Q: What is the HESI Admission Assessment (A²) exam?
A: The HESI A² exam is designed to assess the academic and personal readiness of prospective students for higher education. It is particularly well suited for prospective students in the health science fields, though it is applicable for basic skills for all potential students. The A² consists of nine different exams, seven of which focus on academic subject areas and two on personal assessment. A composite score is provided for the total number of academic exams that are administered. These academically oriented subjects include: Basic-Math, Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary and General Knowledge, Grammar, Chemistry, Biology, and Anatomy and Physiology. To meet the needs of Radiography (Radiation Technology or Imaging Sciences) programs that include a basic physics course as a pre-requisite, a Physics subject exam is also available for institutions ordering the Health Professions (HP) version of the HESI A². The Learning Style and Personality Profile exams are available for the purpose of offering insights about student study habits, learning preferences, and dispositions as they relate to academic achievement.

Q: Are there two separate scores, like a minimum passing score and a recommended score?
A: Each institution can select the HESI A² exams to be administered to their applicants. After the test has been administered to all prospective students, the institution receives results that provide a percentage-based score for each exam (for example, Basic-Math, Reading Comprehension, Anatomy & Physiology, etc.) administered, in addition to the overall composite score that incorporates scores from all exams administered.

There is no official minimum passing score established by Elsevier as each individual program may choose different criteria for program acceptance. However, research has shown, and a majority of institutions have agreed, that the level of student ability necessary for successful program completion for RN & HP program applicants is a 75% minimum cumulative score over the academic subject areas tested, and a 70% minimum cumulative score for applicants to LPN/LVN programs. For a complete listing of the recommended scores for each of the HESI A² academic subject exams, please refer to the HESI A² Scoring Guide.

Q: Should students be allowed to re-take the test to improve their scores?
A: Student performance on the HESI A² provides a useful snapshot of current student ability in each of the subject areas tested. A² testing should be used as just one component of the admission decision, along with transcript review, including assessment of the overall GPA and science GPA; performance during interview; and/or prevalence of repeating courses in order to achieve a passing score. Elsevier provides two versions of the HESI A² examination should the faculty allow students to re-take the exam to attempt an improvement in their performance. The second version of the exam is based on the same blueprint as the first version, but is comprised of different test questions. Elsevier recommends re-testing with the second version of the exam rather than presenting the first version again to any student so that reliability and validity of the exam can be preserved, as the use of the second version ensures that the student’s performance reflects application of the concepts being tested. The HESI Admission Assessment (A²) Exam – Frequently Asked Questions
Assessment Exam Review provides a content review of topics typically covered on admission exams, practice questions and is useful in preparing for either version of the exam.

Q: Are the HESI A2 Exam scores useful for an indefinite period of time, or should they be considered useful for a defined time frame only?
A: HESI A² exam scores provide a “snapshot” of the individual’s ability in a variety of content areas. As such, there is really no specific timeframe after which a score becomes invalid because the score reflects the student’s ability at only one point in time -- the day the test was taken. Therefore, a student’s scores could be reviewed at any point in time as evidence of his/her general knowledge and academic abilities relevant to admission. If the scores were over a year old, then it may be important to review a more recent assessment, and consider repeating the administration of the HESI A² if the applicant had not been admitted to the program within that year.

Q: If someone took the HESI A2 Exam to get into another school a number of years ago, should we accept those scores?
A: Institutions may adopt that policy if they wish; however the test measures knowledge at a specific point in time, and older scores may not be as relevant to the student’s knowledge at a later date. Please see the above answer regarding this topic.

Q: Is it best to benchmark with the composite score or a score in each area?
A: The individual institution usually maintains a specific viewpoint regarding the minimum level of skills needed to be successful in that program.

