



**Illinois Nursing Workforce Center**  
**Tool-kit for Advancing Nursing Education**  
**Suggestions for Use**

**Tool-Kit Use**

- This tool-kit was designed to be used by nurse leaders who will use the kit in conjunction with working nurses to encourage and promote returning for educational advancement in nursing.
- This toolkit may also be used as a self-assessment instrument by nurses considering returning to an educational setting while continuing to work.

**Suggestions**

1. Tool-kit should be introduced (potentially in a group setting) and background information should be presented to potential users related to the startling statistics that support educational advancement for nurses.
2. Introduction to the tool-kit should also include the commonly cited barriers and benefits nurses experience when considering returning for advanced degrees.
3. Use of the kit should be in combination with the plan set forth by the healthcare facility to promote educational endeavors (specifically how the nurse will receive the needed support, i.e. financial, time, etc.).
4. Expectations from healthcare facilities should be clarified. i.e. "It is expected that our support for your return to school will require that you conduct a biennial in-service for staff on the topic of their choice."
5. This tool-kit is intended to make the process of returning to school less overwhelming for nurses and somewhat inspirational. Presenter should serve as a role- model and leader in the facility and community.



## Step One: Self-Assessment

### Professional Goals

All goals should be specific, measurable, able to be attained, relevant, and include a specific timeframe.

Personal vision for your career in nursing (Short term, 5 years):

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Personal vision for your career in nursing (Long term, 10 years):

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### Readiness and Attitude

Benefits:

Evaluate the following commonly perceived benefits by nurses who have considered returning for advanced education. Answer the following questions.

#### Personal Satisfaction:

1. Will I benefit personally from returning to school (personal growth)? Y N Unsure
2. Presently, am I motivated to engage in learning? Y N Unsure
3. Presently, do I have a desire to learn new things? Y N Unsure
4. Will returning to school offer personal validation? Y N Unsure

#### Career Advancement:

1. Will pursuing a higher degree offer more mobility in my career? Y N Unsure
2. Will pursuing a higher degree offer advancement in my current position? Y N Unsure
3. Do I need further educational preparation for my expanding roles? Y N Unsure
4. Will I obtain an improved salary from returning for further education? Y N Unsure

#### External Pressure:

1. Do I need a higher degree to be more marketable and meet my career goals? Y N Unsure
2. Does my employer expect that I will obtain a higher degree? Y N Unsure
3. Does my employer value my seeking a higher degree? Y N Unsure
4. Does my employer REQUIRE a higher degree? Y N Unsure

If you answered mostly yes, it is time to consider pursuing further education. If you are unsure of several answers, determine where you might seek more information? Do you need to do a



personal inventory of goals? Do you need to contact your employer to gain information about available positions, and the options for advancement if you return for further education? Contacting your employer and setting up a meeting may also help you to gain a clarification of expectations.

Write out what you perceive to be the most important benefits to returning for further education. How will advancing my education benefit me professionally and personally?

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**Barriers:**

Evaluate the following commonly perceived barriers by nurses who have considered returning for advanced education. Answer the following questions.

**Academic Barriers:**

1. Is the cost of higher education too expensive? Y N Unsure
2. Are the classes too rigid or not useful to your profession? Y N Unsure
3. Are the classes set up in an inflexible manner? Y N Unsure
4. Are the educational advisors not available often enough or are they too difficult to reach?  
Y N Unsure
5. Have you had several negative experiences with education in the past? Y N Unsure

**Workplace Barriers:**

1. Does your current education meet the requirements for your position? Y N Unsure
2. Does your workplace offer financial assistance for education? Y N Unsure
3. Is your workplace schedule too inflexible to accommodate returning for a higher degree?  
Y N Unsure
4. Does your workplace offer incentives for returning for a higher degree? Y N Unsure
5. Do you consider your workplace an environment supportive of your continuing your education?  
Y N Unsure

**Personal Barriers:**

1. Do you think your age is a limitation for returning for a higher degree? Y N Unsure
2. Do you have several roles you are trying to already fulfill in the other areas of your life?  
Y N Unsure
3. Are you apprehensive about finding the resources to return for a higher degree (financial, role support, etc.)? Y N Unsure
4. Are you uneasy about your ability to be successful in an academic setting? Y N Unsure
5. Do you have personal expectations that include advancing your education? Y N Unsure



If you answered “yes” to several questions under academic barriers, these may be an issue for you. Considering looking into programs online that may suit your interests and setting up an appointment with an academic advisor directly in the college or school of nursing. If you answered yes to several questions under workplace barriers, consider looking into the incentives offered by your workplace with the human resources department or your nurse managers. If you answered yes to several questions under personal barriers, consider each of these barriers, and if necessary, seek support with family, friends, and colleagues. An academic advisor may also be useful in helping you attain an idea about what returning to school involves (time, financial requirements, etc.) If you are unsure of several answers, consider the resources you have available to seek out and obtain these answers.

