A study to determine if a relationship exists between traits mentioned in preadmission letters of recommendation and first-year clinical progress reports in a diploma school of nursing.

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Boston University

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Boston University
A STUDY TO DETERMINE IF A RELATIONSHIP EXISTS BETWEEN TRAITS MENTIONED IN PRE-ADMISSION LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION AND FIRST-YEAR CLINICAL PROGRESS REPORTS IN A DIPLOMA SCHOOL OF NURSING

BY

Leona C. Koziar

(B.S.N., Georgetown University, 1957)

A field study submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in the School of Nursing Boston University August, 1960

First Reader: Janice Hayes

Second Reader: Evelyn Sheehan
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I have read and approved the final draft of the field study prepared by Miss Leona Koziar in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Science in Nursing from Boston University School of Nursing.

I will sign the final copies when I return in September 1960.

M. Evelyn Sheehan

June 14, 1960
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Applicants to a school of nursing are usually considered by the admission committee on the basis of evidence from many sources, which generally include high school records, entrance test scores, letters of recommendation, personal interviews, and physical examination reports. A perusal of withdrawal statistics released by the National League for Nursing and covering the period 1950-1957, indicates that approximately thirty-three per cent of the total number of students who enter nursing do not complete the course.¹ The importance of careful selection techniques cannot be overemphasized if the needs of the individual student of nursing, the schools of nursing, and society as a whole are to be met.

Although a volume of research has been carried out in recent years on the predictive value of pre-entrance test scores, personality tests, and high school records, the nursing literature reveals little about letters of recommendation save mention of them. But letters of recommendation are almost routinely part of the admission procedure.

Statement of the Problem

Do letters of recommendation reveal characteristics or traits about prospective students in a diploma school of nursing which can be

identified in the clinical progress reports of these same students in their first year in the school of nursing? An attempt will be made to relate the traits mentioned in letters of recommendation to those traits mentioned in the progress reports.

**Justification of the Problem**

Individual members of admission committees or admission committees in totality may attach particular significance to letters of recommendation, or discount them entirely. Nevertheless, because of the generality of their use, it is reasonable to believe that there is value in examining the contents of the letter of recommendation. Because the writer believed that it was necessary to relate the contents of the letters to some other written record of the student, she selected the progress report. It was felt this would be a most valuable source of information about students.

**Scope and Limitations**

The study is limited to the letters of recommendation and the progress reports of thirty-eight students in one diploma school of nursing. The items of information contained in these two records were so great in number that it was necessary to categorize the information contained within them. In the categorization process some of the sophistication and detail were lost, but this was deemed necessary to see if a relationship existed. In addition, the writer limited the traits included in the analysis to those mentioned more than ten times. These processes may have been a limitation of the study.
Definition of Terms

In this investigation, "Letter of recommendation" and "Trait," as used by the author, mean:

1. Letter of recommendation: communication written by individuals, whether informal, unguided letters in which the individual tells what he pleases concerning the candidate, or specific forms which call for definite information about the candidate.

2. Trait: refers to any characteristic in which people differ or vary from one another; general qualities of social and emotional behavior, descriptive in nature.  

Preview of Methodology

Letters of recommendation, numbering 114, and progress reports, numbering ninety-five, written about thirty-eight students in a non-sectarian diploma school of nursing were used for analysis. The research method employed in the study was content analysis. Item inventory, categorization, and re-categorization of the information obtained from the letters of recommendation and progress reports were executed. The last step was to determine the relationship which existed between the content of the two evaluative measures.

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Sequence of Presentation

Chapter II contains a review of the literature which seemed pertinent to the study.

Chapter III explains in more detail the methodology used to select the sample, to collect the data, and to prepare the data for analysis.

In Chapter IV the data collected are presented and discussed.

A summary of the study with conclusions and recommendations which evolve from the data is presented in Chapter V.
CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Review of the Literature

Because of the wealth of material available and pertinent to the study, the writer limited the review of the literature to what she deemed relevant to the study. The review included: the use of measurement instruments in the assessment of personal qualities, a discussion of evaluation devices, and specific literature applying to the letter of recommendation.

Instruments of educational measurement are defined as "simply the means by which quantitative aspects of human behavior are observed with greater accuracy." Measurement instruments used by most schools of nursing, colleges, and universities include high school data, such as the official transcript of grades, average school grade, rank-in-class, and the measurement of aptitude and achievement by use of tests. Studies have shown,

It is apparent that even when the most valid measures of aptitude and achievement are used there remains an unpredicted variance . . . it seems that this unpredicted portion is due largely to such factors as persistence, motivation, personal adjustment, interest and study methods--factors difficult to quantify and measure.2


2 Ibid., p. 92.
Additional instruments are used to attempt to assess personal qualities. One of the evaluative measures employed in this area is the letter of recommendation.

