

COVID-19 Vaccination, Accommodations, Exemptions, and Our Partners

To: Coconino Community College Nursing Students

Re: Updated Communications Regarding Our Partner Organizations

Date: 12/3/21

Students,

As you know, our program partners with several external organizations for the purpose of providing you with the necessary clinical opportunities for you to both graduate and qualify for nursing under the rules of the Arizona Board of Nursing. We (CCC) do not have control over the policies and procedures of these partner organizations. They provide a needed resource for us and our students – giving you opportunities to gain crucial clinical skills – and you provide excellent services to them as you learn.

The federal government has mandated certain healthcare facilities to require the healthcare practitioners serving patients there to be fully vaccinated from COVID-19 and mandatory masking. These precautions have been put in place as an effort to slow the spread of the disease, protect the general public, and most importantly – protect healthcare workers.

As stated above, we as an educational institution have no control over what the federal government mandates, what these third-party healthcare facilities require, nor what the Arizona Board of Nursing requires to be certified in the profession. Currently, the State Board of Nursing requires at least 50% percent of your training to be in-person clinical training. As such, to meet both the requirements of the program you are currently enrolled in as well as the Arizona Board of Nursing, external clinical experiences are a necessity. Therefore, if the facilities you need to work within require vaccination, if you wish to further both your educational opportunities and your professional opportunities in this field, you may likely need to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

If you are religiously opposed to the vaccine or have a legitimate medical concern, you are free to apply for either a religious accommodation or medical exemption from our partner facilities. We have no control or input in that process, and it may change over time.

If the facility rejects your request, we cannot assist. In the event you are not granted an accommodation or exemption and cannot meet the requirements of this program, you will be required to either postpone your education in nursing, withdraw from the program, or we will be forced to fail you based on attendance at your clinicals, per the CCC Code of Conduct, the Nursing Student Handbook, and the Arizona Board of Nursing Practice Act.

The past two years dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic have been incredibly challenging, especially for our chosen profession. As a point of reflection, we ask you all to review our guiding principles here (the Nursing Code of Ethics) and remember the foundation of why we choose to enter this profession.

1. The nurse practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person.

2. The nurse's primary commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group, community, or population.
3. The nurse promotes, advocates for, and protects the rights, health, and safety of the patient.
4. The nurse has authority, accountability, and responsibility for the nursing practice; makes decisions; and takes action consistent with the obligation to provide optimal patient care.
5. The nurse owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to promote health and safety, preserve wholeness of character and integrity, maintain competence, and continue personal and professional growth.
6. The nurse, through individual and collective effort, establishes, maintains, and improves the ethical environment of the work setting and conditions of employment that are conducive to safe, quality health care.
7. The nurse, in all roles and settings, advances the profession through research and scholarly inquiry, professional standards development, and the generation of both nursing and health policy.
8. The nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public to protect human rights, promote health diplomacy, and reduce health disparities.
9. The profession of nursing, collectively through its professional organization, must articulate nursing values, maintain the integrity of the profession, and integrate principles of social justice into nursing and health policy.

Much of the fear and concern over receiving the vaccine is based on misinformation and lack of knowledge about the vaccine and its development (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). According to one study, as of August 2021, 92% of nursing faculty were vaccinated or planned to be vaccinated and 86% of currently enrolled students have been vaccinated (National Student Nurses Association, 2021). Thus, it is a small number of students who are vaccine-hesitant and affected by vaccine mandates. This policy addresses these students. Clinical experiences are **integral** to nursing education. NCSBN's National Simulation Study (Hayden et al., 2014) demonstrated that up to 50% of clinical experience can be substituted with simulation. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education (2021), "Simulation experiences represent an important component of clinical education... **However, care experiences with actual individuals or groups continue to be the most important component of clinical education...**Simulation cannot substitute for all direct care practice experiences in any one sphere or for any one age group."

All available US vaccines have received full Food and Drug Administration approval. The vaccine protects health care professionals and students as well as patients. In fact, millions of people in the U.S. have received COVID-19 vaccines. All three of the vaccines available in the U.S. have undergone the most rigorous safety monitoring in U.S. history (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). The COVID-19 vaccine's authorization is based on scientific evidence (Food and Drug Administration, 2021). Identifying, assessing, and integrating reliable evidence into one's practice has been and continues to be an expectation for the preparation of professional nurses (AACN, 2021, 2008). Unvaccinated individuals are at risk for contracting COVID-19, thereby increasing the chances for more variants to emerge and, more importantly, putting vulnerable individuals at risk; especially hospitalized patients, nursing home residents, health care professionals and peers who may be immunocompromised. (Plater, 2021).

As the Arizona State Board of Nursing has not adjusted their requirements for nurses entering the profession, we cannot as a program offer alternative (simulation) learning opportunities for our students beyond what is already provided. As such, students should be vaccinated when clinical facilities require it so that they can participate in the clinical experience and progress in their programs.

We are unable to provide substitute or alternate clinical experiences based on a student's request or vaccine preference, and we cannot accommodate these requests. Just as the nursing education program and/or clinical facilities require other vaccines, the facilities have the option to mandate the COVID-19 vaccine. The Arizona Board of Nursing has no obligation to waive its current rules/regulations about clinical experiences for unvaccinated students.

As discussed above, if a student continues to refuse to be vaccinated and is not entitled to a reasonable accommodation under the disability laws or is not entitled to a reasonable accommodation for a sincerely held religious belief then, the student (a) may be disenrolled from CCC/nursing program or (b) may not be able to fulfill the clinical requirements of the program, resulting in them not graduating. Accommodations made for students under the disability laws or for a sincerely held religious belief are decided on a case-by-case basis by our partner institutions.

If you have further questions regarding this situation, please reach out to your faculty advisor or program leadership.