



**ACCREDITATION BOARD
FOR SPECIALTY NURSING CERTIFICATION**

**ACCREDITATION STANDARDS
FOR
ASSESSMENT-BASED CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS**

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Introduction

An assessment-based certificate program is a non-degree granting program that provides evidence-based education on a narrow subset of knowledge and skills that adds value to the clinician and the healthcare consumer. A certificate is awarded on completion of the education program and successful performance on an outcomes-based assessment. The type and content of the assessment is determined by the program sponsor. A certificate awarded for an assessment-based program is not given for attendance only. The candidate must complete both the education and the assessment components to earn the certificate.

A specific credential is not awarded for completion of the assessment-based certificate program. The purpose of an assessment-based certificate program differs from a certification program. Other terms for an assessment-based certificate program may include *certificate of mastery* or *certificate of added qualification*.

To be accredited by the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification, Inc. (ABSNC), an assessment-based certificate program must include registered nurses and/or advanced practice registered nurses among eligible candidates. The program can be interdisciplinary in nature, but must also be appropriate for RNs and/or APRNs. It must also have been offered for at least 1 year or have been completed by 200 candidates, whichever occurs first.

In addition, the assessment-based certificate program must be administered by a recognized business entity. Examples include, but are not limited to, commercial entities, academic institutions, certifying organizations, specialty member associations, and healthcare organizations.

ABSNC has adopted these additional operational definitions to assist the applicant organization in understanding the variety of individuals who may participate in an assessment-based certificate program:

- Registered Nurse (RN) specialty certification, offered to any qualified registered nurse candidate.
- Advanced nursing practice certification, offered to an RN candidate prepared at the graduate-degree level. Practice and certification are within a specialty nursing area and may or may not have a direct care component (e.g., education or administration).
- Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) certification, offered to an RN candidate prepared at the graduate-degree level (or through a post-master's or post-doctoral certificate program) in one of four roles (i.e., CNS, CRNA, CNM, and CNP) and one of six populations (i.e. family/individual across the lifespan, adult-gerontology, pediatrics, neonatal, women's health/gender-related or psych/mental health) as identified in the *2008 Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: Licensure, Accreditation, Certification and Education*. APRN is a legally protected title for licensure purposes. An APRN's primary focus is direct patient care. APRN certification measures entry-level competence at a graduate-degree level in a role and population as described in the Consensus Model and associated national standards and competencies.
- Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) sub-specialty certification, offered to APRNs (e.g., NSPM-C) within a role and population focus (e.g. CRNA).
- Non-RN nursing team member certification, offered to any direct patient-care provider supervised in practice by an RN as a member of the patient care nursing team.

**STANDARD 1
NEED FOR ASSESSMENT-BASED CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**

The granting organization demonstrates a need for the assessment-based certificate program which is based on a distinct, well-defined healthcare area of practice in which registered nurses and other healthcare team members may practice. By design, the knowledge and skills covered by an assessment-based certificate program are limited in scope to an aspect of that area of practice.

RATIONALE

A need must exist for persons with knowledge and skills in the specific practice area addressed by the assessment-based certificate program.

CRITERIA

- Evidence of a body of scientific knowledge specific to the defined healthcare area of practice.
- Evidence of a societal need for persons with the knowledge and skills addressed by the assessment-based certificate
- Eligibility criteria identifying qualified candidate for the assessment-based certificate program

DOCUMENTATION – The applicant organization must:		Narrative (Cite Tab or Appendix for Specific Supporting Documentation)
1.1	Provide at least two documents as evidence of a body of scientific knowledge that serves as the basis for this healthcare area of practice and for the assessment-based certificate program. Examples may include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. An education program outline or a table of contents from a related publication. b. Copies of other documents that discuss the focus of the practice area, the phenomena with which the practice area is concerned, and its relationship to the whole of patient care. 	
1.2	Discuss the analysis process that supports the need for persons with added qualification in the practice area represented by the assessment-based certificate program. Include industry and participant data.	
1.3	Discuss specifically how the needs of candidates, the healthcare area of practice, and healthcare consumers could be addressed through the assessment-based certificate program.	
1.4	Provide the purpose statement for the assessment-based certificate program.	
1.5	Identify the target audience and the eligibility criteria for the assessment-based certificate program, including the rationale for their selection.	
1.6	Provide evidence of how eligibility criteria are communicated to candidates.	

STANDARD 2
EDUCATION COMPONENT

The education component for an assessment-based certificate program is based on generally accepted principles for instructional design. It reflects identified needs and relevant learner outcomes.

RATIONALE

Nurses and non-RN team members need unique educational opportunities that will enrich their practice and allow them to remain lifelong learners. An assessment-based certificate program can meet a healthcare industry need by providing education and knowledge assessment on discrete areas of specialty practice.