The importance of the measurement of personal characteristics is recognized by educators in all fields. In the foreword to the book on *Educational Measurement* the president of the American Council on Education states:

> It is well known that the measurement of individual ability, achievements, characteristics offers the most solid basis on which students may be assisted in their choice of studies and occupations. . . . The movement may, indeed, now be regarded as having established itself as the chief source of information on which educational and personnel officers may rely to aid them in their process of selection and guidance of individuals.³

Lambertsen listed fourteen principles of professional education which serve as guides in curriculum evaluation and development. One of the principles reads:

> The objectives of professional education require selection by the professional school of socially and professionally educable students. . . . A problem of any school is securing evidence of certain potentials for future achievement.⁴

It is acknowledged that this evidence may be subjective, but in regard to this Muse stated, "Subjective methods of evaluation and data are recognized as both necessary and eminently 'respectable.'"⁵ She cited Hopkins' illustration of a butcher weighing meat to point out the dif-

³ Ibid., p. v.


ference between objectivity and subjectivity in measurement. The butcher's scale is inspected regularly to ensure that it measures 16 ounces to the pound but objectivity of measurement, however accurate, is no guarantee of the quality of the meat.\textsuperscript{6}

"Evaluation includes measurement, but adds to it the concept of factors which are intangible and not subject to quantitative determination."\textsuperscript{7} "It includes the human equation (subjective factors) and refers to appraisal of the student as a whole."\textsuperscript{8} Letters of recommendation and clinical progress reports are both evaluative measures; each measures personal characteristics and relationships with others. Using subjective techniques of observation, judgments are made according to standards which have been established. The letter of recommendation form used by most schools of nursing in the area in which the study was conducted is the National League for Nursing form F SL4. In this form a list of traits is given and the person completing it is asked to rate the degree to which the trait is displayed. Thus, it is both a measurement device and an evaluative device.

Factors have been identified which influence evaluation in general. These factors can apply to both the letter of recommendation and the progress report. The Curriculum Research Project in Basic Nursing Education at the University of Washington conducted a five-year study on evaluation. It was found that most of the evaluative methods in use at

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{8}Ibid.
present are dependent upon objective tests or observations of students by instructors.

The latter, we have found, is usually based upon an unclear notion of precisely what is to be observed and how well the student is expected to do if she is competent.9

Slowly and steadily we have come to believe that sound methods of evaluating students' competence can be developed only when the complexities of evaluation are recognized and dealt with and when we are able to describe the objectives of nursing education more clearly.10

Vernon stated that the assessment of human personality is more complex than any other problem in individual psychology.11 In his discussion of the scientific study and measurement of personality traits he isolated several factors which make it a difficult procedure.

First, they are mostly very vague and ambiguous in meaning, and different people often include different modes of behavior within one trait. . . . Behavior which one person interprets as aggressive might be called adventurous by another, or limelight exhibitionism by another.12

Our second difficulty is that they involve subjective interpretation. They are partly dependent on the observer. His own personality and viewpoint both influence what he notices in other people's behavior.13

Vernon listed other elements which add to the difficulty, but concluded by saying,

10Ibid., p. 290.
12Ibid., p. 6.
13Ibid.
Nevertheless this does not mean that it is hopeless to try to measure personality traits or to assess people. For it is clear that some individuals behave more markedly and frequently than others do in a manner that most of us would call, say, timid, and that others are more bold or fearless.\footnote{14}

In an article pertaining to the evaluation of clinical achievement, Symonds enumerated several conditions which cause bias in evaluation. "One of the principal factors causing bias in evaluation is what Thorndike many years ago called the 'halo effect.'\footnote{15} Vernon described "halo effect" this way:

If we rate or assess a number of people on several presumably distinctive traits it is always found that the ratings overlap rather closely. Presumably we are influenced, unwittingly, by our general good or bad impressions of people, and so attribute all the desirable traits to some, undesirable ones to others, almost regardless of their meaning.\footnote{16}

A second major factor suggested by Symonds is the constant error of judgment, a general tendency to rate consistently high or consistently low. The constant potential error in judgment makes absolute judgments difficult. Errors in observation, variability of the subject, errors in memory, differences in the meaning of traits, differences in interpreting behavior, and the evaluator's procedure also are considered to affect the reliability of the evaluative technique, according to Symonds.\footnote{17}

\footnote{14}Ibid., p. 7.

\footnote{15}Percival Symonds, "Eliminating Bias in Students' Achievements," \textit{American Journal of Nursing} (May, 1952), 52:610-613.

\footnote{16}Vernon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 5.

\footnote{17}Symonds, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 611-612.
The literature relating specifically to letters of recommendation identified similar conditions which affect their writing. It is interesting to note that more than three decades ago, Hollingworth made a study of letters of recommendation and suggested that a rating form be designed to assist writers of testimonials to give more valid and reliable judgments. To increase reliability and validity, he proposed that the reporter be provided with a standard form which would include a limited number of definitely relevant terms, succinctly defined and illustrated.\(^{18}\)

The fact that the vital questions involved in writing of letters of recommendation had been treated from various tangents without offering any satisfactory solutions led to a study of the subject.\(^{19}\) A quarter of a century ago, Morrisett examined the contents of letters of recommendation in order to compare and relate their characteristics as an instrument for the selection of secondary school teachers in the United States. Difficulties inherent in such letters were summarized as:

1. The writer of testimonials and letters of recommendation is likely to view his task lightly.

2. The writer for mere accommodation will often exceed his knowledge or falsify it.

3. There is no way of checking against errors.

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4. Bias or carelessness of the writer is a factor.

5. The writer may overstate or underestimate the case of the candidate.

6. The writer may simply make inadequate statements perfunctory in character.

The majority of the school executives agreed that the most important function of the letters of recommendation was to reveal accurate information upon which the employer could base his judgment. Seven items of information considered desirable in letters of recommendation were common to the lists of both principals and superintendents. They were: breadth of interest, personality, instructional skill, training and preparation, cooperation, the writer's general rating of the candidate, and the writer's knowledge of the candidate. 20

Review of the more recent literature pertaining to the letter of recommendation did not suggest that the problems identified in the 1920's and 1930's have been totally solved. That the very source of the letter of recommendation limited its usefulness as an admission tool was pointed out by one author.

