

BENCHMARKING WITH HESI EXAMS IN ADN AND BSN PROGRAMS

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of Health Education Systems Inc. (HESI) specialty, custom, and exit exams in evaluating student success and curricular outcomes in both an associate degree nursing (ADN) and a baccalaureate nursing (BSN) programs.

Method: A comparative, correlational design was used to analyze the relationship between nursing students' HESI exam scores and their final course grades in an ADN and a BSN program. The sample consisted of 52 ADN students who graduated in the spring or fall semesters of 2002, and 60 BSN students who graduated in the spring or fall semesters of 2003, who had completed all nursing courses and had taken all HESI exams administered throughout their respective nursing programs. Students' scores on the HESI Admission Assessment (A²), three 50-item custom exams (designed by HESI to evaluate specific course content) in the ADN program, one mid-curricular 100-item custom exam (designed by HESI to evaluate the half of the curriculum) in the BSN program, and the HESI Exit Exam (E²) were compared with the students' final course grades and NCLEX-RN outcomes within and among the programs. Student scores on three HESI specialty exams (Maternity, Pediatric, and Psychiatric Nursing), which were administered in the ADN program, were compared with students' final course grades and NCLEX-RN outcomes within that program. Pearson *r* correlations were calculated to determine the degree of relationship between students' HESI scores and their final course grades in the courses the HESI exams were used to evaluate. Chi squares were used to detect any differences in the predictive accuracy of the E² by type of program.

Findings: Significant correlations ($P < .05$) were found among all HESI exams administered within the curriculum and final course grades in corresponding courses with the exception of the Therapeutic Communications course in the ADN program. Significant correlations ($P < .05$) were also found among all HESI exams administered within the curriculum and final course grades in corresponding courses in the BSN program. No significant differences ($P < .05$) were found in the predictive accuracy of the E² with NCLEX-RN success based on type program type, but significant differences ($P < .05$) were found among student scores and NCLEX-RN outcomes attained by students in both programs who scored at each of five HESI scoring intervals.

Discussion: The findings of this study indicated that HESI exams were reliable and valid measures used to benchmark student progress in two nursing programs. While limitations existed, including use of a convenience sample and a lack of control for intervening variables that could have occurred following completion of the nursing courses and related HESI exams, and preceding administration of the NCLEX-RN, the study's results supported the use of HESI exams as a means of obtaining evidence of curricular effectiveness in both ADN and BSN curricula.