CRITERIA

Sound principles guide the development of the education component in an assessment-based certificate program.

DOCUMENTATION - The applicant organization must:	Narrative (Cite Tab or Appendix for Specific Supporting Documentation)
2.1 Discuss results of a needs assessment supporting the relevance of the topic for the education component of the assessment-based certificate program (e.g., high-risk, low-frequency practice area within the nursing specialty).	
2.2 Discuss the development of relevant learner outcomes for the education component of the assessment-based certification program.	
2.3 Discuss the literature review process used to identify current references (last 3-5 years) with development of a content outline as the foundation of the education component of the assessment-based certificate program.	
2.4 Describe the use of generally accepted principles for instructional design (e.g., adult learning principles) in development of the education content.	
2.5 Describe the selection of subject matter experts (SMEs) used as authors of the education content. In table format, identify name, position and employer/location, years in nursing, and years in specialty; include experience relevant to the topic. Do NOT submit resumes/CVs.	
2.6 Discuss the content review process by additional SMEs to validate currency and relevance of content, including how changes were made in content based on reviewer feedback. Include process for initial review and ongoing (at least annual) content review. In table format, identify name, position and employer/location, years in nursing, and years in specialty; include experience relevant to the topic. Do NOT submit resumes/CVs.	
2.7 Describe the method of delivery for the education component and how it supports the purpose of the activity.	
2.8 If the program is offered as a live activity, describe the process for selecting SMEs who facilitate the activity. Provide SME information in table form as in 2.5 and 2.6 above.	
2.9 If contact hours of continuing education are offered for the program by an approved provider, provide evidence of the granting authority and the activity expiration date.	

**STANDARD 3
ASSESSMENT COMPONENT**

The assessment component of the assessment-based certificate program links to each learning outcome of the education component. The assessment component incorporates principles of measurement, including validity, reliability, minimum performance standard, administration, and security. Assessment can be conducted by written or practical examination, portfolio, other reflective learning activities, or another activity with appropriate performance criteria.

RATIONALE

A valid assessment of the education component of an assessment-based certificate program must measure a candidate's accomplishment of each learning outcome.

CRITERIA

Sound assessment requires a systematic process of measurement that addresses validity, reliability, minimum performance standard, administration, and security.

DOCUMENTATION - The applicant organization must:	Narrative (Cite Tab or Appendix for Specific Supporting Documentation)
3.1 Submit a blueprint/content outline of the assessment that links each learning outcome of the education component to specific elements of the assessment (i.e., test items or performance criteria).	
3.2 Explain how each element of the assessment is a valid measure of its related learning outcome.	
3.3 Explain how reliability of the assessment is determined (e.g., computing a reliability coefficient for a test or training assessors of a performance assessment for inter-rater reliability).	
3.4 Describe how the assessment was designed, addressing generally accepted principles of measurement.	
3.5 If used for the assessment-based certificate program, submit a copy of the most recent job analysis (role delineation study). A job analysis is not required unless the assessment-based certificate program is a high-stakes endeavor affecting candidates' employment opportunities.	
3.6 Explain how the minimum performance standard was determined.	
3.7 Explain the process for analyzing aggregate results of the assessment and subsequent adjustments made in the assessment on the basis of this analysis. a. Submit summary data (e.g., number of candidates, mean, standard deviation, pass rate) for the past 12 months or 200 candidates, whichever occurred first. b. Describe adjustments, if any, made in the assessment and/or assessment procedures based upon assessment data.	
3.8 Submit summary results of candidate evaluation of the education and assessment components of the assessment-based certificate program. Submit summary data for past 12 months or 200 candidates, whichever occurs first.	
3.9 Explain how candidate feedback is used to improve the education and assessment components of the assessment-based certificate program.	
3.10 Submit the policy and procedure regarding the number of times a candidate may attempt to pass the assessment.	

3.11	Submit the policy and procedure that govern security of the assessment.	
3.12	Submit the policy and procedure that specify how assessment results are reported to candidates and made available to other parties (e.g., employers, if applicable).	

**STANDARD 4
PROGRAM OVERSIGHT/MANAGEMENT**

The granting organization manages the assessment-based certificate program effectively to protect candidate rights, ensure program credibility through response to misrepresentation or noncompliance with eligibility criteria, and include continuous corrective and preventive actions for quality improvement.

RATIONALE

To protect candidate rights, the granting organization must maintain confidentiality of candidate information and provide an appeals process for applicants denied eligibility. Addressing misrepresentation or noncompliance with eligibility criteria contributes to the credibility of the assessment-based certificate program for candidates who complete it. Continuous quality improvement efforts are also needed to ensure a credible program.

CRITERIA

The granting organization manages the assessment-based certificate program effectively to support program credibility.