For example:

Do you need to contact some academic institutions and identify what their programs entail?

Do you need to take a personal inventory?

Do you need to contact your employer with questions?

Write out what you perceive to be the most pertinent barriers for you when considering returning to pursue a higher degree:

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### **Learning Style**

Learning Style Inventory questionnaires are available online if you have questions about what type of learner you are. Completing a Learning style inventory may also help you determine what sort of program will work best for you (Online, traditional, or blended).

Online Nursing Programs: *(please note, the majority of Illinois baccalaureate completion programs are either completely online or have a significant portion of the classes online)*

When considering an online program, some questions proposed by O’Neil and Fisher (2008) a potential student may want to ask include:

By what means do you best learn? (Are you an active learner? Are you an independent learner?)

Do you learn through interacting with others?

Do you focus on the process or the outcome of learning? (Do you feel it is more important to learn concepts that apply to practice or are you more focused on grades?)

What are your computer skills? (Comfort-level with computers and basic computer programs)

(p. 57-58).

2020: Revised by Illinois Nursing Workforce Center.

2013: S. Adams, MSN, RN (Univ. of Illinois-Chicago) created original toolkit for IHAC: Illinois Healthcare Action Coalition



Blended Nursing Programs: When considering a blended or hybrid program, potential students should consider both traditional and online questions (above) to determine the appropriateness of the type of program where they will be most successful.

Traditional Nursing Programs: When considering a traditional nursing program, a potential student may want to determine:

Will I be able to accommodate the time-commitment of pursuing a traditional nursing degree?

Do I learn best through interactions with others?

Do I work well in a group interactive setting?

**Resources and Support**

See step 2: Creating a Personal Plan

**Illinois Nursing Workforce Center  
Tool-kit for Advancing Nursing Education  
Step Two: Creating a Personal Plan**

**Organize your Goals**

Complete the following sections. Even the smallest positive move toward a goal can keep you motivated. Even if the action seems simple (i.e. putting in a transcript request at your former university), small actions combined get you significantly closer to your goal of returning to continue your education.

All goals should be specific, measurable, able to be attained, relevant and include a timeframe.

1. My long-term professional goals are (These goals should include those that you plan to meet within a five-year time period, you may use your short- term goals from the self-assessment component of the tool-kit):

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2. My short-term professional goals are (These goals should include those that you plan to meet within a shorter time frame, even within the year):

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3. What can I do in the next 6 months to move toward accomplishing my goals?

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4. What can I do in the next 6 weeks to move toward accomplishing my goals?

5. What can I do in the next 6 days to move toward accomplishing my goals?

6. What can I do today to move toward accomplishing my goals?

**Timing:** You can offer a range here but try to be specific. i.e. I will contact my undergraduate university to obtain a copy of my transcripts within 1-2 weeks.

1. My time frame to accomplish my long-term goal(s) is:

Goal: Time for completion:

Goal: Time for completion:

2. My time frame to accomplish my short-term goal(s) is:

Goal: Time for completion:

Goal: Time for completion:

**Recognizing outside responsibilities:** You can and should use your calendar for this section.

1. Hours per week I will dedicate to my job:

2. Hours per week I will dedicate to my education (class time, homework, research, organization):

3. Hours per week I will dedicate to my family (children, grandchildren, spouse, partner, etc.):

4. Hours per week I will dedicate to other commitments (volunteering, committee work, religious activities, etc.):

5. Hours per week I will dedicate to self-care (exercise, time with friends, hobbies, etc.):

6. Hours per week I dedicate to other responsibilities:

**Financial considerations**

1. Make a thorough budget to examine current resources available for education.

There are several budget resources available on the internet that deal with financial plans that include continuing education expenses.

2. Contact the director of human resources at your place of employment and look into any tuition benefits or scholarships that may be available through your facility.

3. Visit nursing scholarships sites, a few are listed below:



Federal: HRSA: <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/loans-scholarships/nurse-corps/scholarship>

Illinois Nursing Workforce Center: has links to state, national and private foundation nursing scholarships <http://nursing.illinois.gov/financial.asp>

Another resource may include scholarship opportunities, or tuition reduction through your nursing education program.