If the applicant is required to provide letters of recommendation, he will undoubtedly apply to friends or acquaintances who will write as glowing accounts of his abilities as possible. 21

Most of the recent authors agreed that a guided, checklist form with a rating scale is the best type of letter of recommendation. It was also strongly suggested that letters be received from more than one source in order to give greater validity to the contents of the rec

20 Ibid., pp. 35, 56.

21 Lindquist, op. cit., p. 93.
mendations. But there were those who disagreed.

In order to save time for persons appealed to as references, some agencies use a check list containing terms such as accurate, cooperative, industrious, etc. The respondent may be asked to indicate the degree to which the applicant manifests the trait on a scale from 1 to 3 or from 1 to 5. The objection is often raised that these abstract terms are meaningless.22

In the one article in the American Journal of Nursing relating specifically to letters of recommendation, Smith, too, believed the check list letter was practically useless. She went on to say,

The use of such forms as these tends to hamper the individual who really wants to produce a thoughtful and comprehensive evaluation. Moreover, reports prepared in this way are inclined to become stereotyped.23

There was a dearth of literature in nursing journals regarding letters of recommendation. Most of the information reviewed by the writer was obtained from the publications of Education, Business, and Psychology.

Bases of Hypothesis

The need for assessment of personal qualities of the applicants to educational and vocational institutions is recognized and considered a matter of import by personnel and admissions officers. In many schools of nursing, letters of recommendation are required to aid in this assessment. Because both letters of recommendation and clinical progress reports are evaluative measures, dependent upon the subjec-


tivity of the evaluator, the inherent difficulties of the evaluative process are met.

**Statement of the Hypothesis**

The writer believes that no relationship, or a minimal relationship, exists between traits mentioned in letters of recommendation about applicants to a school of nursing and traits mentioned in the clinical progress reports of the same applicants, now students, in their first year in the school of nursing.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Selection and Description of the Sample

The purpose of this study is to determine if a relationship exists between traits mentioned in letters of recommendation and clinical progress reports. The records of the students studied were obtained from the files of the Stonybrook Hospital School of Nursing, located in the suburban community of Marina, Massachusetts. The school of nursing offers a three-year program leading to a diploma in nursing and is fully accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Service. The Stonybrook Hospital, which serves the communities of Marina and Pemberton, supplies the clinical facilities for the school of nursing. The hospital has a capacity of 290 beds.

The majority of the students are residents of eastern Massachusetts. The writer selected a sample from a suburban, nonsectarian hospital school of nursing. The Director of Nursing of Stonybrook Hospital School of Nursing was eager to have a field study conducted in the agency.

The records used for the sample included the letters of recommendation and the clinical progress reports of those students in the class of 1961 who were enrolled in the school in April 1960. The number of students in the class at the time of the data collection was thirty-eight, somewhat less than the average class, which numbers approximately
forty-five students. This particular class was chosen so that the progress reports of the first year would be available in the files. It was thought that the progress reports studied should be limited to the first year in the school to lessen the time interval as much as possible between the writing of the letter of recommendation and the writing of the progress report. It was assumed that the greater the interval between the writing of the letter of recommendation and the writing of the progress report, the greater the probability that a change in behavior would have occurred.

One of the admission policies of the school is that five persons write recommendations about the applicant. When the author reviewed the students' folders, a few contained less than the requested five recommendations. Most of the students had three clinical progress reports from September 1958 to September 1959. Some folders contained only two progress reports. In an effort to establish a balance between the two instruments to be studied, the writer analyzed three of the recommendation forms in each folder. For convenience, the first three in the folder were arbitrarily chosen. The data are based on the analysis of 114 letters of recommendation written by forty-seven high school teachers, sixteen registered nurses, eleven principals or deans, ten ministers or priests, seven friends of the family, six guidance counselors, six housewives, six businessmen, and five physicians. The total number of progress reports in the students' folders was ninety-five. The reports were written by eight instructors in nursing.
Tools Used to Collect the Data

The two records analyzed for content were the Estimate of Behavior Traits, National League for Nursing form F 814, and the Progress Report of Nursing Ability and Personality Development, National League for Nursing form D-4.

Estimate of Behavior Traits: (See Appendix A.) This form is sent by the school of nursing to the persons listed by the applicant on the application for admission. The directions given in reference to choosing the person to write the recommendation are as follows:

Give the names of five mature persons, not relatives, who know you intimately and can give information about you. Include three of your most recent teachers, and if possible, someone in the nursing profession.

The person completing the recommendation is asked to send it directly to the school of nursing.

The form is composed of three major parts. The first part consists in nineteen traits which are to be checked in the appropriate column. The column headings are Habitually, Moderately, and Seldom. The second part contains a list of fourteen traits and directs the person to check any traits which are applicable. The third part, on the reverse side of the sheet, allows the person completing it further opportunity to evaluate the applicant. It includes eight questions. The writer limited the data collection to questions one, six, and seven in part three because answers to these questions appeared to be a germane source of information.
Progress Report of Nursing Ability and Personality Development:

(See Appendix B.) This form is divided into five major categories. These are: Personal Characteristics, Technical Performance, Relation to Patients and Family, Relation to Co-workers, and Relation to Administrative and Teaching Staff. A guide for the use of the report was prepared by the National League for Nursing. "This form is for the purpose of furnishing evidence of the progress a student is making in her ability to practice nursing." ¹ The form provides for commentary, or numerical rating, or both, in relation to the five major ability-areas. The space provided under each heading may be used for a descriptive paragraph, or listing of specific qualities or skills which the faculty have selected as pertinent. The rating scale at the right side of the form may be used for each quality, or for the five main headings, or not at all. The agency in which this study was conducted did not use the rating scale.

