

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Findings from the Annual Survey of Schools of Nursing Academic Year 2011-2012

NLN Annual Survey Finds Education Pipeline Expanding But Lack of Clinical Settings Still Crimps Entry into PN and ADN Programs

This year's NLN Annual Survey of Schools of Nursing finds the nation's nursing education capacity expanding and some of the long-standing unmet demand for seats in nursing schools beginning to subside. Waiting lists for entry into nursing programs were persistently long throughout the late-2000s, with both national statistics, as well as news reports and anecdotes from around the country, describing a widespread lack of capacity in nursing education programs.

From 2009 to 2011, the percentage of nursing programs that turned away qualified applicants was peaking across all types of nursing education programs, with shortage levels most acute among programs that prepare students for initial licensure. In 2011, 43 percent and 48 percent of master's and doctoral programs, respectively, rejected qualified applicants. More dramatically, well over 80 percent of programs offering practical nursing and associate degrees were forced to turn away qualified candidates, as did almost two thirds of baccalaureate programs.

Current Data Show Some Reduction in the Acuity of Capacity Shortages. The number of pre-licensure RN programs grew throughout the mid-2000s, peaking at a growth rate of 10 percent in 2006. Although growth then slowed to just 1 to 2 percent per year, admissions statistics indicate that capacity shortages have begun to ease. In 2012, the percentage of programs that turned away qualified applicants dropped substantially for every program type with the exception of those offering the baccalaureate degree. Moreover, as a measure of volume, the percentage of all qualified applications rejected by programs also declined, almost across the board. With some states considering the requirement of a baccalaureate degree for RN practice, only RN-to-BSN programs maintained their 2011 seating shortage levels. And, in another indication that nursing education capacity has grown to meet demand, the percentage of programs that could not fill all available seats for new students also fell in 2012.

In a new analysis conducted this year, the NLN examined capacity shortage indicators by the urban-rural location of nursing programs. About two thirds of PN and associate degree programs are located in urban centers (64 percent and 67 percent, respectively), in contrast to 80 to 90 percent of baccalaureate and higher degree programs. Approximately one in five PN and ADN programs are located in large rural areas, with 10 percent in small rural locations.

Although one might expect metropolitan-based programs to benefit from their proximity to dense population centers, in actuality, urban programs experienced student vacancy rates that were similar to their more rural counterparts. Moreover, among urban-based diploma and RN-to-BSN programs, the percentage of programs that could not fill all available spots for admission was notably higher than in programs located in less dense population centers. (See Figure 1.)

