

Modifications to NCLEX-RN and NCLEX-PN Exams

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, NCSBN introduced several carefully evaluated and evidenced-based modifications to the NCLEX-RN and NCLEX-PN examinations. Collectively, these modifications were designed to maintain psychometric rigor and validity while reducing test time. The modified exams continue to use the same exam items, passing standard and computer adaptive testing (CAT) algorithms as before. As such, the difficulty of the exams is unchanged. This approach allows us to maximize capacity at the testing centers where testing appointments are being reduced due to social distancing requirements.

In addition to the removal of unscored pretest items from the exams, NCSBN also reduced the maximum number of scored (operational) items that any candidate could receive. The table below summarizes these changes.

Changes to Exam Structure

Characteristic	Modified Exam	Standard RN Exam	Standard PN Exam
Seat time	4 hours	6 hours	5 hours
Pretest items	None	15 items	25 items
Next Generation NCLEX Special Research Section	None	30 minutes (optional)	N/A
Minimum length exam	60 items	75 items*	85 items*
Maximum length exam	130 items	265 items	205 items

*Including the 15 RN and 25 PN pretest items.

To ensure maintenance, reliability, and legal defensibility of the pass/fail results, NCSBN ran numerous simulations and comparisons against historical NCLEX candidate data. The simulations and comparisons confirmed the measurement properties of the modified exams and did not identify any negative impact on the candidates testing experience or results. The table below summarizes the psychometric properties of the modified exams and compares candidate performance against the same time period last year when standard exams were in place.

Comparison of Psychometric Properties

	NCLEX-PN		NCLEX-RN	
	April/May 2019	April/May 2020*	April/May 2019	April/May 2020*
Passing Rate (U.S.-educated, first attempt)	84%	86%	84%	83%
Number of candidates	5,405	2,188	13,134	5,614
Standard Error	0.22	0.24	0.23	0.23
Decision Consistency	.90	.89	.90	.88

*April/May 2020 data reflects exams completed through May 5.

Early analysis of pass rates through April 16th indicated higher pass rates on the modified exam for both RN and PN. As indicated in the chart above, analysis of the pass rates through May 5th has indicated that the pass rates between the full length NCLEX and the modified exam have converged and are now statistically comparable. It's important to recognize the change in pass rates from April 16th to May 5 may be related to which students have

elected to test thus far. For example, those candidates taking the exam during the early administration of the modified exam will have fully completed their programs, may be more confident and could be higher performing students. Conversely, the candidates waiting to test may be impacted by alterations in education (i.e., shortened educational experience, change in educational modality from classroom to online, altered clinical experience and focus) causing a decrease in confidence and/or ability level. NCSBN will continue to psychometrically monitor the examination to ensure it continues to provide valid and reliable results.