  
THECB approval of Distance Education Plan  
TAMUS Board of Regents approval of Distance Education Plan
eLINE – Electronic Learning in Nursing Education
Claudia L. Johnston, PhD

The shortage of registered nurses is acute and intensifying. Responding to this critical need, the eLINE Project is designing, implementing and evaluating a seamless, articulated, collaborative, entry-level nursing curriculum, available anytime, anywhere that will produce the nursing workforce needed to manage, provide and innovate the caring continuum for the ever evolving health care needs of the population.

Warnings in various media forums about the growing shortage of registered nurses are now appearing regularly across the entire country. The shortage is acute. No state is immune from this threat to public safety. There are approximately 2,696,540 registered nurses in the United States according to the most recent data reported by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS, 2/01) and that number cannot tackle the demands of the nation’s health care delivery system. Texas reports a need for 27,000 additional registered nurses to meet current staffing demands (Associated Press, 2/01). Experts at Vanderbilt University project a critical shortage by 2010. The Division of Nursing, Department of Health and Human Services projects a shortfall of 400,000 registered nurses by 2020. Insufficient nursing staff throughout the health care system yields increased risk for unintended adverse patient outcomes. The especially alarming concern is an inevitable increase in treatment and medication errors.

Demand is mounting as the population ages. Greater longevity, due to technological advances and other lifestyle enhancing practices leads to an intensification of chronic diseases, and increased health care and education needs. At the other end of the continuum, technology enables our very youngest citizens more opportunities for life with chronic conditions encompassing periods of acute episodes. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing cites determinants of the shortage to include; aging of the nurse workforce and faculty, competing career opportunities, an increasingly violent and stressful workplace and the demand for advanced degree nurses for complex community-based acute and ambulatory settings. The average age for registered nurses is 45.2; 46% are over 50. Nurses under 30 decreased from 419,000 to 246,000 between 1993 and 1998; a 41% reduction (Buerhaus, 2001). The average age of nursing assistant professors is 49; of nursing associate professors is 52; and new nursing PhD’s are 46, on average, compared to 34 in other fields.

Solutions must be found to provide an appropriately selected and educated nursing workforce. Solutions must move past a “shift the burden” or “do more with less” attitude. Solutions must integrate new ideas and technologies.

Partnerships that share resources hold the potential for the health professions to meet the continually changing and growing need for their graduates. Approximately six years ago, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation initiated the Colleagues in Caring: Regional Collaboratives for Nursing Workforce Development Program to foster state-based groups charged with developing relationships and programs that would enable accurate prediction of nursing workforce needs. Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi’s (TAMU-CC) collaborative partnership, the Nursing Workforce: Beyond 2000 Project (NW2K) was one of the initial twenty sites funded in 1996 and again among twenty-four funded sites in 1999. The registered nurse educational programs at TAMU-CC and Del Mar College are working with other partners to
address the health care needs in South Texas. A key goal of the NW2K Project is to underpin the establishment of a seamless nursing education system that will meet health care needs. Quality community responsive nursing education would thus be available throughout the entire region (>15,000 square miles). Learning anywhere, anytime, unencumbered by time and place, with technology and educational opportunities seamlessly integrated, is an innovation not yet applied to entry-level registered nurse education at the programmatic level!

Because nursing educational programs offer different degrees for entry into practice, it is uncommon to realize economies of scale by sharing scarce resources such as faculty and clinical sites. Students entering the nursing profession choose between five types of educational programs, diploma, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, generic master’s degree, nursing doctorate (ND) degree. All five programs are entry level and prepare students for the same licensing examination. However, each type of program has differing goals beyond the initial licensing examination and graduates are prepared for different roles in the health care system, the licensing examination functioning as the minimum standard for practice in every state. Movement of students or transfer of courses between types of programs is difficult at best. Regionally based articulation agreements between associate and baccalaureate degree programs are the most common linkages yet there is still much duplication of content. In an ideal educational process, students would complete an entry-level program and progress to higher degree levels featuring clearly differentiated content. Students would be able to move easily, at their own best learning pace, among linked programs, while individually demonstrating achieved competencies.

The eLine Partnership Project is working to create the curricula, pedagogy and process that will enable this kind of learning. The eLine Partnership Project curricula will meet existing national accrediting standards. Students will achieve the same national competencies established by the profession, accrediting agencies, commissions, boards of nursing and health care, and education in the different states. The prototypical curricula is the same curricula as offered on campus in the programs of one associate and one baccalaureate degree programs in south Texas. Asynchronous curricula are competency based, self-paced, faculty and preceptor guided. Adjunct clinical faculty and preceptors from the student’s ambient health care delivery system will be contracted for practice and to demonstrate essential competencies. Students will choose to enter the eLine model program and designate the degree of their choosing from their institution of choice. The degree received is dependent on the general education requirements of the participating colleges and university as well as the number of competency modules the student completes. Students often need a rapid pathway to licensure in order to enter the workforce and then return to study for a higher degree. A competency based, self-paced model will facilitate this course of action, as well as more quickly inject greater numbers of entry-level nurses into the workplace.