Space for student self-evaluation is provided on the form. "Since the student is really the most important element in the evaluation process, she should have many opportunities for thoughtful consideration of her own development." ²

A summary statement about the student which represents the composite thinking of those who have been guiding her learning experiences in the clinical area is provided for in the area, Comments by Faculty Group.

¹1952 Revision of Guide for Record Forms D-1, D-1a, D-4, National League for Nursing, Division of Nursing Education, New York, 1953.

²Ibid.
Few notations were found in the Student Self-Evaluation and Comments by Faculty Group areas in the progress reports studied. Because of the dearth of comment, no data were obtained from these areas.

**Procurement of Data**

The writer conferred with the Director of Nursing of the Stonybrook Hospital School of Nursing about the proposed study. Permission to use the desired records in the office was granted. Five days were spent at the agency obtaining the information from the Estimate of Behavior Traits and the Progress Reports of Nursing Ability and Personality Development.

The research method employed in the study was content analysis. "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communications."

"What content analysis does is to provide a more or less precise description of the content in terms meaningful to the problem at hand."

The data were categorized to provide precise information. Categorization presented the major difficulty in working with the data; it was painstaking and time-consuming but accepted by the author as the most important aspect of content analysis. "Content analysis stands or falls by its categories. Particular studies have been productive to the extent that the categories were clearly formulated and well-adapted to the

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4 Ibid., p. 516.
problem and to the content.\textsuperscript{5}

The primary step was an item inventory of both tools. Two hundred nineteen traits were mentioned 1284 times in the progress reports. Four hundred twenty-five traits were mentioned 2328 times in the letters of recommendation. The latter figure represented the sum of the checked traits in the first part of the form, plus an additional 405 traits which were checked on the second part of the form or were mentioned in answer to questions one and seven on the reverse side of the sheet. Many of the traits mentioned differed only in descriptive adjectives, adverbs, or phrases to amplify, modify, or qualify a given subject. Because of the length of the list and the presence of many synonymous terms, it seemed necessary to combine certain items of information under a given trait, quality, or characteristic. In the preliminary categorization, this writer followed the categories described in Morrisett's study.\textsuperscript{6} He used twenty-eight major categories to contain the items of information in letters of recommendation which had been requested by seventy-one principals.

The author of this study placed the information from the progress reports and letters of recommendation in nineteen categories, which she found to be cumbersome for analysis. Many traits were mentioned once; several were listed a few times. Further consolidation was indicated. The next step was to re-categorize the data on the basis of elimination of those traits mentioned less than ten times. This decision was based

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 510.

\textsuperscript{6}Morrisett, op. cit., pp. 38-50.
on the following suggestion about the use of content analysis.

Count carefully when the materials to be analyzed are representative enough to justify the effort. If the materials under analysis are fortuitous, irregular, uneven, or otherwise unrepresentative of whatever universe of content they are meant to represent then the effort of counting does not seem worthwhile.7

Four major headings resulted from the re-categorization. They appeared to be well-adapted to the content, and the writer was able to replace the data within the four newly-formed categories which were: I. Interpersonal Relationships; II. Personal Characteristics; III. Technical Performance; and IV. Scholarship. For example, dependability, promptness, and self-possession, formerly separate categories, were now placed within the category of Personal Characteristics. Consideration, co-operation, and leadership were placed within the category of Interpersonal Relationships, and so forth.

The four broad categories were interpreted by the author as follows:

Category I. **Interpersonal Relationships:** those characteristics or traits which suggest a relationship between two or more people. Included in this category are traits such as consideration, co-operation, sociability, interest in others, etc.

Category II. **Personal Characteristics:** those traits which identify or describe an individual. Under this heading are traits such as dependability, conscientiousness, enthusiasm, insight, personal appearance, character, and self-possession.

Category III. Technical Performance: "performance or activity peculiar to or characteristic of a particular art, science, profession, etc." 8 Under this heading are traits such as organization, planning and exactness of work, general ability, and overall performance.

Category IV. Scholarship: "learning; knowledge acquired by study; the academic attainment of a scholar." 9 This category is enlarged to include traits descriptive of attitude toward education such as "eager to learn," "asks questions," and "profits from suggestions," as well as academic standing.

After the broad categories were formulated and defined, the writer placed all the traits mentioned more than ten times within the four categories. It was then possible to determine the relationship of the contents of letters of recommendation to the contents of progress reports.


9 Ibid., p. 1085.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Presentation and Discussion of the Data

To determine if a relationship existed between the traits mentioned in the letters of recommendation and the progress reports, the writer placed the traits contained in the two instruments in four categories, which were:

I. Interpersonal Relationships
II. Personal Characteristics
III. Technical Performance
IV. Scholarship

It was necessary for the writer to categorize the information so that analysis of the data could be accomplished. She realized that some of the sophistication and detail would be lost through the process of broad categorization, but the sacrifice seemed necessary. Traits mentioned less than ten times in both the letters of recommendation and the progress reports were not included in the analysis.

The data which were analyzed were derived from the contents of 114 Estimate of Behavior Traits written by forty-seven high school teachers, sixteen registered nurses, eleven principals or deans, ten ministers or priests, seven friends of the family, six guidance counselors, six housewives, six businessmen, and five physicians. The analysis also included data from ninety-five clinical progress reports.
written by eight instructors in nursing from September 1958 to September 1959.