## **Illinois Nursing Workforce Center Tool-kit for Advancing Nursing Education Step Three: Evaluating and Selecting a Program**

### **Evaluating Programs**

Consider program accreditation:

Accreditation is a self-regulatory process by which non-governmental associations recognize educational institutions or programs that have been found to meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality. (ACEN <https://www.acenursing.org/faq/>)

Nursing programs in the United States are accredited by:

ACEN: Accreditation Committee for Education in Nursing (formerly NLN- NLNAC: National League for Nursing Accreditation Center)

AACN- CCNE: American Association of Colleges of Nursing- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education

Accreditation of a program assures that the program has been reviewed periodically by a nationally recognized organization with nursing educational standards. Accreditation with either the NLNAC or CCNE can affect the student's financial aid eligibility. If the program is not accredited, the student may not be eligible for federal or state financial aid, employer tuition reimbursement programs, scholarships, or grants. Accreditation of a program also enables students to become eligible for advanced certifications and degrees in nursing.

### **Selecting a Program**

Examine your professional goals and review the types of programs that are available and will directly support your goals. Also consider the type of program that was congruent with your learning style (Traditional, Online, or Blended) and whether or not the program is accredited by the ACEN (formerly NLNAC) or AACN-CCNE.

## See Nursing Education Flow Chart (final page)

If you are an **RN with an Associate Degree in Nursing**, consider:

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

The baccalaureate nurse generalist will:

- Practice from a holistic caring framework
- Practice from an evidence base
- Promote safe quality patient care
- Use clinical/critical reasoning to address simple to complex situations
- Assume accountability for one's own and delegated nursing care
- Practice in a variety of healthcare settings
- Care for patients across a health-illness continuum
- Care for patients across the lifespan
- Care for diverse populations
- Engage in care of self in order to care for others
- Engage in continuous professional development

Advanced roles of the baccalaureate prepared nurse:

- Patient advocate
- Patient care coordination and transition
- Patient partnership
- Leadership
- Evidence-based holistic care giver
- Designer manager and coordinator of care
- Member of a profession

(AACN, 2008)

RN to BSN programs usually take from 16-24 months. In Illinois, the majority of RN to BSN or bachelor of science in nursing completion (BSNc) programs are offered online. This link shows the format in which BSNc programs are offered: online, blended or traditional format.

[http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2018-08-21a\\_IDFPR\\_INWC\\_IL\\_PostLicense\\_BSNc\\_Online.pdf](http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2018-08-21a_IDFPR_INWC_IL_PostLicense_BSNc_Online.pdf)

### **RN to MSN**

1. Master's programs prepare nurses for roles in:

- Administration
- Teaching
- Research informatics
- Direct patient care

2. Usually take about 2-3 years (Discuss options with academic advisors in your selected programs to determine exact length of time and degree requirements).

3. Offered in online, blended and traditional formats. In Illinois the majority of programs have a significant online component.
4. Baccalaureate curriculum offered in the front end of the program.
5. Recommended for the RN with an associate degree and a BA or BS in another field.

If you are an **RN with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing** consider:

#### **BSN to Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)**

1. Master's programs prepare nurses for roles in:

- Administration
- Teaching
- Research informatics
- Direct patient care

2. Offered in online, blended and traditional formats.

4. **Clinical focus:** application for licensure as an **Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN)** may be applied for after program completion and national certification. The APRN roles are:

- Certified Nurse Practitioner
- Certified Clinical Nurse Specialist
- Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (in Illinois all programs result in the DNP degree)
- Certified Nurse Midwife (IL program at Univ. of Illinois at Chicago results in DNP degree)

3. May consider a **MSN dual degree**

- MSN/MBA- master's in business administration
- MSN/MPH- master's in public health
- MSN/MHA- master's in health administration

5. BSN-MSN programs can take 18months- 3 academic years depending on whether the student attends part or full-time. Discuss options with academic advisors in your selected programs to determine exact length of time and degree requirements.

#### **BSN to Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)**

“...if your ultimate goal is the doctorate, progressing seamlessly from baccalaureate to doctoral education is more efficient, requiring less time in class and lower educational expenses” (AACN, 2012).

- Efficient
- Early career doctorate
- Nurses in practice and new graduates
- Rigorous (Full-time study strongly recommended)

Highest level of preparation of in nursing practice



BSN to DNP programs can take anywhere from 3-7 years depending on whether the student attends part or full time (Discuss options with academic advisors in your selected programs to determine exact length of time and degree requirements).

