



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Miles Community College

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**IMAGE:** Nursing professor, Katrina Luther, visits with students outside the MCC nursing labs.

### **Nursing Program Reaches Highest National Pass Rate in Six-Years; Lands Short of Professional Accreditation Standard**

MILES CITY, MONTANA: Three years after the Miles Community College nursing program posted its lowest first-time pass rate score for graduates taking the [National Council Licensure Exam \(NCLEX\)](#), the institution and its nursing graduates have made significant strides, posting the programs highest score in last six-years.

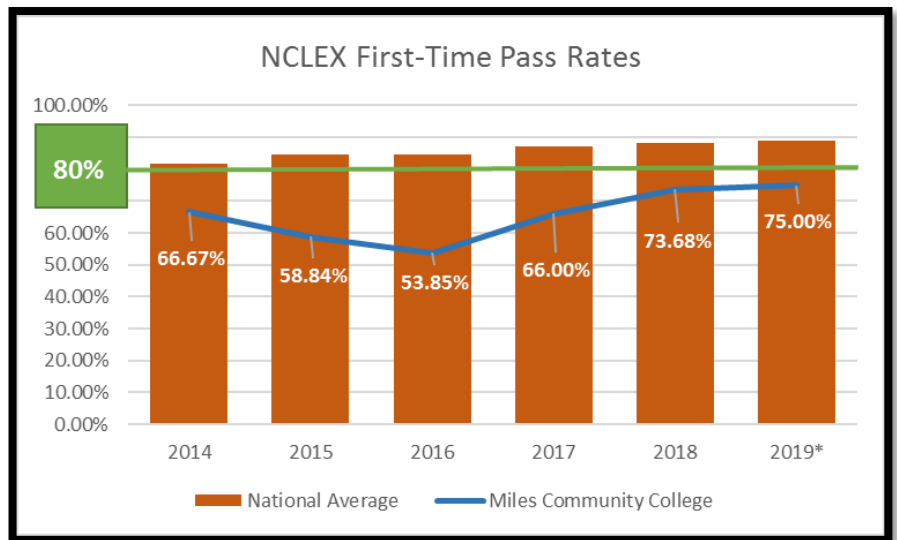
From 2016 through 2019, the first-time pass rate for MCC nursing graduates taking the NCLEX has steadily risen from 53.85% to 66%, 73.68% and now 75%, respectively.

"We are pleased to be trending in the right direction with regards to our graduates' first-time pass rates," remarked MCC Interim President Aaron Clingingsmith. "Our upward momentum certainly speaks to the initiatives our nursing faculty and student affairs staff have implemented to bolster student success. However, all measurable success aside, at

75 percent we are still below the expected 80 percent benchmark set by the [Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing \(ACEN\)](#), and that will have some short-term ramifications for our nursing program.”

ACEN is a nursing specific accrediting body that provides professional accreditation for all levels of nursing education and transition-to-practice programs.

Holding accreditation from ACEN or another professional accrediting organization offers nursing programs across the country an additional layer of credentialing beyond what is held by their institution.



MCC’s sole ACEN accreditation hurdle has been the NCLEX pass rate. During a site-visit to Miles City by ACEN in October the accrediting body noted that all standards had been successfully met, with the exception of the cumulative first-time pass rate. To that end, MCC has been operating under “warning with good cause” by ACEN.

With the 2019 scores landing at 75 percent, the college’s best path forward is to withdraw from ACEN and start fresh by reapplying with the accrediting body. This means MCC will be applying for [candidacy status](#) with ACEN, and once approved, will begin the twelve-eighteen month process of attaining accreditation.

“We will be treated like any new program applying for ACEN accreditation,” stated Nursing Director Pauline Flotkoetter. “What’s exciting is our past is truly in the past. Our program’s previous NCLEX scores are moot-point. This year’s graduates and classes to follow will have their professional accreditation fate in their own hands.”

For most Montana institutions of higher education, including Miles Community College, the [Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities \(NWCCU\)](#) is the overarching accrediting body. This is a fact that is not lost upon Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Accreditation, Garth Sleight.

“We want to make sure that we don’t confuse parents, students and the community at large when we are talking about accreditation for our nursing program,” said Sleight.

"Miles Community College and our nursing program are accredited by NWCCU; however, we want to get that next layer of specialty nursing accreditation through ACEN for our nursing students and program."

As for the short-term ramifications interim president Clingsmith noted, ACEN *candidacy status* means the next several nursing classes will not immediately be recognized as graduating from a professionally accredited program.



"It was an extremely difficult conversation to have with our nursing students as we unpacked what applying for ACEN accreditation meant to them in the short-term," reflected Vice President for Academic Affairs Rita Kratky. "Our freshman and sophomore nursing students are a very thoughtful and pragmatic group and once they realized they would be conferred ACEN accreditation retroactively to our candidacy date, they quickly pivoted to how they could be a part of the solution, and ultimately the group that achieved ACEN accreditation."

That pivot to accreditation success now includes more intrusive advising, greater emphasis on NCLEX test preparation and an overall urgency that first-time pass rates matter to the ongoing vitality of program. MCC nursing students recognize the NCLEX score isn't like taking the ACT in high school. Simply put, you don't get a second chance to better your score in the eyes of ACEN.

"Obviously withdrawing and subsequently applying for ACEN accreditation is not where we want to be, having just crested fifty-years of nursing this academic year," commented Incoming President Ron Slinger. "However, I was appreciative that the campus let me know during the presidential search process that this could be a potential outcome. Candidly, I didn't even pause. Like all of Miles City, I too recognized MCC nursing as an essential program for our rural healthcare region and am excited about our next fifty-years. This is merely a small hurdle for Montana's oldest community college to step-over."

For additional information regarding the MCC nursing program and the ACEN accreditation process, please contact Nursing Director Pauline Flotkoetter at [FlotkoetterP@milescc.edu](mailto:FlotkoetterP@milescc.edu) or call 874-6188.