The largest category was Category II, Personal Characteristics, composed of eight traits which were mentioned 1118 times. Category I, Interpersonal Relationships, was second. It was composed of six traits mentioned 969 times. The next largest category was Category III, composed of three traits mentioned 498 times. The smallest category was Category IV, Scholarship, Two traits were mentioned 160 times.

Studied individually, the letters of recommendation followed the same rank order as the combined total of the traits mentioned in letters and progress reports. The progress reports had the largest number of traits mentioned within Category I, Interpersonal Relationships, followed by Categories II, III, and IV.

Since the number of letters of recommendation was greater than the total number of progress reports, the writer equalized the two tools before attempting to discover the relationship between them. This was accomplished by taking five-sixths of the total traits mentioned in the letters; five-sixths of 114 is ninety-five. Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 show the composition of the four categories. The figures in the column headed "Letter" are corrected figures. That is, they represent five-sixths of the actual totals obtained from the letters of recommendation. This explains why the category totals in the tables differ from the category totals listed above.

For a list of all the traits which comprised the trait headings found in the tables, see Appendix C.
Table 1. Number and Kinds of Traits Mentioned, in Rank Order, within Category I, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Trait</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Progress Report</th>
<th>Letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sociability</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Co-operation</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Consideration</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
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<td>4. Initiative</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Breadth of interest</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Relation to authority</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Total</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>498</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The closest relationship between the two tools existed in the trait, Consideration. Co-operation and Sociability also had a fairly close relationship. Initiative, Breadth of interest, and Relation to authority were low in relationship. Freshman students may not be expected to display Initiative. They are in a situation which is new to them; they are concerned with acquiring skills and may be so involved in such activities that they do not display Initiative. Possibly instructors may not consider this trait to be pertinent to evaluation. Instructors mentioned Relation to authority more than the writers of the letters of recommendation. A great deal depends upon the emphasis placed by individuals on the importance of specific traits when evaluation is being carried out.
Table 2. Number and Kinds of Traits Mentioned, in Rank Order, within Category II, PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Progress Report</th>
<th>Letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self-possession</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dependability</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Personal appearance</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Promptness</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Insight</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conscientiousness</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Character</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Enthusiasm</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Total</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>635</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Close relationship existed between the two tools in four traits in Category II. Character, Personal appearance, Conscientiousness, and Insight all were related closely. Dependability, Enthusiasm, and Promptness were low in relationship. A freshman student nurse may not be expected to be Dependable at this stage of her professional development, but whether she is or is not expected to be, the trait is not mentioned very frequently by those evaluating the students. The infrequent mention of the trait, Promptness, in the progress reports may be explained on the basis that this trait is an expected behavior of the student and therefore not considered pertinent to the evaluative process.

The trait, Self-possession, was mentioned most frequently in both the letters and the progress reports. In the progress reports it
was mentioned many more times than any other of the traits comprising the category.

Table 3. Number and Kinds of Traits Mentioned, in Rank Order, within Category III, TECHNICAL PERFORMANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Progress Report</th>
<th>Letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Exactness</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ability</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Performance</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Total</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As compared with Categories I and II, there is little relationship between the traits mentioned in the progress reports and those mentioned in the letters of recommendation in Category III. Exactness was mentioned most frequently in both of the tools, even though it was mentioned many more times in the letters of recommendation. Systematic planning, Accuracy, and Thoroughness were a few of the traits which were combined to make up the trait heading, Exactness. Since these traits were listed as separate traits to be checked on the Estimate of Behavior Traits (first part), it explains the frequent mention of Exactness in the letters of recommendation. It may be more valid, using the writer's categorization method, to consider Exactness mentioned approximately ninety-five times in the letters.

Traits mentioned within the trait heading, Performance, were specific to the performance of nursing care. It was, therefore, not surprising that no relationship existed between the two tools in this
trait.

The writer was unable to find a relationship between the traits mentioned in the letters and those mentioned in the progress reports in Category IV, Scholarship. Those traits which were mentioned in the letters were not mentioned in the progress reports, and vice versa.

Table 4. Number and Kinds of Traits Mentioned, in Rank Order, within Category IV, SCHOLARSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Progress Report</th>
<th>Letter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Progressivism</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic standing</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Total</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such traits as "Accepts suggestions and criticisms," "Asks questions if in doubt," and "Eager to learn" were contained within the trait heading, Progressivism. None of these traits was mentioned in the letters of recommendation. It is not of great import that no relationship existed between the two tools in the trait, Academic standing. There are other methods of assessing this trait in applicants to a school of nursing.

Category I, Interpersonal Relationships, and Category II, Personal Characteristics, were closely related in many of the traits mentioned in the letters and in the progress reports. Since letters of recommendation are instruments to aid in the assessment of personal characteristics, it is significant that the closest relationship should
exist in these two areas. The writer found it more difficult to cate-
gorize the items of information in Categories III and IV since the traits
seemed, in many instances, to be pertinent to either the letters of rec-
ommendation or to the progress reports.

An inventory of traits mentioned more than ten times in the prog-
ress reports, before categorization, is found in Appendix D. Appendix E
contains an inventory of the traits found in the letters of recommenda-
tion before categorization. Individual traits mentioned most frequently
in the progress reports were: "Works with others," "Establishes rap-
port with patients and co-workers," "Neat," "Lacks confidence," and
"Accepts suggestions and criticisms." Traits mentioned most frequently
in the letters of recommendation were those traits checked on the first
part of the Estimate of Behavior Traits.

Two traits, Co-operation and Good relationship with others, were
mentioned more than thirty times in both the letters of recommendation
and the progress reports.