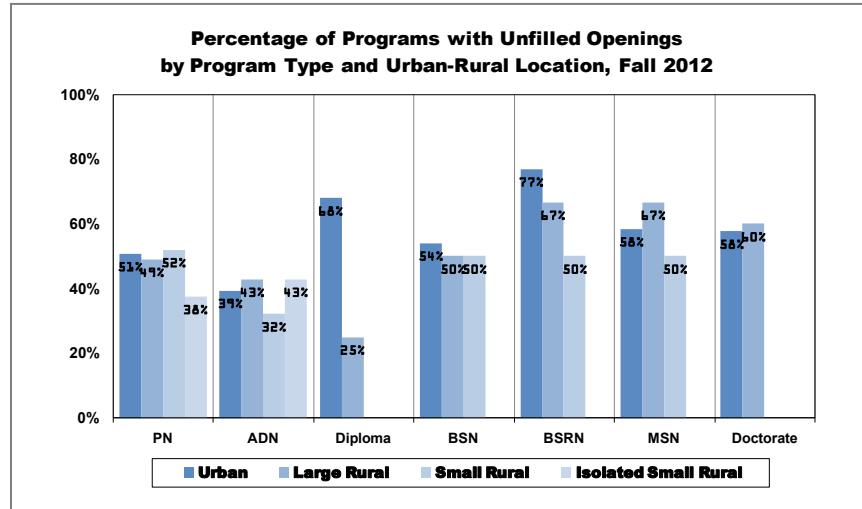


Figure 1

Shortage of Clinical Placement Settings Increasingly Crimps PN and ADN Program Expansion. Deans and directors of schools housing programs that did not accept all eligible applicants were asked to identify the primary obstacle to expanding their program's capacity. Since 2010, the percentage of those directing ADN and PN programs who cited a shortage of clinical sites as the primary impediment to expansion has steadily increased. For PN programs in particular, the percentage jumped to 52 percent in 2012, a 10 percent rise over 2011 levels. By contrast, graduate programs consistently cite a lack of faculty as the primary obstacle to expansion. However, the percentage of all types of programs citing a faculty shortage has declined since peaking in 2009.

Age of Associate Degree Students Rises. Last year saw a substantial increase in the percentage of associate degree students who were over 30 years old – an unexpected finding given that adult students typically leave school and return to the labor market as recessions ebb, reducing the overall age of the college student population. Because associate degree nursing students comprise two thirds of all pre-licensure RN enrollees, this uptick in enrollments among older students will likely reignite concerns over an aging nursing workforce and the potential for future labor shortages as large swaths of the RN population reach retirement age. (See Figure 2.)

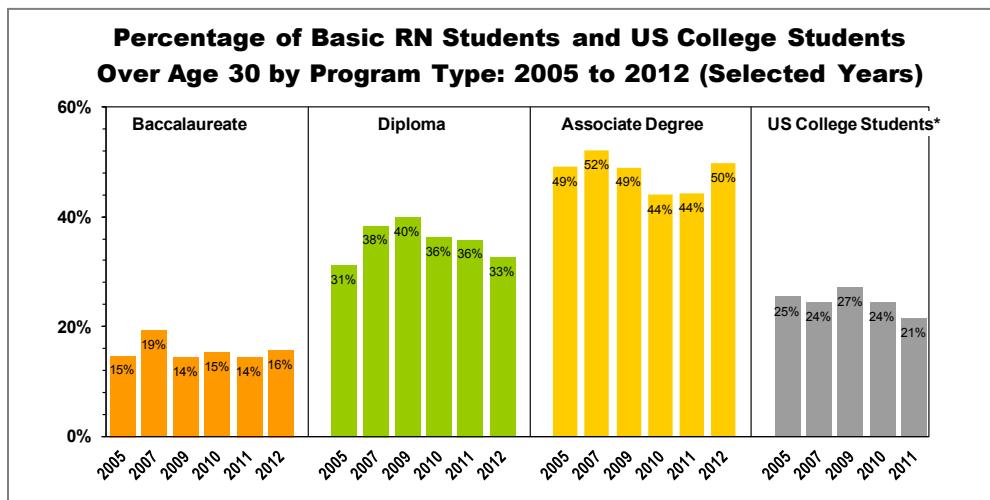


Figure 2

The percentage of men enrolled in pre-licensure RN programs held steady in 2012 at 15 percent, compared with male representation among all college students of about 43 percent. Men are particularly underrepresented at the post-licensure and graduate levels, representing just 11 percent of RN-to-BSN, master's, and doctoral students in nursing.

The percentage of racial-ethnic minority students enrolled in pre-licensure nursing programs remained stable in 2012 with approximately one in three PN and ADN students and one in four diploma and BSN students belonging to minority groups. However, looking beyond the totals, both Blacks and Hispanics remain underrepresented among basic RN students, as the percentage of Blacks and Hispanics in the general student college undergraduate population continues to rise. (See Figure 3.)

By contrast, the percentage of minorities enrolled in most types of post-licensure programs rose notably in 2012. RN-to-BSN programs exhibited the largest uptick, with minority enrollment gaining four percentage points to reach 26 percent. Doctoral programs also saw a gain of four percentage points, with over one in five students (22 percent) belonging to a minority group in 2012. Minority enrollment in master's programs held steady at 24 percent.