Many programs have incorporated the use of awarding points (within a designated total point system used for admission decisions) that are specified for each area of the criteria reviewed. For example, a composite score in the 90-99 range would add 3 points to the applicants total admission points, a score of 80-89 would add 2 points, and so on. Below 75, however, the applicant would be awarded 0 points for the A² composite score. Similarly, GPA would also be ranked on a point system, etc. Faculty can then set a minimally acceptable accrual of points that would be required for admission to the program, and only those candidates that meet or exceed this level are actually admitted. If there are more candidates that exceed the minimal level of points, then the total number of points can make priority-setting easier to determine candidate admission.

If the institution is interested in a specific skill set (for example, if Basic-Math and Reading Comprehension alone are the most important, in your faculty’s opinion, to succeed in your program), then you may want to establish specific benchmarks (minimally acceptable scores) for those exams alone as part of your admissions policy.

Q: Is the HESI A2 Exam available online?
A: Yes, all of HESI’s secure exams are web-deliverable, and more importantly, the results are also delivered online, making sorting, saving, and searching easier for faculty.

Q: What are the advantages of the HESI A2 Exam over the other available tests?
A: The HESI A² offers a great deal of flexibility with testing. The institution, not the testing company, makes the decision to include or exclude components of the exam that are relevant for their particular program. For instance, if Chemistry is not a required pre-requisite subject, then the Chemistry component does not have to be administered to program applicants.

There is no timed-testing involved, which accommodates English as a second language (ESL) student that might have some limitations when taking a test that requires a significant amount of reading. It is important to assess the actual skill level of all candidates at the beginning of the program, including ESL students. The pressure associated with a timed test can negatively impact students causing increased anxiety, which may lead to lower test scores. In order to determine true reading ability, it is helpful to measure student performance without additional time pressure.

The exams available through the HESI A² also exceed those available through comparable testing company tests, allowing the institution to measure a greater number of basic skills than they might measure through another test. Studies have shown that Vocabulary, for example, is the greatest single indicator of program success and adult IQ measurement. Without a vocabulary component, this skill would never be measured prior to acceptance into the program.

The results reporting, as mentioned previously, is also an advantage of the HESI A². Most testing companies will offer only a printout of student results, sorted alphabetically by student name. HESI offers online reporting, with online reporting, the institution is able to sort by any exam score, composite score, or name in order to rank students in each area. These results can be saved as they are sorted, providing you with an easier point of comparison in making admission decisions.

Because Elsevier is the market leader in Nursing and many of the Health Professions, it is also important to note the advantages to these specific markets. Online testing is, in itself, an advantage in the Nursing market. Students will face computerized testing throughout their educational programs, particularly Nursing students upon program completion and NCLEX® candidacy. It is important for institutions to administer computerized testing from the point of admission to (1) determine their students’ comfort levels with this type of testing and (2) introduce them as early as possible in the curriculum to computer-based testing formats. HESI exams are designed to simulate the NCLEX® keystrokes, mouse requirements, and screens. Therefore, Nursing students can actually prepare for the NCLEX® experience throughout their Nursing programs when standardized testing is used.

Finally, Nursing and Health Professions programs that have used more general assessments of reading, math, and general knowledge abilities have often voiced that these general assessments were not sufficient in providing an accurate picture of students’ academic abilities as they relate to the health sciences. While the HESI A² does not include vocabulary terms from a medical dictionary, and the Reading Comprehension exam does not offer reading selections from an actual Nursing textbook, the terms and reading selections that are used often relate to medical scenarios, or include commonly used concepts in health sciences. For instance, a vocabulary term tested might include “ominous”. This is a standard English word,
but it is used frequently in Nursing and Health Professions texts when referring to a patient condition, so it is important that students have an understanding of these types of words in order to be successful in reading their Nursing textbooks. The HESI $A^2$ provides faculty with specific information about the student’s academic ability as it relates to nursing and health professions content.