Broad Characteristics of the Letters of Recommendation

Four of the 114 letter of recommendation respondents did not fill
out the form. Two stated they had been acquainted with the applicant
for only a short time and could not complete the form with accuracy.
One person stated that the Estimate of Behavior Traits appeared to be a
form for past employment and, because she was a housewife, she was un-
able to complete it. Another wrote that she had had no opportunity to
observe the applicant in many of the occasions listed.
Analysis of the length of time the writer of the letter had known the applicant (answer to question six on back of form) revealed a range from a minimum of two months to the applicant's lifetime.

Several people did not complete the form in its entirety. Eighty-six of the 114 completed it. Three persons omitted the first block of traits in the first part of the form, that part which is introduced by the statement, "To what extent did her work show, (the following traits) . . . ." Comments made indicated the respondents did not feel qualified to evaluate the applicant in the particular area. Other traits which showed consistency in omission are listed below:

1. Able to win the co-operation of others ........ 11 times
2. Tactful ........................................ 7 times
3. Tolerant ........................................ 7 times
4. Democratic ..................................... 6 times
5. Adaptable ..................................... 5 times
6. Sensitive to the reactions of others .......... 5 times

The traits listed above were left blank or were accompanied by question marks or comments such as "too vague a characteristic." Although it is possible that the respondent did not feel qualified to evaluate the applicant on the particular traits, the number of question marks may have indicated that the traits require further clarification.

The writer was interested in learning the number of respondents who checked all the traits in the Habitual column in the first part of the Estimate of Behavior Traits. Twenty-five of the 114 respondents
checked this column consistently. Eleven people checked a trait or traits in the Seldom displayed column. The majority evaluated the applicant as displaying a trait Habitually or Moderately and used both columns in the first part of the form.

Of the fourteen traits listed in the second major part of the letter of recommendation (refer to page 16), eight different traits were checked fifteen times. The trait, Moody, was checked most frequently. It was checked five times. Difficulty in making up her mind was checked four times.

It was of interest to the writer to note that in only one case was the same trait checked by two different respondents about the same applicant.

On some of the Estimate of Behavior Traits there were statements which revealed the personal characteristics of the applicant which the writers of the letters thought a nurse should possess. Some of the comments are quoted below:

"Because of my knowledge of her unusual sense of dedication to others I am happy to give an enthusiastic and unqualified recommendation. Character, poise and friendly personable attitude when working with others makes her the type one likes to see enter nursing."

Friend of family--male

"_ seem to have the intelligence to learn what is required of a nurse. She has a pleasing personality as well as the stability to stand the strain of nurse's training. She has seen at first hand what nurses do and wants to be a nurse with at least some idea of what she is getting into."

Chemistry teacher--male
"Neat, polite and co-operative but I have some doubt as to whether she has the ability to do the academic work required in the nursing curriculum."

Chemistry teacher--male

"Stable, mature girl, not a brilliant student but average academically and above that in many other qualities required in nursing such as dependability, maturity, friendliness and attentiveness."

Teacher--male

"This girl is a good solid citizen who is willing to work for what she wants. I believe she has the understanding and feeling for others which will help her to be a good nurse. She also has the personality characteristics which will carry her through the difficult things which a nurse must face."

Friend of family--male

The writer found it interesting that clergymen mentioned morals or ideals only five out of the twenty times they were cited in the letters. Housewives or friends of the family most frequently made comments in these areas.

Broad Characteristics of the Progress Reports

The Progress Reports of Nursing Ability and Personality Development were completed by eight instructors in nursing for the thirty-eight students. There were ninety-five reports in the students' folders from September 1958 to September 1959. Generally, the reports were composed of specific qualities or characteristics, stated in one or two words, or in short phrases. The rating scale was not used. Nor were there comments found, except in a few instances, in the spaces provided for Student Self-Evaluation and Comments by Faculty Group.
The greatest number of traits were mentioned within the first part of the progress report, Personal Characteristics. The single trait, Neat, was mentioned seventy-five times. Other traits mentioned frequently were Pleasant, Well-groomed, and Friendly. Most of the comments appeared to be related to the strengths of the students. The one trait, mentioned in excess of fifty times in the reports, which seemed to be the one area indicating need for improvement was, Lacks confidence. Comments such as, "Needs reassurance in new situations" or "lacks confidence when carrying out new procedures," were made. The writer wondered if this is not expected behavior from a freshman student, or for anyone who is participating in a new activity. Because the trait was mentioned so many times, it seems improbable that the lack of confidence would be a pronounced individual problem.

The comments made by instructors regarding Technical Performance, the second heading of the progress report, were usually expressed in four areas. These were: "organizes work well," "lacks organization in work," "knows principles underlying nursing care," and "applies principles to nursing care." Some of the notations seemed vague and meaningless to the writer. A few examples of such comments were: "profits from experience," "assumes a positive approach," and "unobtrusive." If specific examples had been given by the evaluators explaining or defining the trait, it is probable that the trait would have been significant.

In the section, Relation to Patients and Family, only one comment was made relative to patient teaching. The writer realized that a freshman student may not be able to function effectively as a teacher,
yet there were no comments which indicated the student's awareness of the need for patient-teaching or a beginning understanding of patient-teaching principles.

The comments most frequently made in this area were: "seems aware of needs," "tries to meet needs," "establishes good rapport," and "treats patients as individuals." Again there were no specific examples to explain or amplify the manner in which the student demonstrated these abilities.