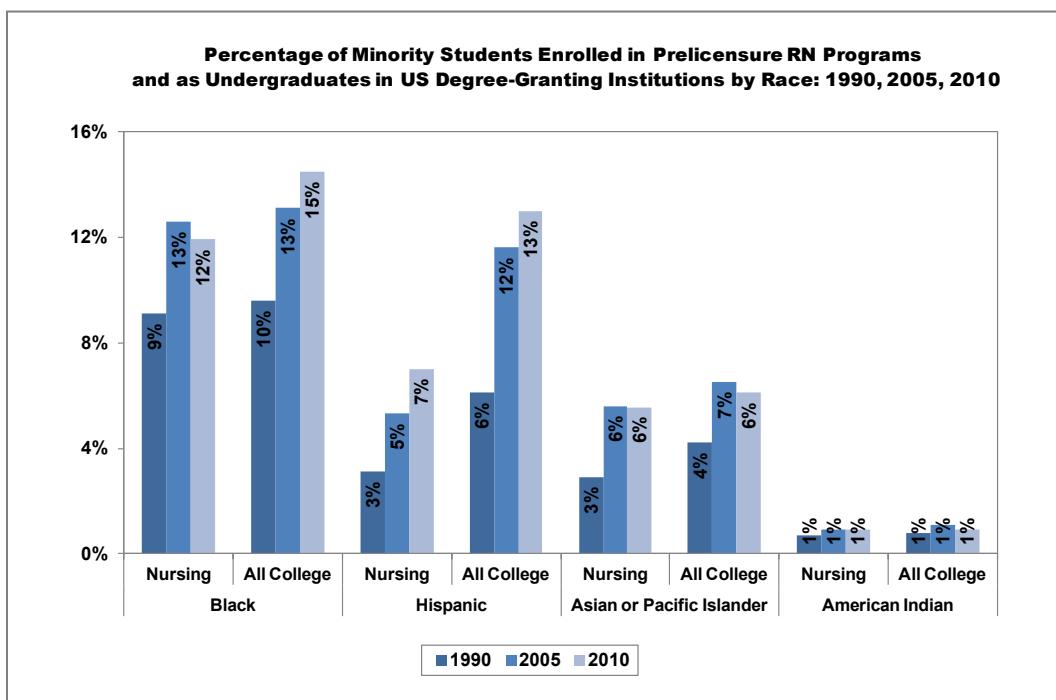


Figure 3

New Survey Section on Faculty Hiring. This year's annual survey featured a special section on the topic of faculty hiring. The study found that 73 percent of responding schools had hired new full faculty in the past 12 months. When asked to rank criteria used in faculty hiring, the top three, in order of importance, were: ability to teach particular course work, ability to communicate effectively, and having formal, graduate-level teacher training. Ranked lowest were ability to provide service to the profession, nation, region, locality, or institution; ability to write refereed journal articles and make refereed presentations at conferences; and ability to bring in external research funding. Ability to work well with others and having a doctoral degree were intermediate considerations, ranked fourth and fifth, respectively.

Average Ranking Given to Criteria for Hiring New Faculty, 2012

Hiring Criteria	Average Ranking (from 1 to 8)
Ability to teach coursework	2.2
Can communicate effectively	2.9
Having formal, graduate-level teacher training	3.2
Works well with others	3.4
Having a doctoral degree	5.2
Can provide service to profession, nation, region ... or institution	5.3
Can write refereed journal articles / make conference presentations	6.4
Can bring in external research funding	7.3

Figure 4

Overall, more than two thirds (69 percent) of new hires were prepared at the master's level. Sixteen percent had PhDs, and 7 percent had DNP. New hires were ranked similarly with respect to teaching skills regardless of their credentials. However, while PhD-prepared faculty were ranked slightly higher on curriculum development and assessment skills, they were ranked notably lower than both DNP- and master's-prepared faculty on clinical skills.

Please watch *Nursing Education Perspectives* and the NLN DataView™ website for more information as we continue to mine this rich dataset. As always, we are grateful to all of the schools of nursing that contributed data to this survey. Without their generous assistance, this study would not be possible.

Kathy A. Kaufman, PhD
Senior Research Scientist, Public Policy
National League for Nursing