

Educational Pathways for Nurses: 2-year to Ph. D, there's a program to meet your needs.

There are many options available to those interested in obtaining a nursing degree. From associates to doctorate, you are sure to find a program that meets your goals and get you started on a well-respected, high paying career within the healthcare sector.

Nursing degree options

Below you will find a list of many affordable nursing degree options. Before selecting any one nursing degree program, it is important to first evaluate your career goals; e.g., do you wish to start as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)/Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) and attend a one-year program or do you wish to become a Registered Nurse and spend from two to four years in school (depending on whether you enroll in an associate or bachelor nursing degree program)? Making a thoughtful decision based on evaluation of your career goals will go a long way toward ensuring success in your nursing career.

LPN/LVN Nursing Degree

Licensed practical nursing/licensed vocational nursing (LVN) degrees typically involve one year of study and are offered in hospitals, vocational schools, or community colleges. Graduates of these programs are eligible to be licensed as an LPN/LVN after receiving a diploma or certificate and passing a State-board administered National Council Licensing Examination for LPNs (NCLEX-PN).

LPN-to-Associate's Nursing Degree Program

This nursing degree program is targeted toward working LPNs who want to earn a degree that will enable them to sit for the NCLEX-RN and become a registered nurse (RN). Many associate degree programs provide credit for work experience or courses taken as part of an LPN diploma or certificate program.

Associate of Science (A.S.) in Nursing Degree

This 2-year nursing degree program focuses more on clinical skills than nursing theory and is a stepping-stone toward a bachelor's degree for more than 30 percent of nursing students. While

you can become an RN with an associate's degree, advancement opportunities may be limited. Having a bachelor's degree will enable you to advance into supervisory positions with higher salaries. However, an associate's degree is a great option to begin a career as a nurse in a shorter period than enrollment in a 4-year bachelor's program. Many times LPNs who further their education can have all or part of their education paid for by the facility in which they work in exchange for agreeing to remain with the employer for a certain amount of time after-graduation. The Associate of Science in Nursing degree program prepares students for direct patient care and is the quickest route to becoming a nurse.

LPN-to-BSN Nursing Degree Program

This nursing degree program offers LPNs or LVNs the opportunity to obtain a bachelor's degree in four academic semesters or two years of full-time study. The reduced time is because many courses taken in a diploma or associates program may be transferred toward the bachelor's degree. Credit is also given for LPN work experience.

Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) Degree Program

This 4-year nursing degree program is the degree of choice for most employers and offers the best prospects for employment and advancement opportunities. This nursing degree program provides the necessary educational preparation for a professional nursing career. In most programs, the first two years are spent taking general liberal arts coursework, with the remaining two years devoted to nursing-specific study.

RN-to-BSN Nursing Degree Program

This nursing degree program is targeted toward RNs who have graduated from associate or diploma programs who wish to obtain a BSN degree. It provides credit for courses taken in other programs and for nursing-related work experience. It is often the case that these nursing degree programs are offered on an evening and weekend basis to accommodate the schedule of working students. Some schools offer "RN-only" programs in which all students are working nurses. These classes are separate from those taken by "pre-licensure" students.

Many of these nursing degree programs having rolling admission dates as opposed to just one start date in the fall semester. These programs are often referred to as “Bridge Programs” or “Advancement Placement programs.” It is estimated that about 30 percent of nursing graduates have participated in these Bridge programs.

Second Degree Nursing Programs

Second degree BSN nursing programs are tailored for non-nurses who possess a bachelor’s degree in another area of study. These programs will provide credit for the liberal arts portion of your first bachelor’s degree, thereby allowing you to complete the BSN nursing degree program in two years or less if you attend full time. You must have earned a minimum cumulative 3.0 GPA from your first bachelor’s degree to be accepted into these programs.

Accelerated BSN Nursing Degree Programs

This is a variation of the second-degree BSN programs. In addition to providing transfer credit for liberal arts coursework taken as part of your first bachelor’s degree, accelerating nursing degree programs allow you to complete the BSN degree in less time than students enrolled in traditional nursing programs. Accelerated nursing degree programs typically take about one year to complete if you attend full time, although some programs may last up to 20 months. As with second degree nursing programs, accelerated programs also require a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 GPA from your first bachelor’s degree.

Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) Nursing Degree Program

Nurses with a master’s degree are in high demand across all practice areas!

