

Nurses are trained to select and apply theory and research findings to patient care in a variety of situations and settings, to identify and respond to acute and chronic health problems, to promote health and prevent illness, to evaluate completed nursing research, to participate in professional and community organizations relevant to nursing, and to provide leadership as an essential member of the health care team. To meet these needs nurses must possess critical-thinking ability, knowledge of science, compassion, and communication, organization and multi-tasking skills. There is currently a nursing shortage in the U.S., and nurses are needed in all settings including acute care hospitals, community health agencies, homes, outreach programs, public schools, HMOs and clinics serving poor and rural populations. Career opportunities are particularly good for bilingual or underrepresented nurses. For links to information on nursing careers and education, visit the "Health Careers" page at <http://career.ucsd.edu/undergraduates/exploring-a-career/life-sciences-and-health-career-info.html>.

## Nursing Roles

Depending on their level of education and experience, nurses can fill many roles in the health care system. All nurses must obtain a Registered Nurse (RN) license through completion of an educational program and passage of the National Council Licensure Examination in Nursing (NCLEX-RN), but there is no one right career path in nursing. Career opportunities for nurses are rich and varied – a flight trauma nurse, a pediatric nurse practitioner, a forensic nurse, a psychiatric nurse, an academic nurse, an infection control nurse, a nurse anesthetist – the list is long; possibilities are everywhere. Learn as much as you can about advanced practice roles and about the many areas of specialization. For information on the various nursing careers, see the professional association websites listed below and visit [www.DiscoverNursing.com](http://www.DiscoverNursing.com), [www.ExploreHealthCareers.org](http://www.ExploreHealthCareers.org), and [www.bestnursingdegree.com](http://www.bestnursingdegree.com). Stop into the Career Services Center to read *Opportunities to Care: the Pfizer Guide to Nursing and Careers in Nursing*. Check out job postings on the National League for Nursing website ([www.nln.org](http://www.nln.org)) to see the variety of roles for nurses. Also, talk to nurses and/or volunteer in a health care setting where you can learn about nursing careers.

- **The Professional Nurse/RN** completes a college-level program of coursework and clinical training and passes the NCLEX. Professional nurses work in all areas of health care and in many settings providing basic care.
- **Advanced Practice Nurses** are RNs with graduate (post-baccalaureate) academic preparation and advanced clinical skills qualifying them as experts in a defined area of knowledge and practice. Graduate academic preparation in nursing is at the master's and doctoral level. Advanced practice roles include:
  - **Nurse Practitioner (NP)** – NPs specialize in the primary health care needs of individuals and families. They are skilled health care providers who perform many of the tasks traditionally done by physicians and can conduct complete medical exams, diagnose and treat common acute illnesses and injuries, administer immunizations, manage chronic problems like high blood pressure and diabetes, order lab services and X-rays, prescribe drugs and counsel patients. The NP works in collaboration with physicians and as an independent member of the health care team, working in hospitals, clinics, HMOs, private offices, nursing homes, etc. (American Academy of NPs – [www.aanp.org](http://www.aanp.org))
  - **Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS)** – CNSs have advanced clinical expertise in a particular specialty (e.g., oncology, cardiovascular nursing, etc.), providing expert patient care or facilitating clinical research to improve patient outcomes. In addition to clinical practice or research, responsibilities may include education and consultation. They provide leadership to other nurses in hospital, ambulatory or home care settings. (National Association of CNS - <http://www.nacns.org>)
  - **Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM)** – CNMs specialize in the practice of obstetrical and gynecological care of relatively healthy women. They practice in hospitals and medical clinics, and may also deliver in birthing centers and at home. CNMs provide care to women from puberty through menopause and may work closely with an obstetrician, who provides consultation and assistance to patients who develop complications. (American College of Nurse-Midwives - <http://www.midwife.org/>)
  - **Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA)** – CRNAs are specially trained to administer anesthesia. They work as licensed independent practitioners or require some degree of supervision from the operating physician or surgeon, depending on state law. (American Association of Nurse Anesthetists - <http://www.aana.com/>)
- **Nurse Administrators/Educators** are RNs with doctoral-level (DNP or PhD) academic preparation and advanced clinical skills enabling them to work in hospital administration, nursing policy, research or in nursing education.

*Note: Licensed Vocational or Practical Nurses (LVN or LPN) and Clinical Nursing Aides (CNA) are part of the health care team, but do not have the RN licensure; career and advancement opportunities are limited for LVNs and CNAs.*

## Nursing Education

Individuals entering the nursing profession may choose between four educational routes, all of which include the RN licensure. To determine which degree option is right for you, consider your career goals and advancement opportunities, the cost and time it will take to complete the program(s), and your likelihood of admission. Because of the demand for nurses, many educational programs are oversubscribed or "impacted;" many have waiting lists for enrollment.

- **AS/ADN** – the Associate's Degree in Nursing can lead to RN licensure and is obtained at the community college level in programs lasting 1-2 years. Though faster and cheaper than a bachelor's degree, career options with the associate's degree are limited and the BSN or higher is becoming the expected degree for nurses.

