



Questions to ask a nursing program before you apply

Choosing the right nursing school provides you the best start to your future nursing career. We hope these questions stimulate ideas and questions that will help you get that right start.

1) Is the nursing program approved/accredited?

- a) Prior to taking the licensure exam to become a registered nurse (NCLEX exam), a candidate must complete a course of study from a nursing school that prepares them for the licensure exam. The nursing school must be approved by the State Board of Nursing in the state where the school is located.
- b) Approved. The State Board of Nursing has the legal authority to approve and regulate nursing education programs in the state. Approval refers to recognition by the Board of Nursing education programs that meet certain established standards and requirements under the Nurse Practice Act and the Board rules and regulations. The list of approved nursing education programs in Colorado can be found on the Board website under the 'education' link at www.dora.state.co.us/nursing.

The State Board of Nursing in Colorado requires that schools providing nursing education programs be accredited by a U.S. Department of Education approved post secondary accrediting agency. Within 4 years of receiving Board approval, the nursing education program also be accredited by one of two nursing accreditation agencies – NLNAC (National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission) or CCNE (Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education). You can go to the NLNAC or CCNE websites to see what nursing schools have achieved this accreditation and what schools are in the process of gaining accreditation.

- c) Accredited. Accreditation is a process that an educational institution goes through to demonstrate quality to the public. Accreditation is important to a student if there is a chance that you will need to transfer credits and may be a requirement to advance in your career. The U.S. Department of Education identifies two levels of accreditation: (1) institutional and (2) specialized or programmatic.
 - i) Institutional Accreditation. Accreditation for an educational institution may be either regional accreditation such as Higher Learning Commission, North Central Accreditation or national accreditation such as Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges. The U.S. Department of Education recognizes accrediting agencies that are reliable authorities on quality of education. To see all of the U.S. Department of Education approved accrediting agencies go to www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html. Institutional accreditation is important to a student because it assures transfer of credits. Educational programs with the same level of accreditation are more likely to accept credits from other institutions with the



same level of accreditation. Always look at the transfer policies found in the catalog, enrollment agreements, etc. of the school that you wish to transfer to.

- ii) Programmatic Accreditation. Programmatic accreditation refers to accreditation of nursing education programs. In the U.S. there are two national nursing accrediting bodies: (1) NLNAC and (2) CCNE. NLNAC accredits practical nursing, associate degree, baccalaureate degree and graduate degree nursing programs. CCNE accredits baccalaureate and graduate degree nursing programs. If you are considering advancing your career by going to graduate school in nursing, look at the admission requirements of the graduate program to see if they require that you be a graduate of a particular type of accredited program.

2) Specific questions you'll want to ask to be sure you are meeting the requirements for taking the NCLEX licensure exam.

- a) Does the nursing education program have approval from their State Board of Nursing?
- b) What are the NCLEX pass rates for that nursing education program?
- c) What do current students say about the nursing education program? What do they say about the quality of faculty? Do faculty who are teaching in the program know and demonstrate competence in their subject area? What do they say about the types of clinical experiences? Is there a variety of clinical opportunities so that you will be prepared in the basic areas of adult medical surgical nursing, pediatric nursing, obstetric and newborn nursing, and psychiatric nursing?

3) Specific questions you'll want to ask if you are planning to advance your career?

- a) Does the school hold regional accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission?
- b) Does the nursing program have accreditation from either the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (Bachelor's of Science in Nursing and graduate programs) or NLNAC – National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (Diploma, Associate Degree in Nursing, Bachelor's of Science in Nursing and graduate programs)?

4) What are the graduation rates?

- a) Some students will find the curriculum in nursing schools to be challenging. Many schools offer assistance to nursing students to help them be successful and graduate in a timely fashion. To help you know a little more about the success rate for nurses completing the program, you'll want to know the following:
- b) What percentage of students entering the program graduated within the expected time?
- c) Are there sufficient clinical placements that students are attending clinical at the expected time or does the program have 'delayed clinicals', which results in delayed graduations? Delayed clinical experience is not a preferred way to receive clinical education for a student.
- d) What assistance is available to a student who is having difficulty with the coursework?
- e) What are the repeat and readmission policies for a student who is not successful?

5) What is the percent of job placement?

- a) Once you finish your nursing education program, you will most likely want to begin employment. Oftentimes, schools have a placement office or another resource for students



to help them identify potential employers, prepare for interviews and be successful in landing their first job.

- b) How many of the students graduating had job offers with three to six months following graduation?
- c) What are graduates who are successful in getting employed doing differently from those who are not getting employed?
- d) Check your own attitudes and expectations about employment to see if they are realistic.

6) What is the licensure (NCLEX) pass rate?

- a) Once students complete their nursing education to become a registered nurse, they are eligible to take the NLEX licensure exam or “nursing boards”. These exams are given via a computerized adaptive process in a testing center. Your education should help you pass the boards and become a successful, competent nurse. The Board of Nursing receives reports from the testing company on graduates from the approved nursing education programs in the state. The reports provide the percent of students who pass the licensure exam on the first attempt. The Colorado Board of Nursing and most of the state boards of nursing provide statistics on the schools pass rate on their website. Higher percent pass rate are preferred and in Colorado it should be more than 75 percent.
- b) How many of the students taking the NCLEX-RN exam to become registered nurses actually passed the first time taking the test?
- c) Does the school offer NCLEX preparation information or program?

7) How did the students rate their satisfaction with the program? How long does it take most students to complete the nursing program?

- a) You may request names and contact information from the school’s placement office to determine the satisfaction other students had in the program. You’ll also want to know if there are waiting lists prior to getting into the program; or other factors that may delay your pathway of education. For instance, if you are a full time student taking a community college program, ideally you’ll complete the program in two years. A bachelor’s degree program generally takes four years.

8) What is the application process?

- a) Just like applying to any school of higher learning, there is an application process and you’ll want to have a clear understanding of the process including: What are the admissions criteria? What is the admissions deadline?

9) Are the credits you earn transferable?

- a) You may have already successfully completed courses at another institute and will want to know if those credits will count toward graduation requirements. There may be a cost-saving to having your courses completed already so it is important to know. In addition, if you choose a school of nursing, you’ll want to know if those course credits will count toward other programs if you choose to or need to transfer mid-stream.

10) Where do students have their clinical experiences?

- a) Clinical education is an important part of the process and provides future nurses hands on experiences for which to build their future career. You’ll want to know the school’s current



list of clinical agency partners and determine if experiences in those agencies will foster the type of experiences you seek. You'll also want to know if you'll be required to have your own transportation to clinical sites.

11) Are there leadership opportunities for students?

- a) Schools of nursing are often associated with the national student nurses association or other organizations related to scholarship. Other opportunities for gaining and honing leadership capacities may be available and you'll want to ask your potential schools to determine what those options may be.

12) What number of students are accepted versus the number that are qualified?

- a) You'll want to take a look at your chances of being accepted in the program by asking about the number of students who were qualified but not accepted.

13) What pre-licensure programs do you offer?

- a) Some schools have a variety of options for students interested in becoming a registered nurse. If you have another degree already, this question becomes even more important.

14) Is there a simulation lab?

- a) Simulation labs allow a student to gain clinical experience in a simulated patient environment. Some schools have high-fidelity mannequins that allow a student to practice before working with real patients.