A Master of Science in nursing degree program is an 18-to-24-month degree program that enables a nurse to specialize in a particular area of practice: e.g., certified nurse practitioner (CNP), nurse certified midwives (CNM), certified nurse anesthetists’ (CRNA), or clinical nurse specialist (CNS). Some nurses combine an MSN degree with a degree in business administration, public health, or health administration. Many of these dual degree holders then move into supervisory and administrative positions within hospitals or long-term care facilities. Other nurses with a master’s degree take part in research or become teachers within nursing education

programs. In general, you will need to have a BSN degree with a minimum GPA (usually 3.0) to gain acceptance into masters-level programs, along with acceptable scores on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), and clinical nursing experience.

Direct Admission MSN Nursing Degree Program

Direct Admission MSN nursing degree programs, also referred to as “graduate entry” programs are tailored toward those students who hold a bachelor’s degree in an area other than nursing. These nursing degree programs provide credit for the liberal arts portion of your first bachelor’s degree and permit students the opportunity to complete their nursing prerequisite coursework on an accelerated schedule followed by entry into graduate study. In effect, the program combines preparation for RN licensing with advanced education in a specialty practice area.

Direct Admission MSN programs usually take three years to complete if you attend on a full-time basis. The first year is devoted to prerequisite nursing coursework while the last two years are focused on master’s level study.

Post-masters Professional Certificate Programs

Professional certificates are awarded to those who pass an exam that provides evidence of expertise within a specific area of nursing practice (e.g., midwifery, clinical nurse specialist, nurse anesthetist, etc.) Specialty exams are given in 30 areas of nursing practice. The exams are administered by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), a subdivision of the American Nurses Association (ANA).

Professional certifications are available only to nurses who possess a master’s degree in nursing who wish to obtain credentialing that attests to their expertise within a given specialty. Having this certification can lead to career advancement or enable a nurse to transition into a new area of practice.

Doctorate Nursing Degree Programs

With a master’s degree, nurses who hold a doctorate degree are also expected to be in great demand through the year 2018!

Doctorate programs prepare nurses to advance into high-level administrative careers within all types of healthcare facilities. Nurses with a doctorate can also participate in clinical research, advanced clinical practice, and become deans of nursing education programs. Doctorate programs take from four to six years, depending on whether you attend on a full or part-time basis.

The focus of study in doctoral programs is on research methods (statistics and data interpretation), history of nursing, as well as business management, and leadership skills. However, each student will choose an area of specialty and research topic for your dissertation or final project. When deciding on a doctorate program it is important you choose a program where there is at least one faculty member with extensive background in the area you wish to specialize in.

Requirements for admission are possession of a master's degree with a minimum GPA (although some schools accept students with a bachelor's degree), acceptable scores on the GRE, along with substantive nursing experience.

Doctor of Nursing Degree (ND)

Doctor of nursing degree programs typically take from 3 to 5 years to complete if you attend on a full-time basis, including summer study. While the specific focus of the program will vary between schools, the overriding purpose of all programs is on developing advanced clinical nursing skills. The goal is to graduate nurses who can take a leadership role in effecting change through system analysis and redesign in a variety of healthcare and educational settings. An alternative dissertation project is a requirement for graduation.

Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree (DNP)

This is a new nursing degree program so that specific areas of focus vary by school. These nursing degree programs typically take up to three years of full-time study to complete. The goal of all programs is to prepare graduates to assume leadership roles in research, clinical practice, patient care management, and system redesign. Graduates are expected to gain expertise managing the complex interplay between quality patient care and fiscal efficiency. A dissertation or other final project will be required for graduation.

Doctor of Nursing Science Degree (DNSc)

Doctor of Nursing Science degree programs have a dual focus in preparing graduates to develop clinical leadership skills, along with investigative ability to affect change in a variety of healthcare systems. Areas of specialization include health informatics, healthcare economics, and patient outcome measurement. A dissertation and defense is required for graduation.

Doctor of Philosophy Nursing Degree (PhD)

These programs prepare nursing scholars and researchers who are expected to advance the theoretical knowledge of clinical nursing practice and health delivery outcomes. Graduates of these nursing degree programs will be able to engage in scholarly research, assume leadership positions in a variety of healthcare settings, and take part in public policy formulation and development. A dissertation and defense is required for graduation.