



# A Guide to Online Degrees for Working Nurses



University of New Hampshire 



# Table of Contents

<b>3</b>	<a href="#"><u>Introduction</u></a>
<b>4</b>	<a href="#"><u>Advantages of Online Nursing Programs</u></a>
<b>6</b>	<a href="#"><u>Types of Online Programs for Working Nurses</u></a>
<b>8</b>	<a href="#"><u>Behind the Scenes of the Online Classroom</u></a>
<b>10</b>	<a href="#"><u>How to Succeed as an Online Student</u></a>
<b>12</b>	<a href="#"><u>Paying for Your Online Nursing Degree</u></a>
<b>14</b>	<a href="#"><u>Your Next Steps</u></a>
<b>16</b>	<a href="#"><u>About Our Online Nursing Programs</u></a>



## Today more than ever, nurses are pursuing advanced degrees online—and for good reason!

Online nursing programs are more convenient and affordable than brick-and-mortar alternatives, especially for working nurses, and advanced degree can help improve your career and salary prospects.

But finding and succeeding in an online nursing program can be intimidating, especially if it's been a few years since you were last in school. We'd like to help.

In this guide, we'll walk you through everything you need to know as you consider pursuing an online nursing degree.

- Advantages of online nursing programs
- Types of online programs for working nurses
- Behind the scenes of the online classroom
- How to succeed as an online student
- Paying for your online nursing degree
- Your next steps







## Advantages of Online Nursing Programs

There are a lot of advantages to pursuing an online nursing degree, both for your life and career. Here are some of advantages of online programs for working nurses.

### You'll Stay Competitive

Earning a bachelor's or master's degree in nursing can make you a much more competitive candidate when applying to hospitals. These hospitals have a growing need for deeper, more specialized skill sets, and many are required to employ a certain number of nurses with advanced degrees to earn Magnet Status, the gold standard of quality nursing. That means if you earn an advanced degree, you'll have a clear, competitive advantage in the workplace.

### More Career Choices

If you have an RN diploma or Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN), the number of roles you're able to fill can be somewhat limited. The skills you develop while pursuing a BSN or M.S. Nursing, however, greatly open up your options—making it easier to pursue leadership roles, and making it possible to specialize in a field of nursing that interests you.

## Increased Earning Potential

While salary is influenced by many factors, such as years of experience, location, and specialization, getting an advanced degree in nursing can help you earn more. According to **Payscale.com**, the average salary for someone with an associate degree in nursing is \$67,000 per year; but nurses who have a BSN earn \$78,000 on average, and those with an MSN earn on average \$91,000.

## Flexibility for a Balanced Life


Pursuing an advanced degree while working as a nurse can be challenging. But online degrees offer you the ability to pursue education on your terms. Lectures may be viewed whenever and wherever you're available, such as in your living room or at a desk in your bedroom; and classwork can be completed as you have the time—during off-hours and weekends. Pursuing an advanced degree doesn't have to upset your life. Instead, an online education can complement it.

### Average Salary for Nurses by Degree:

ADN  
\$67,000

BSN  
\$78,000

MSN  
\$91,000



Source: Payscale.com, Compensation Research.  
(visited Nov. 2018)



# Types of Online Programs for Working Nurses

There are various types of online programs for nurses currently in the workforce, but two of the most useful are the Bachelor of Science in Nursing and the Master of Science in Nursing degrees.







## Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN)

For working nurses who began their careers with an RN or associate degree, online BSN programs, such as our RN to BSN degree, provide the opportunity to pursue better, more diverse opportunities. This degree deepens your knowledge and approach to care, while also preparing you for more specialized roles and leadership positions.

Online RN to BSN programs are usually completed within two years, and require an ADN, RN diploma, or a bachelor's in another field to apply. As an added benefit, some programs allow you to use your existing job as the required clinical experience.

## Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)

An online M.S. Nursing degree is the next step for those who've earned a bachelor's and want to open up further advancement opportunities and continue honing their specialized knowledge in areas such as pediatrics, orthopedics, oncology, mental health, and more. Holding an a master's in nursing can help you gain more autonomy on the job, leverage better hours, and influence the policies and care practices of your hospital.

M.S. Nursing programs generally require a BSN degree and RN license to apply, and usually take up to two years to complete. While a small number of programs allow you to apply with just an ADN, it can be very difficult to complete an M.S. Nursing degree without the experience gained from a BSN degree.