**Q: Who writes the HESI $A^2$ Exam, and how often are they reviewed?**

**A:** The items developed for the HESI $A^2$ Battery were developed following the HESI item writing guidelines presented by Morrison, Smith, and Britt (1996) and Morrison, Nibert, and Flick (2006) and adhering to the Elsevier/HESI Testing and Remediation Style Sheet for Item Writers. The HESI $A^2$ items were written by experts in the field of education, who have expertise in constructing standardized tests used to assess basic knowledge of English, mathematics, and the sciences at the secondary and post-secondary level.

Item writers were selected based on clinical expertise, recommendation of school administrators and faculty, and/or approval of senior level HESI personnel. Item writers attend an item writing conference conducted by the HESI item development team. This training includes instruction in constructing multiple choice items which measure higher levels of cognitive taxonomy, aligning item content with the purpose of the examination, and recognizing and eliminating item bias. Item development is a continuous process. Approved item writers submit, via a secured electronic database, original items for review by the internal staff of HESI. Items approved by the internal review process are added to the item bank as pilot items and are available for inclusion in subsequent examinations for data acquisition purposes and further statistical analysis. Items meeting rigorous statistical guidelines established by HESI are moved to active status and are available for inclusion on active examinations developed by HESI.

**Q: What current research validates the use of the HESI $A^2$ Exam as a predictor of success for nursing students?**

**A:** Several multi-site studies are currently underway that focus on student success in the nursing and allied health programs as predicted by performance on the $A^2$. Studies that have been published in peer-reviewed nursing journals include those summarized below:


This study examined the value of the HESI Admission Assessment in predicting student success. Associate degree ($N = 68$) and baccalaureate ($N = 69$) nursing students took the Admission Assessment after acceptance into the nursing programs for the purpose of identifying their academic weaknesses and focusing their remediation efforts. Findings indicated that the Admission Assessment was a valid predictor of students’ academic ability to succeed in the nursing programs. In the associate degree nursing program, The Admission Assessment scores demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation with 88.90% of all nursing course grades in the program and 100% of the beginning-level course grades. In
the baccalaureate nursing program. The Admission Assessment scores demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation with 50% of all nursing course grades in the program and 80% of beginning-level course grades. Findings of this study indicate that the $A^2$ provides valuable information about a student’s academic ability to succeed in a nursing program. Based on the data obtained from this study, the faculty in the participating ADN program chose to use applicants’ $A^2$ scores as a criterion for selection with future applicants to the program. Further study is needed to examine the value of using the $A^2$ as an admission criterion and to determine if there is a relationship between using the $A^2$ as an admission criterion and prediction of success in the nursing program.


The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Health Education Systems, Inc., (HESI) exam scores and success within an associate degree (ADN) nursing program. A longitudinal, bivariant correlational design was used to measure the relationship among scores on the HESI Admissions Assessment ($A^2$) exam, scores on a customized Mid-Curricular (MC) exam, and scores on the HESI Exit Exam ($E^2$). The accuracy of the $E^2$ in predicting NCLEX-RN success was also examined.

The $A^2$ is comprised of nine different exams. Seven of these exams are academically oriented, consisting of math, reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, chemistry, anatomy and physiology, and biology. Only the math and reading comprehension exams were administered to the study population prior to admission into the nursing program. Scores on this exam were used as a component of the selection process. Faculty designated 850 as the benchmark score for the MC, administered half way through the curriculum, and the $E^2$, administered during the last semester of the curriculum. Students were permitted three opportunities to achieve the benchmark scores. A different version of the exams was used for re-testing. Data were obtained from 139 students who took the $A^2$, MC, $E^2$, and NCLEX-RN® from August 2002 through October 2004. Findings indicated that the reading comprehension scores were significantly related to MC scores ($P = .001$) and to $E^2$ scores ($P = .05$). MC scores were significantly correlated with $E^2$ scores ($P = .001$). The $E^2$ was 94.55% accurate in predicting NCLEX-RN® success; three students who scored above 900 on the $E^2$ failed the NCLEX-RN® on their first attempt.