The least number of traits mentioned in the progress reports appeared in the section, Relation to Co-workers. The comments included, "works well with others," "co-operative," "helpful," and "always willing to assist." A comment which appeared twelve times was "helps others when work is completed." It is not known if this comment was meant to be praiseworthy or derogatory in nature, since it was qualified by "when work is completed." Most of the comments about helping others were not qualified in any way.

The fifth part of the form, Relation to Administrative and Teaching Staff, included comments related to four characteristics. These were: "accepts suggestions and criticisms," "profits from suggestions," "asks meaningful questions," and "seeks guidance when necessary."

The evaluations seemed vague and general because of the over-all repetition of relatively few terms in each major area of the progress report. Specific examples, which would have explained or individualized the reports, were rarely present.
The writer thought the absence of comments in the areas for Student Self-Evaluation and Comments by Faculty Group was of great significance. Many educators believe that the most important appraisal of a student's achievement is her own appraisal. Insight can be gained when the individual knows her own performance and can judge this performance with standards set by herself or by others. Instructors can also aid the student to set realistic goals, goals accepted by the student as well as by the instructor. Unless the instructor is on the clinical unit at all times with the student, head nurses are essential to the evaluation of student's achievement, and their comments can be utilized in the progress reports.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In this study the writer has attempted to discover the relationship between traits mentioned in letters of recommendation and those mentioned in clinical progress reports. The letters of recommendation were written about applicants to a school of nursing; the progress reports were written about the same individuals who were then students in the school. The hypothesis was postulated that the relationship between traits mentioned in these two instruments would be minimal or nonexistent.

An item inventory was made by the writer from 114 Estimate of Behavior Traits and ninety-five Progress Reports of Nursing Ability and Personality Development. Traits with synonymous meanings, modified by adjectives, or qualified by adverbs, were then combined. Next, the traits were listed in eighteen categories. This categorization proved cumbersome and led to re-categorization. All traits were finally contained within four major categories. These were: I. Interpersonal Relationships; II. Personal Characteristics; III. Technical Performance; and IV. Scholarship.

The relationship of the traits mentioned in the letters of recommendation with those mentioned in the progress reports was determined on the basis of number of times mentioned in both of the instruments.
This relationship was dependent upon the contents of the categories as developed by the writer. The relationships were stated as being close, fair, or low. It was also possible for the writer to identify specific characteristics of the letters of recommendation and the clinical progress reports.

**Conclusions**

Using the categories as established by the writer, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Traits related to personal characteristics were mentioned most frequently in the letters of recommendation and the progress reports.
2. The closest relationship between the two instruments existed in Category II, Personal Characteristics.
3. Fair to close relationship existed in three of the six traits included in Category I, Interpersonal Relationships.
4. Low relationship existed between the two instruments in Category III, Technical Performance.
5. There was no relationship between the two instruments in Category IV, Scholarship.

The hypothesis that there would be no relationship or a minimal relationship between the traits mentioned in the two instruments was not found in actuality. Since the letter of recommendation is a tool to aid in the assessment of personal qualities, and other methods are used to determine and describe scholastic ability, the writer believes it may
have been invalid to attempt to find a relationship in the category of Scholarship. This was the only area in which no relationship existed. The relationship found in Categories I and II was much closer than the writer had expected it would be.

On the basis of information obtained from the broad characteristics of the letters of recommendation and the progress reports, the writer believes some conclusions and suggestions can be made in the hope of improving the use and effectiveness of the two instruments. These conclusions and suggestions are:

1. Writers of letters of recommendation use discretion in the use of Estimate of Behavior Traits. This is based on the evidence that four people did not fill it out because they believed they could not do so accurately; specific areas of the form were omitted for similar reasons, and only twenty-five of the 114 checked all of the traits in the first part of the form as being displayed habitually.

2. Writers of recommendations occasionally make derogatory remarks about applicants, even though the writer of the recommendation had been selected by the applicant. Eight different traits in the second part of the form were checked fifteen times; eleven of the respondents used the Seldom displayed column when checking traits in the first part of the form.

3. Admission committees may want to give thought to defining or clarifying the meaning of the traits mentioned in the first part of the Estimate of Behavior Traits; especially, "Sen-
sitive to the reactions of others," "Able to win the co-

4. Student self-evaluation is recognized as an essential part of the evaluative procedure. In view of the fact that active participation of the student is essential, it is suggested that this part of the Progress Report of Nursing Ability and Personality Development be utilized. Comments were found in this area in only a few of the reports.

5. Instructors in clinical nursing may wish to evaluate the comments contained in the progress reports in light of expected behavior of a freshman student nurse.

6. Comments on both the progress reports and the letters of recommendation would have been more meaningful if specific examples had been given as illustrations.

Recommendations for Further Study

On the basis of the findings of the study, the writer recommends:

1. That a similar study be made in a school of nursing which does not use a guided form for letters of recommendation to determine if writers of such letters reveal pertinent information about applicants to a school of nursing.

2. That a study be made to determine the attitudes of members of admission committees in schools of nursing toward the letter of recommendation, its effectiveness, and the value placed on it as part of the admission procedure.
3. That a study be made of the contents of progress reports to identify cliches and their meanings, used by instructors in nursing when writing evaluations.

4. That a study be made of the contents of progress reports to reveal similarities of evaluations written by the same instructors with different students.

5. That a study be made to determine if a relationship exists, on an individual student-to-student basis, between contents of the letters of recommendation and clinical progress reports.