# Behind the Scenes of the Online Classroom

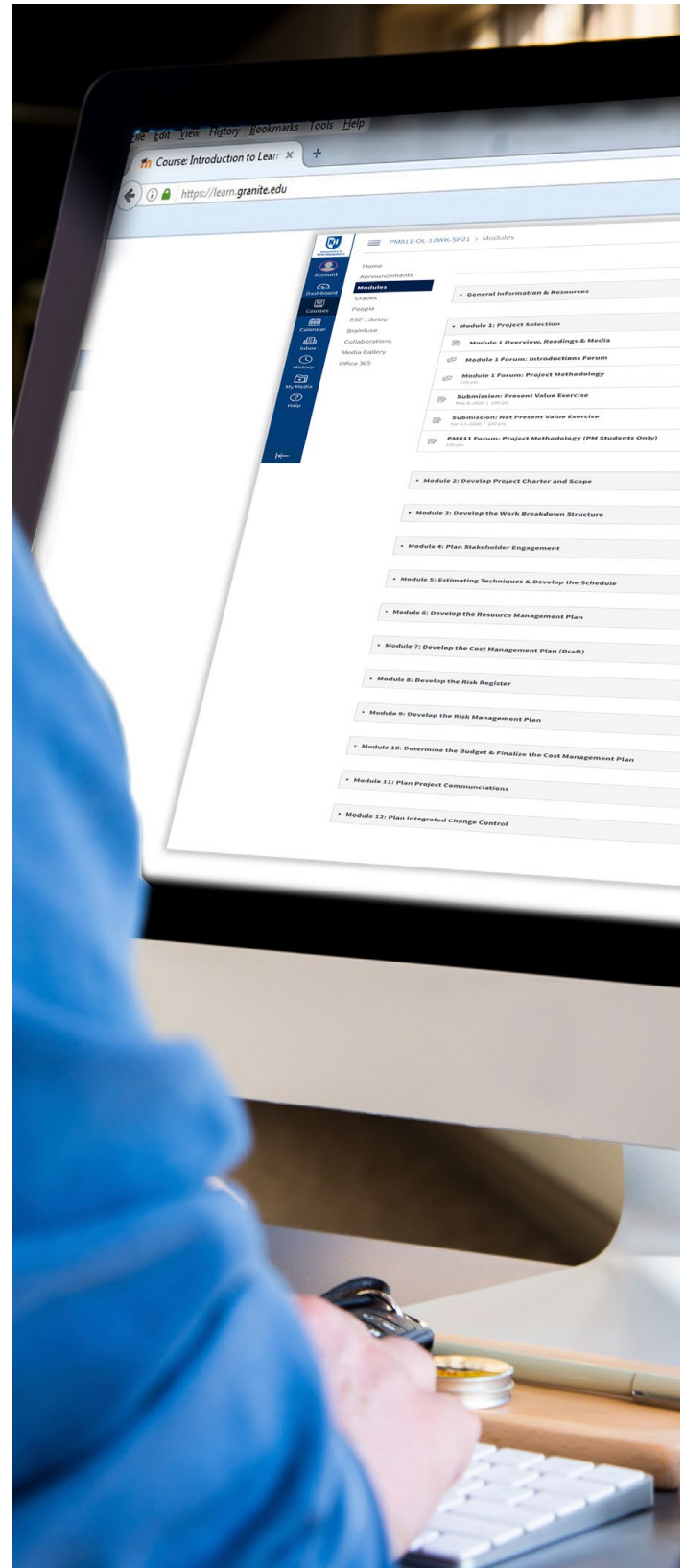
As you consider pursuing an online education, you should start by gaining insight into how classes work online. Here's a brief overview of what you can expect in an online classroom.

## Online Orientation

Most online classes begin with an orientation (often a video), in which the goals and components of the class are outlined. You'll also likely be introduced to the online classroom interface and be directed to important resources, such as the online bookstore and library. Orientation is important for every student, but it's especially important for those who've never taken an online course before or have been out of college for a few years and need a refresher.

## Accessing Lectures

Because your class won't be gathering in a physical room for lectures, you'll instead log into the online classroom to access recorded lectures, notes, and readings from your instructor. You will watch or read these resources on your own, but your instructor will also be there to guide you through points of confusion via email or video chat.





## Assignments and Testing

In the online classroom, you'll have many of the same assignments you would in a traditional face-to-face, such as papers, readings, responses, and more. The biggest difference is that you'll be uploading your finished assignments, completing quizzes through an online portal, and taking on more responsibility in remembering deadlines—since your instructor won't be there to remind you each week in person.