### **BSN to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

- Efficient
- Early career doctorate
- Nurses in practice and new graduates
- Rigorous (Full-time study strongly recommended)

Terminal degree in nursing

Creation of the nurse scientist

Generate and communicate new knowledge

40 programs nationwide- traditional, online, and blended options available

The Illinois Nursing Workforce Center has links to all the Illinois graduate degree programs

<http://nursing.illinois.gov/Gradeducation.asp>

If you are an **RN with a Master of Science in Nursing** consider:

### **Post-Master's certification**

Include, but not limited to:

- Holistic Nursing
- Forensic Nursing
- School Nursing
- Nursing Education
- Occupational Health
- Women's Health
- Gerontology
- Adult Health
- Oncology

INWC resource [http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2020-01\\_RN\\_Post\\_Licensure\\_Certificates\\_final.pdf](http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2020-01_RN_Post_Licensure_Certificates_final.pdf)

### **MSN to Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)**

Highest level of preparation of in nursing practice

Level of education necessary for advanced nursing practice, Advanced practice roles

Nurse Practitioners, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Nurse Anesthetists, and Nurse-Midwives

Leadership roles

Faculty roles

### **MSN to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

Terminal degree in nursing

Creation of the nurse scientist

Generate and communicate new knowledge

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At least 4 programs in Illinois – online, hybrid and in class  
Leadership roles

Advanced faculty roles

Masters and Doctoral Education information retrieved from:

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/brochures/GradStudentsBrochure.pdf>

**The Illinois Nursing Workforce Center (INWC) includes a links to**

The Illinois 4 year university and 2 year community college partnership agreements

[http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2020-05-06\\_ILBSNcPgms\\_Partnerships\\_Final.pdf](http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2020-05-06_ILBSNcPgms_Partnerships_Final.pdf)

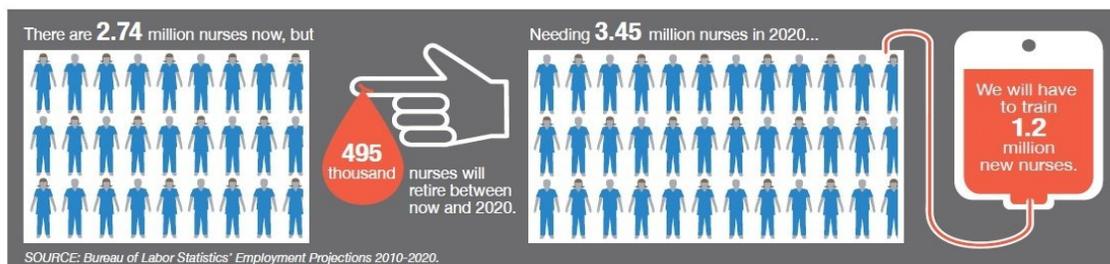
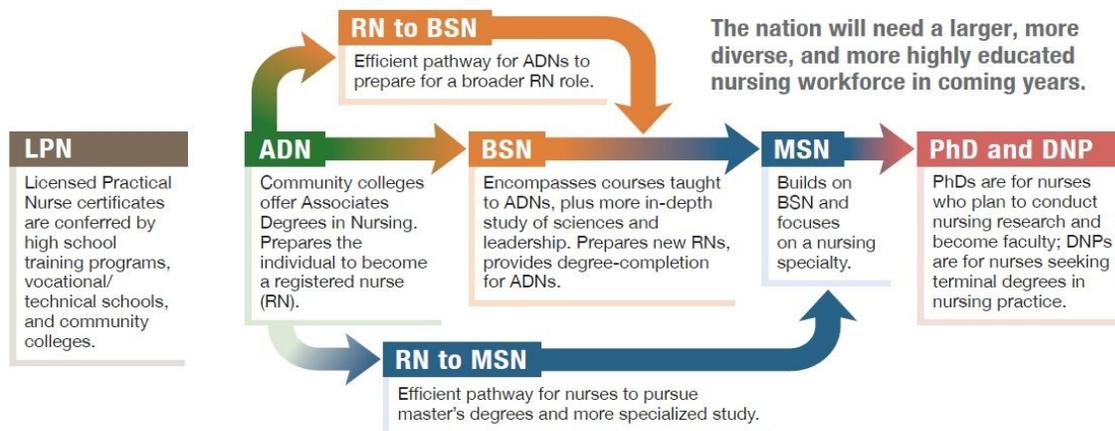
All RN-BSN programs <http://nursing.illinois.gov/BaccCompeducation.asp>

All post-licensure certificate programs [http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2020-01\\_RN\\_Post\\_Licensure\\_Certificates\\_final.pdf](http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2020-01_RN_Post_Licensure_Certificates_final.pdf)

All graduate nursing education programs <http://nursing.illinois.gov/Gradeducation.asp>

The types of graduate nursing education specialty programs [http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2017-11\\_Grad\\_Ed\\_Specialization\\_Focus.pdf](http://nursing.illinois.gov/PDF/2017-11_Grad_Ed_Specialization_Focus.pdf)

## TOWARD A MORE HIGHLY EDUCATED NURSING WORKFORCE



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) 2012

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