DOCUMENTATION - The applicant organization must:	Narrative (Cite Tab or Appendix for Specific Supporting Documentation)
4.1 Submit the policy and procedure that describe appropriate use of the certificate; also provide evidence that this information is communicated to certificate holders and potential certificate holders.	
4.2 Submit the policy and procedure that describe the appropriate inferences stakeholders can and should draw about certificate holders; also provide evidence that this information is communicated to certificate holders, potential certificate holders, and other stakeholders.	
4.3 Submit the policies and procedures describing how candidates and staff access records to update information while ensuring confidential information is secured and limited. This should include the process for authenticating identity (e.g., access code, password).	
4.4 Describe the process by which electronic and paper data files, records, and information are maintained by staff for candidates (e.g., secure areas, staff training and monitoring, the transfer of electronic and/or paper data and records to other organizations such as testing agencies or electronic testing centers, if applicable).	
4.5 Submit the policies and procedures and forms addressing the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Release and use of candidate information. b. Minimum number of candidates required to release aggregated candidate data and rationale for decision on the minimum number. c. Candidate consent forms authorizing release of individual test scores to schools or other third parties (if applicable). 	
4.6 Submit the policies and procedures related to appeals, including how candidates are notified of their right to appeal and what can specifically be appealed (e.g., eligibility).	
4.7 Submit policies and procedures for <i>investigating</i> and <i>responding</i> to complaints of misrepresentation or noncompliance.	

4.8 Discuss possible time sensitivity of certificate content and justify the length of certificate validity.	
4.9 Submit the following documentation related to the granting organization's quality improvement (QI) system: a. Customer service standards b. The frequency and process for review/revision of all policies and procedures c. How adherence to established QI policies and procedures is ensured	

**STANDARD 5
ORGANIZATIONAL AUTONOMY**

The granting organization offering the assessment-based certificate program shall have a defined business structure and legal standing to ensure confidence in its integrity and ability to provide a relevant, credible program.

RATIONALE

Candidates and other stakeholders need to have confidence that the granting organization is a legal entity with adequate financial and human resources to develop and maintain an assessment-based certificate program that adds value to the healthcare practice area and contributes to safe health care.

CRITERIA

The granting organization offering the assessment-based certificate program has the business structure to support the program’s development and ongoing use for learner education and knowledge and skills assessment.

DOCUMENTATION – The applicant organization must:	Narrative (Cite Tab or Appendix for Specific Supporting Documentation)
5.1 Provide evidence of the granting organization’s legal standing as a for-profit or nonprofit business entity.	
5.2 Discuss the human and financial resources needed to develop and support an assessment-based certificate program, and identify how the granting organization is able to supply and manage those resources.	
5.3 If the assessment-based certificate program was developed as a joint endeavor between the granting organization and an affiliate (e.g., specialty nursing membership association or certifying organization), provide a copy of the contract governing their mutual roles and responsibilities for the program. Also discuss how the division of responsibilities was determined.	

**STANDARD 6
NONDISCRIMINATION**

The granting organization administering the assessment-based certificate program does not discriminate among candidates as to age, sex, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The granting organization takes steps to eliminate or reduce bias and stereotyping from all aspects of the assessment-based certificate program.

RATIONALE

Candidates have the right to expect that all aspects of the assessment-based certificate programs will be fair and free from discrimination. All reasonable efforts should be made to ensure all facets of the assessment-based certificate program are job-related. No applicant is excluded as a result of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Bias is the presence of an item characteristic that results in the differential performance of candidates of equal ability. Variations in results are acceptable only when they reflect the true ability of candidates and not when they result from unintended interpretation of the item by an identifiable subgroup. The presence of bias may result in validity concerns with the assessment-based certificate program.

Stereotyping refers to material that characterizes individuals by virtue of their group membership, and can be offensive or demeaning. Stereotyping is not acceptable within an assessment-based certificate program.

CRITERIA

The granting organization takes steps to avoid discrimination, detect and eliminate bias from the education and assessment components, and accommodate candidates with disabilities.

DOCUMENTATION – The applicant organization must:	Narrative (Cite Tab or Appendix for Specific Supporting Documentation)
6.1 Submit the nondiscrimination policy and/or procedure of the granting organization and its testing vendor (if applicable) and provide evidence of how this policy is distributed to applicants.	
6.2 Provide evidence of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.	
6.3 Provide at least one example from the last 3 years, if applicable, of a reasonable accommodation request with the organization’s response to that request. Sample documentation may include, but is not limited to: applicant request for accommodation; organization’s response indicating decision concerning the request; and, communication with the assessment vendor on behalf of the applicant specifying the accommodations to be made. If no requests for accommodation were received, indicate “N/A.”	

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American Nurses Association. (2010). *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice* (2nd ed.). Silver Spring, MD: Author.

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American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education. (2014). *Standards for Education and Psychological Testing*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.