## Engaging with the Class

Engaging with classmates is an important part of any education. In the online environment, you'll interact with your classmates through discussion boards, messaging, or live video. Some instructors might even create a Facebook group for the class. Class conversations will usually revolve around readings or, depending on the instructor, students may be asked to come up with topics of their own and work together to share resources.





## How to Succeed as an Online Student

The online classroom offers many benefits to working nurses, from convenience to affordability; but it does come with unique challenges. If it's been a while since you were last in school, you'll need to acclimate yourself to life as a student, recalibrate your study habits, and learn how to navigate an online interface.

During this process, it's easy to feel a bit lost, but remember: your past experiences as a student are 100% transferrable to online learning, even if it may seem unfamiliar.

## Here are a few steps you can take to feel prepared for your online education:

### 1. Get Off to a Good Start

At the beginning of your course, take your time getting oriented. Go through your course's full orientation, carefully read the syllabus, and explore your online classroom interface. Make sure you know where to find class resources, how to submit assignments, and how to get in touch with your instructor should questions arise. This will help prevent a lot of issues from cropping up down the road.

### 2. Check Your Deadlines

One of the main challenges of the online classroom is managing time and deadlines. You won't be meeting with your teacher in-person, so they won't be able to provide as many reminders to complete your work. That makes it vital for you to stay on top of your various deadlines, from assignments, to class discussions, and more.

### 3. Keep a Schedule

As a nurse, you're already busy balancing your professional and social lives. That's why it's so important for you to keep an organized schedule as you take online classes. Buy a personal planner, where you can write down all key deadlines and block off time specifically for completing classwork; or, if you'd prefer, use an online planner or calendar app. Whatever medium you choose for your schedule, be sure to update and reference it frequently to ensure your life and education continue running smoothly.

### 4. Check for Course Announcements Daily

Over the course of the semester, your instructor will make important announcements on your course homepage, such as changes to deadlines or assignment instructions. Missing these announcements could hurt your grade or result in missed assignments, so you should check your course page frequently—even daily—for updates, to ensure you never miss out on vital information.

### 5. Reach Out When You Need Help

Online classes may be conducted remotely, but that doesn't mean you're alone! If you ever find yourself struggling or falling behind with coursework, reach out to your instructor and classmates immediately. They're there to help you, and the sooner you ask for help, the sooner you'll get back on track for success.





# Paying for Your Online Nursing Degree

Pursuing an advanced nursing degree is an investment for the future, but how do you go about paying for, or even affording, that degree?

## Go Online!

Online degrees have many benefits, but one of the biggest is affordability. You can avoid the extra fees associated with room, board, or student activities and there's no commute to pay for. Class materials, such as textbooks, are sometimes even available as an *Open Educational Resource*, which is free classroom course content. That makes for a more affordable education.

## Look into Employee Tuition Reimbursement Programs

Because hospitals want more of their staff to pursue advanced degrees, many offer tuition reimbursement programs. While you'll still need to cover upfront tuition costs, the reimbursements themselves could save you thousands of dollars—so reach out to your company's Human Resources department to see what programs are available to you.



## Set up a Payment Plan

Many colleges offer tuition payment plans, which break costs into three or four payments per term. This allows you to spread out the financial burden, rather than tackling it all in a single lump sum. This is especially helpful if you need to break up your payments as you wait for tuition reimbursements from your employer at the end of the term.

## Apply for Financial Aid

Federal aid is available to students of any age, both young and old—so fill out a **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** to see what loans you may be eligible for. You should also look into the many nursing grants and scholarships offered by colleges, healthcare companies, federal agencies, and nonprofits throughout the U.S.





## Your Next Steps

Now that you know more about online nursing degrees and how to pursue them, it's time to take the next steps toward your online degree.

### Start with Research

To find the right online program, it's important you begin with research. Look for programs with features like regional accreditation, CCNE accreditation, rolling admission, and multiple terms. You should also make sure your top choices are authorized in your home state, as each state has laws governing whether out-of-state colleges can offer online programs to state residents.

### Pass the NCLEX-RN®

If you apply to an RN to BSN or master's program, you are often required to show you passed the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). This is the standardized exam used by state boards of nursing to determine whether a candidate is prepared for entry-level nursing practice.



