

Preparing to Enter a Nursing Program

Our goal for the nursing program is to graduate competent, caring, responsible beginning level nurses to meet the health care needs of our community. Nursing is a complex and multifaceted profession and the program leading to becoming a nurse is equally complex and multifaceted. We want the students entering the program to be as well prepared as possible to be successful.

There are some common barriers to success for students entering the nursing programs. Some students have expressed a “deer in the headlights” feeling when confronted with the expectations of the program. We want to discuss barriers and expectations here so you can prepare yourself to avoid or overcome barriers and be in a better position to meet expectations!

Academic Success

Students must be prepared academically to succeed in a rigorous college curriculum. This means having college level reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and math skills. The nursing textbooks are written at the grade 13+ (college) level. It requires strong reading skills to grasp the content. Nurses must communicate effectively with the interdisciplinary health care team. This requires excellent spoken and written English, including grammar and vocabulary. Nurses give complex medications in pill and in liquid form injected into patients’ veins. Math skills must be top notch to ensure accurate delivery of medication.

Many of the courses you have completed thus far have required that you memorize content and repeat it on a test. This is the knowledge and comprehension listed below. Nursing is much different. Nurses must critically think, plan and take action (not just repeat). No one wants a nurse who, while the patient is bleeding, can recite the top 10 reasons for bleeding. They want a nurse who does something to stop the bleeding! Nurses’ decisions are never black and white, nor “yes” or “no.” Decisions are made based on collection and analysis of information gathered from the patient. Any change in the information (data) may change the decision. Thus, learning experiences and testing in nursing are at the application and analysis level.

Knowledge: Name, locate, tell, list, repeat, point to, identify, match, name, recite

Comprehension: Define, summarize, infer, project, describe, interpret, rewrite, convert, estimate, translate, rearrange, paraphrase

Application: Use, solve, adapt, relate, perform, change, compute, demonstrate, operate, show

Analysis: Compare, classify, screen, examine, test for, outline, break down, discriminate, diagram, order, categorize, distinguish

Synthesis: Create, develop, generate, build, compile, design, combine, compose, rearrange, plan, produce, generalize

Evaluation: Judge, reject, criticize, rate, rank, justify, appraise, compare, support, contrast

You might do some internet reading on these higher levels of learning as a base for critical thinking and familiarize yourself with study and test taking techniques for these higher levels. Your studying must be effective and efficient. Some students think that just adding more study hours will help. Perhaps, but effective efficient studying for higher level learning is the key. Even students with the highest grades in high school or college courses may struggle with nursing level learning.

Financial Planning and Employment

One of the most common reasons for failure in the nursing programs is working (employment) too many hours. This reduces the time available for study. In the following information session you will be referred to sample calendars for the nursing program. There is no time for employment.

You need to review your financial obligations, create a budget, calculate school related expenses (the cost of the program, but also child care, travel, lost income, and other expenses) to be sure you can finance attending the program without being employed or with minimum employment if in the part-time program. Reduce your spending where possible. Save money for the time you are in the program. Explore financial aid options to help make ends meet while in the program. If you conclude you must work full time, we recommend you do so for a few years, save money and attend the program when you have a more solid financial base.

Personal and Family Issues

One of the biggest problems for students while in the nursing program is stress and resulting poor coping strategies. Before entering the program develop strong stress control/reduction skills and productive coping strategies. To employ these stress reduction techniques when stressed, you must practice these strategies and techniques before stress hits.

Family and Friends

Nursing students need the full support of their families and friends. This may include moral support, encouragement, and well wishes. It also includes help with child care, cleaning, shopping, and other house and yard work. You need balance in your life — time with family, exercise, good nutrition, plenty of sleep, and such — but the program must be a top priority.

Effective time management is vital to success and stress control in nursing school and nursing practice. Write out how you spend your time for 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Look for places where you can save time (i.e. you can give up being the class parent or scout leader for two years) and places where others can help (clean, cook, pick up children, babysit, etc.). Your schedule must allow for the 40 hours a week you will devote to class, clinical, skills lab and studying.

We find some students are reluctant to ask family and friends for help. We all need help occasionally. We simply need to ask for specific help: “Would you pick up the kids after school so I can study?” or “Would you take over the shopping while I am in school?”

Unfortunately, some family members and friends are not supportive of nursing students. They may make non-supportive comments (“You’ll never be able to be a nurse.” or “Why are you wasting your time studying?”) or their behavior is non-supportive (promising to help and then not following through or sabotaging your studying by picking a fight the night before a test). You need to recognize these people and their behaviors and develop methods to counter them, including distancing yourself from these people.

Now that you have read this, take time to analyze your position on:

Academic skills at college level (reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, math)

Higher level learning and critical thinking

Effective, efficient study skills

Test taking skills

Financial status

Budgeting

Financial aid

Personal stress management

Personal coping strategies

Time management

Home and work schedule vs schedule for class, clinical, skills lab, and studying

Family and friends’ support

Moral support

Need for help

Identify any weak areas and create a plan to address these. Implement your plan and evaluate results. If you find you have an insurmountable problem, consider whether this is the best time for you to enter the nursing program, or whether you should create a longer range plan to solve problems and then apply for the nursing program. If you are having trouble with this analysis, the Faculty Fellow for Health Sciences is available to help you. Call 352-854-2322, ext. 1611, to speak with the Faculty Fellow.

Note that the Associate in Science to Bachelor of Science Nursing program and the Licensed Practical Nurse to Associate Degree Nursing program are approved by the Florida Board of Nursing and accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), 3343 Peachtree Road, NE, Suite 850, Atlanta, Georgia 30326, telephone 404-975-5000.