- **BSN** – the Bachelor of Science in Nursing is currently the most desired degree for employment. UCSD students who wish to pursue careers in nursing should consider transferring to an undergraduate institution which offers the BSN. Students who wish to earn a degree at UCSD before studying to become a nurse can attend “accelerated” or “second” BSN programs for students who already have a non-nursing bachelor’s degree. Accelerated programs are typically 18 months to 2 years long, but can be as short as 12 months.
- **MSN** – the Master’s of Science in Nursing degree is typically required for the advanced practice nursing roles. The MSN can be earned in 1-2 years after obtaining a BSN or can be obtained in a “direct-entry” MSN program for students with a non-nursing bachelor’s degree. Direct-entry master’s programs can prepare students to earn their RN in 12 months and then require another 1-3 years of education and training depending on specialty area. Most direct-entry MSN programs lead to a master’s degree in general nursing. Additional certification may be required after the general master’s to obtain an advanced practice nursing role. While some direct-entry programs can lead directly to an advanced practice role, the lack of nursing experience these graduates have after going directly from a non-nursing bachelor’s to a direct-entry APN master’s can make employment at the advanced level difficult.
- **DNP or PhD** – Nursing Doctorate programs are designed to prepare students for advanced clinical roles as well as research, management and nursing education. The DNP can be earned after the BSN or MSN. Programs can last 3-5 years. *The DNP is expected to become the standard for advanced practice nurses by 2015.* Master’s and doctoral-level programs are most appropriate for students with a clear idea of their long-term nursing interests.

### Admission Requirements

Nursing programs are unique and each may have different admission requirements. You should carefully review the websites and admission materials of each school to which you plan to apply. Applications are usually made one year before enrolling. Though they vary, nursing programs commonly require:

- **Pre-Requisite Coursework** – A strong, rigorous academic record with a minimum GPA of 2.75 to 3.0 (higher for some master’s programs) is expected and requirements vary but often include *anatomy/physiology, microbiology, nutrition, chemistry, organic chemistry, statistics, human development, sociology, and writing.* Courses not offered at UCSD can be taken at community college.
- **Admission Tests** – Master’s and doctoral level programs often require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE, [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)) which tests verbal, quantitative and writing ability. The Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS, [www.ATITesting.com](http://www.ATITesting.com)) may be required for transfer/enrollment in a BSN program and covers math, science, reading and English language usage.
- **Experience** – Confirm your career choice and develop skills by exploring nursing careers. Consider shadowing, volunteering or working in a hospital or clinic with nurses to gain exposure to nursing. Opportunities can be found at <http://career.ucsd.edu/files/Clinical%20and%20Hospital%20Experience.pdf>.
- **Letters of Recommendation** – Since 2-3 letters may be required for your application, you should work to get to know your professors and nursing professionals. Get tips at <http://career.ucsd.edu/files/guidltr.pdf>.
- **Admissions Essay** – Many applications will require you to write a 1-2 page essay on your experience, motivation and interest in nursing. Help can be found in our written guide (<http://career.ucsd.edu/files/personalstmt.pdf>) and through workshops held in the Career Services Center. Your essay draft can also be submitted for critique.
- **Financial Aid** – Because of the demand for nurses, many scholarships, grants and loan forgiveness programs are available for students pursuing nursing degrees. Find financial aid opportunities at [www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/financialaid.htm](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/financialaid.htm) and [www.discovernursing.com/scholarship-search](http://www.discovernursing.com/scholarship-search).

There is a new centralized application service for nursing programs called Nursing CAS <http://nursingcas.org/>, whereby one application can be sent to many schools. In California, only Samuel Merritt Univ. and Western UHS participate at this time.

In addition to the sources above, the Career Services Center offers a library of books and resources on nursing careers and education, a nursing school workshop, and one-on-one advising appointments to help you on your path to a career in nursing. Visit <http://career.ucsd.edu> for details.

### POPULAR CALIFORNIA NURSING EDUCATION OPTIONS FOR UCSD STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

**BSN Programs Accepting Transfer Students:** Check with the various California State University campuses which offer the BSN. Also, Pt. Loma Nazarene, Loma Linda and Samuel Merritt Universities, and the University of San Francisco sometimes accept transfers.

**Accelerated/Second BSN Programs** (for non-nursing college graduates): Azusa Pacific Univ.; California State Universities at East Bay, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Northridge, San Bernardino, San Marcos, San Francisco, and San Jose; Concordia Univ. Irvine; Loma Linda; Mount St. Mary’s; National Univ; Samuel Merritt Univ.; and the Univ. of Oklahoma (online joint program w/ SDSU or Southwestern College)

**Direct-Entry MSN Programs** (for non-nursing college graduates): Azusa Pacific, California Baptist, and Charles Drew Univ.; California State Universities at Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and San Francisco; UCLA; UCSF; Samuel Merritt Univ.; Univ. of San Diego; Univ. of San Francisco; and Western Univ. of Health Sciences.

### SEARCHABLE NURSING PROGRAM DATABASES

- American Assoc. of Colleges of Nursing – [www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/nurse\\_ed/nep\\_index.htm](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/nurse_ed/nep_index.htm)
- California Board of Registered Nursing – [www.rn.ca.gov/schools/programs](http://www.rn.ca.gov/schools/programs)
- Discover Nursing Program Search – [www.discovernursing.com](http://www.discovernursing.com)
- Peterson’s Guide to Nursing Programs <http://www.petersons.com/college-search/nursing-school.aspx> (also available in book form in CSC library)
- [www.AllNursingSchools.com](http://www.AllNursingSchools.com)