## Prepare to Apply

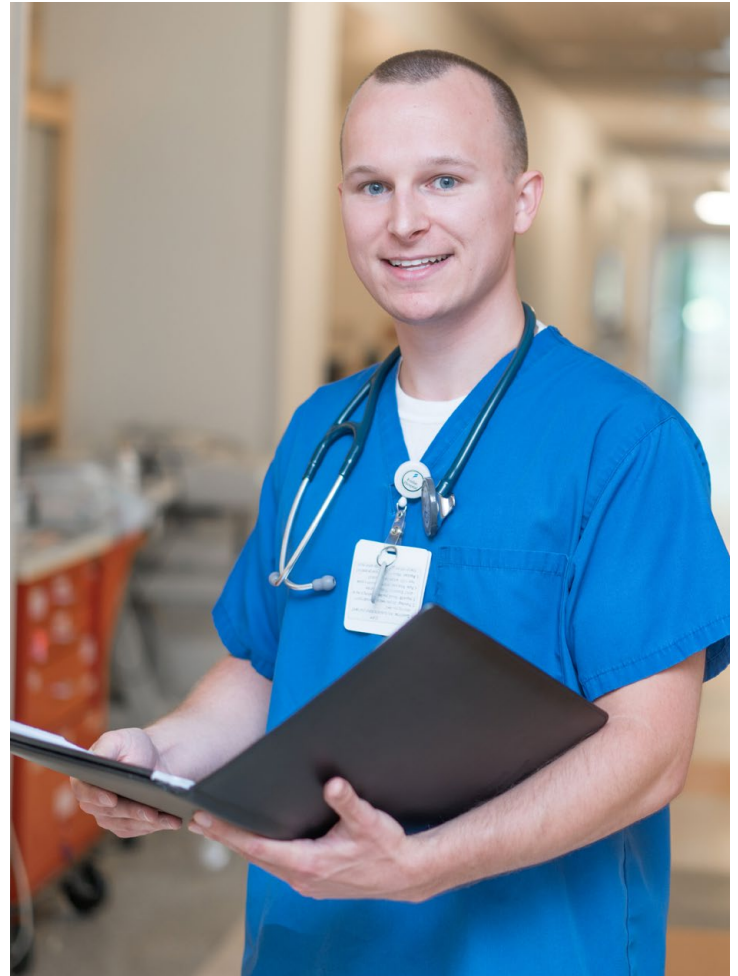
As a nursing program applicant, in addition to your chosen colleges' general requirements, you also often have to submit an active RN license (issued from the state in which you practice), a personal statement or essay, references, and a resume. Collect these materials early, and be sure to apply to multiple programs to keep your options open!

## Request Your Transcripts

For RN to BSN programs, you'll have to provide proof of either an associate degree in nursing from a regionally accredited college or university, or a nursing diploma earned from a school of nursing or teaching hospital. For master's programs, in turn, you must provide transcripts from your undergraduate coursework. Get in touch with your previous college, university, or nursing school to have transcripts sent wherever you apply.

## Prepare Financial Aid and Payments

Remember to complete your FAFSA to see what federal loans are available, and sign up for a payment plan to spread costs throughout the term. After that, be sure to make your first tuition payment on time, and you'll be well on your way to earning an online nursing degree!



### Cost Savings Tip

When searching for an M.S. Nursing degree, find out how many credits are in the program and calculate the overall cost. A high-quality, 30-credit program will cost *less* than a comparable MSN that requires more credits.

# About Nursing Programs at UNH College of Professional Studies

We offer nurses the chance to advance their careers through our RN to BSN and M.S. Nursing Health Care Leadership degrees. Our programs are accredited by the Collegiate Commission of Nursing and our bachelor's programs are top ranked in New Hampshire by *U.S. News & World Report*. They're also among the most affordable options for nurses in New England. Through these programs, you will learn to enhance your career, implement evidence-based care, start influencing health policy, and become a leader in nursing.

## Advantages

### Exclusively Focused on Adult Students

As part of the University System of New Hampshire, we have been a leader in online education for nearly 20 years. We're exclusively focused on providing adult students with supportive, high-quality programs in high-demand fields.

### Scholarships for Community College Grads

New Hampshire's community college graduates are eligible for a scholarship when they're admitted to our RN to BSN Pathway program.

### Master's Degree Designed with Employers

Representatives from major NH health care employers such as Dartmouth Health, Frisbie Memorial Hospital, and Catholic Medical Center, provided guidance to help develop our Master's Nursing in Health Care Leadership program during their time on the health care advisory board.

### Affordable, Accredited, and 100% Online

We are a public, nonprofit university that's regionally accredited by New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE). Since the inception of *U.S. News and World Report* online rankings in 2012, we have consistently held a competitive top position in New Hampshire.



The baccalaureate degree program in nursing and master's degree program in nursing at UNH College of Professional Studies are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education ([ccnaccreditation.org](https://www.ccnaccreditation.org)).



**University of New Hampshire**