The eLINE Partnership Project is a new three-year project in the Learning Anytime, Anywhere Partnerships Program for the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, US Department of Education. The collaborative project is also supported and funded through several other initiatives and agencies including the three primary educational institutions: Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and Del Mar College. Other partners include the Public Broadcasting System of South Texas, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Texas Board of Nurse Examiners and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.
Claudia L. Johnston, Ph.D., R.N.
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
6300 Ocean Drive
Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

June 8, 2001

Dear Dr. Johnston:

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board welcomes the opportunity to support Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi in its application to the FIPSE Learning Anywhere Anytime Partnership Program for funds to develop an on-line, entry-level nursing curriculum. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is committed to working with institutions of higher education, professional organizations and other regulatory agencies to address the need for innovative and creative approaches to meeting the educational needs of the people of Texas.

We will be pleased to support the proposed eLine Partnership by having our staff participate in project meetings as needed to ensure compliance with State guidelines for distance education programs. We wish you success with this project and look forward to working with you and the project staff.

Cordially,

[Signature]

Marshall A. Hill
June 8, 2001

Claudia Johnston, PhD, RN
Texas A&M Corpus Christi
6300 Ocean Drive
Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

Dear Dr. Johnston:

On Wednesday, May 23rd, Sandra Owen, Director of Professional Nursing, and I met with Lois Barry and LeAnn Wagner to discuss the plans of the Consortium of Texas A&M - Corpus Christi, Del Mar College, and Victoria College to apply for a FIPSE-LAAP grant to offer online nursing education. The use of technology to provide nursing education to individuals at a site convenient to them is intended to address the nursing shortage.

The Board of Nurse Examiners supports innovative, creative approaches to nursing education within the boundaries of current education regulations. Further, at its July, 2000 Board meeting, the Board approved the adoption of a new Position Statement on the Development of Additional Nursing Education Programs. The statement was based on experiences with program development and expansion over the past decade. In this position statement, the Board encourages established programs to investigate the feasibility of assisting students to attend established programs rather than developing a new program or forming a partnership with an established program for co-teaching the program of study or serving as a distance education site prior to seeking Board approval to develop a new nursing program.
This proposal is innovative and uses resources of existing nursing programs to expand education to new communities. We are committed to working with you to assure that the project meets the Board’s program rules.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Katherine A. Thomas, MN, RN
Executive Director

cc: Sandra Owen, MN, RN
Director of Professional Nursing
January 30, 2001

Dr. Robert Furgason, President
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
6300 Ocean Drive,
Corpus Christi Hall, Suite 278
Corpus Christi, TX 78412-5599

Dear Dr. Furgason:

On January 24, 2001, the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents adopted the following action submitted by Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

- Approval of Institutional Plan for Distance Education and Authorization to Request Approval from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB).

"The Board of Regents approves the Institutional Plan for Distance Education and Off-Campus Instruction for Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as contained in Exhibit H.

"The Board also authorized the President to submit this Institutional Plan for Distance Education and Off-Campus Instruction to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for approval."

Following THECB approval of this Institutional Plan for Distance Learning, the System Board of Regents can thereafter approve programs offered via distance education, with conditions and exceptions as noted in the THECB's Notification and Approval Procedures for Distance Education and Off-Campus Programs and Courses (adopted October 1999).

All the best,

Howard D. Graves
Chancellor

cc: Jerry Gaston
    Leo Sayavedra
    Walter Wendler
    Sandra Harper

Office of the President
FEB 2 2001
Texas A&M University
Corpus Christi

Office of the Provost and
Vice President for Academic Affairs
FEB 2 2001
July 5, 2001

Dr. Sandra Harper
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
6300 Ocean Drive
Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

Dear Dr. Harper:

A Subcommittee of the Distance Education Advisory Committee has reviewed the Institutional Plan for Distance Education and Off-Campus Instruction submitted by Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and recommends approval following the submission of minor revisions or acceptable additional information. The Subcommittee characterized the overall Plan as outstanding.

The attached Subcommittee analysis gives comments on individual sections of your Plan and notes the additional information that the Subcommittee would like to review. Your revised Plan should be sent to all Subcommittee members and to the Coordinating Board staff by September 10, 2001.

The list of the Subcommittee members who reviewed your Plan is attached. You may contact the chair directly with any questions about the Subcommittee’s response. The Subcommittee and CB staff will work with you during the revision process to provide guidance, suggestions, and if desired, share examples of acceptable Plans. If you have any questions for the CB staff relating to this process, please contact Janel Beinke at (512) 427-6321 or at beinkej@lhecb.state.tx.us.

We at the Coordinating Board appreciate the thought that went into the production of your Plan and hope that the process has helped contribute to your institution’s successful delivery of distance education courses and programs. Because of the Plan’s high quality, we would like to make a link to it available on our website once the requested items have been added to it.

The DEAC’s review of Institutional Plans is intended to ensure the delivery of quality distance education to students in Texas. We appreciate your cooperation in this process.

Best regards,

Marshall A. Hill

Enclosure