6. That a study be made of the contents of progress reports in relation to the objectives of clinical practice.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Periodicals


Publications


References


Estimate of Behavior Traits

School of Nursing

Address

Name of Applicant

Please return this form directly to the Director of the School of Nursing

The above applicant is a candidate for admission to this School of Nursing. We desire your estimate of her behavior characteristics. Your comments will be considered confidential and will be used only by the faculty of this School of Nursing to help them to arrive at a better understanding of the applicant. Your co-operation in completing and promptly returning these estimates of her behavior traits will assist both the applicant and the School of Nursing.

Check in the appropriate column your estimate of each trait listed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Habitually</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. To what extent did her work show:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orderliness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. In her behavior to what extent was she:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well poised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-controlled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive to reactions of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. In assuming responsibility in her work and conduct to what extent was she:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D. In social situations to what extent was she:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pleasing in manner</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In responding to changing situations, to what extent was she:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to win co-operation of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check any traits which apply

1. Seclusive
2. Moody
3. Suspicious
4. Deceptive
5. Markedly nervous
6. Temper tantrums
7. A "show off"
8. A "day dreamer"
9. "Peculiar"
10. Habitual "complainer"
11. Difficulty in making up her mind
12. Poor school or work attendance
13. School or work performance below ability
14. Unco-operative attitude toward teachers

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1. What do you consider the chief qualities of strength or weakness of the applicant? If possible, give illustrations.

2. Do you place full confidence in her integrity? If not, please explain.

3. In what activities has she taken an active part?

4. Has she, so far as you know, any unremied physical or constitutional weaknesses? If so, please specify.

5. What experiences has she had which might have influenced her development:
   a. Favorably
   b. Unfavorably

6. How long have you known the applicant?

7. Does she like to work with people?

8. Please indicate whether or not you endorse the applicant as a suitable candidate for a school of nursing.
   Endorse__________ Endorse with enthusiasm__________ Do not endorse__________

Date____________________ Signature__________________________________________
Month   Day   Year

Position________________________________________________________
Address_______________________________________________________
APPENDIX B
Progress Report of Nursing Ability and Personality Development

Name of Student ___________________________ Class ___________________________

School of Nursing ___________________________ Clinical Experience ___________________________

Grade ___________________________ (Rating Scale) 1 2 3 4 5

I. Personal characteristics

II. Technical Performance

III. Relation to Patient and Family

IV. Relation to Co-worker

V. Relation to Administrative and Teaching Staff

* See reverse side

STUDENT’S SELF-EVALUATION

In relation to her group

In relation to self-development

Additional comments

COMMENTS BY FACULTY GROUP

Signature and Title

Signature and Title

Signature of Student

Date of Conference

Signature and Title

Form D-4 Copyright, 1952, by National League for Nursing, Inc. Printed in U.S.A.
REPORT ON CLINICAL EXPERIENCE
in ____________________) NURSING

Name of Student ____________ Clin. Exp. Begun ____________ Completed ____________

Last  First  Middle  Month  Day  Year  Month  Day  Year

Institution ____________________ City ____________________ State ____________________

SUMMARY OF INSTRUCTION AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusive Dates</th>
<th>Subject or Service Subdivision</th>
<th>Instruction Hours</th>
<th>Nursing Practice Days</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Grading System and/or Rating Scale:

Summary of Time

|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------------|-------|

Signature and Title

Date ____________________

Form D-4
CLASSIFICATION OF TRAITS CONTAINED WITHIN CATEGORIES

Category I. Interpersonal Relationships

A. Consideration
   1. Kind
   2. Considerate
   3. Courteous
   4. Tactful

B. Cooperation
   1. Cooperative
   2. Works well with others
   3. Helps others when work is completed
   4. Willing to help
   5. Able to win cooperation of others

C. Initiative
   1. Takes initiative

D. Relation to authority
   1. Good relationship

E. Sociability
   1. Friendliness
   2. Pleasant
   3. Well-liked
   4. Good rapport

F. Breadth of interest
   1. Interested in nursing
   2. Interested in patients

Category II. Personal Characteristics

A. Dependability
   1. Dependable
   2. Trustworthy

B. Conscientiousness
   1. Conscientious
   2. Industrious

C. Enthusiasm
   1. Enthusiastic
   2. Eager
### D. Insight
1. Seems aware of needs
2. Tries to meet needs
3. Resourceful

### E. Personal Appearance
1. Neat
2. Well-groomed
3. Orderly

### F. Promptness
1. Punctual
2. Needs to develop more speed

### G. Self-possession
1. Well-poised
2. Self-controlled
3. Confident
4. Lacks confidence
5. Lacks self-control
6. Even, stable disposition
7. Quiet

### H. Character
1. Sincere
2. High ideals and morals

---

### Category III. Technical Performance

#### A. Performance
1. Performs satisfactorily
2. Gives good nursing care
3. Knows principles underlying care
4. Applies principles

#### B. Exactness
1. Plans work well
2. Needs help in organization
3. Careful
4. Thorough
5. Accurate

#### C. Ability
1. Capable
2. Adaptable
Category IV. Scholarship

A. Progressivism
   1. Accepts suggestions and criticisms
   2. Eager to learn
   3. Asks questions if in doubt
   4. Profits from suggestions

B. Academic standing
   1. Good student
   2. Above average
   3. Below average
### The Number and Kinds of Traits Mentioned in Progress Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>10-19</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50+</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Consideration</td>
<td></td>
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<td>36. Accepts suggestions and criticisms</td>
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### The Number and Kinds of Traits Mentioned in Letters of Recommendation

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* Designates traits which were part of check list in first part of *Estimate of Behavior Traits.*