Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
New Careers in Nursing

Doctoral Advancement in Nursing Faculty Toolkit

August 2013

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Doctoral Advancement in Nursing Faculty Toolkit

First Edition
August 2013

CREATED IN COLLABORATION WITH

Carolina G. Huerta, EdD, RN, FAAN
Nursing Department Professor & Chair
Lillian O. Slemp Endowed Professor
The University of Texas Pan American

Teri A. Murray, PhD, APHN-BC, RN, FAAN
Dean, Saint Louis University School of Nursing

Catherine Millett, PhD
Senior Research Scientist
Educational Testing Services
Policy Evaluation and Research Center

Becky Choi, Principal
group**forward**, LLC

Vernell DeWitty, PhD, MBA, MSN, RN
Program Deputy Director
New Careers in Nursing Scholarship Program
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
Washington, D.C.

© COPYRIGHT 2013 NEW CAREERS IN NURSING

Washington, D.C., 2013.

Published by agreement between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Careers in Nursing Scholarship Program (NCIN).

CORRESPONDENCE:

NCIN
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 530,
Washington, D.C. 20036-1120

www.newcareersinnursing.org

Doctoral Advancement in Nursing Faculty Toolkit

This toolkit may be used, downloaded, reproduced, publicly displayed or reprinted for personal/noncommercial purposes only. Permission to reproduce for commercial application must be obtained from NCIN in writing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose. 5
Objectives 5
How to Use the Toolkit 5
Part I: Facts about Graduate Nursing Education in the United States 6
Section One: Introduction 6
Section Two: Doctoral Education in Nursing. 7
Part II: Motivating Students to Pursue a Post-Baccalaureate Degree 9
Part III: Preparing for Successful Admission to Graduate School. 10
Section One: Introduction 10
Section Two: Advising Students. 10
Section Three: Graduate School Preparation Timeline Guide 11
Part IV: The Graduate vs. Undergraduate Experience. 13
Section One: Introduction 13
Table 1: Comparison of Undergraduate versus Graduate School. 14
Section Two: Action Steps for Pursuing Graduate Education 15
Part V: Helping the Student Decide on a DNP or PhD 16
Section One: Introduction 16
Section Two: Comparison of DNP and PhD Programs 16
Table 2: DNP Compared to PhD. 17
Table 3: Expected Outcomes and Curricular Elements of PhD Programs in Nursing Role. 18

Part VI: Applying to Graduate School Programs 19
Section One: Helping the Student Decide Which Graduate School(s) to Consider 19
Section Two: Assisting Students with the Application Process 19
A. Introduction 19
B. Preparing to Take the Entrance Exam(s) 20
C. Writing the Personal Statement/Admission Essay 22
D. Letters of Recommendation 23
E. Preparing for a Graduate Admissions Interview 25
F. Managing Outcomes of the Application Process 26
Part VII: Guiding Students on Resources for Financing Graduate School 29
Section One: Introduction 29
Section Two: Funding Your Graduate Nursing Education 29
Part VIII: Helping Students Identify Variables that Impact Graduate School Success 33
Section One: Introduction 33
Section Two: Variables that Impact Graduate School Success 33
Part IX: Other Resources 35
Appendix 36
Applying to Graduate School (The Checklist) 36
References 37
Acknowledgments 38

Purpose

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide resources for nurse faculty who are advising undergraduate nursing students about potential future enrollment in post-baccalaureate study. The materials in the Toolkit are intended to provide information to faculty to be used in guiding students who are in the process of deciding whether to attend graduate school. Materials included can be used to assist the student with the application process and subsequent successful enrollment in graduate study.

The Faculty Toolkit is a work in progress. It addresses issues that can help guide students through the graduate school application process. New materials may be added. This Toolkit is not to be considered the complete source for advising students on graduate programs of study.

Objectives

The objectives of the Doctoral Advancement in Nursing Faculty Toolkit are to:

- Provide faculty with the basic information necessary to guide undergraduate students seeking post-baccalaureate education.
- Provide faculty with tools and resources to assist undergraduate students seeking post-baccalaureate education.
- Provide nursing faculty with the skills to identify nursing students who are potential candidates for graduate study.
- Provide guidance for faculty when preparing letters of recommendation.
- Increase student success in the submission of applications for graduate education.

How to Use the Toolkit

This Toolkit contains information helpful for students applying to graduate school. The faculty advisor for BSN or MSN students contemplating doctoral degrees can use these materials as a template for a successful application and enrollment process. The Toolkit also offers resources that supplement the information it provides. The Toolkit and supplemental resources are not meant to be an inclusive list.

Part I: Facts about Graduate Nursing Education in the United States

Section One: Introduction

Nursing is the nation's largest health care profession with more than 3.1 million registered nurses practicing nationwide. Despite its large size, many more nurses are needed to meet the growing demand for nursing care. There is a demand for masters and doctorally prepared nurses for advanced practice, clinical specialties, teaching, and research roles; and the future demands are expected to outpace supply. As you discuss the possibility of a post-baccalaureate career with students enrolled in BSN programs, those facts should be emphasized.

Faculty shortages at nursing schools across the country are limiting student capacity at a time when the need for nurses continues to grow. Budget constraints, an aging faculty, and increasing competition for clinical sites have contributed to this emerging crisis. Knowing about the faculty shortage in nursing schools is also important to mention to students who are expressing interest in graduate school, and specifically in doctoral study. Typically, doctorally prepared nurses are employed as nursing faculty and/or nurse researchers. Knowing that there is a shortage of doctorally prepared nursing faculty might be valuable information for BSN students who are contemplating what type of graduate degrees to pursue (PhD or DNP).[1]

1 Source: *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/brochures/GradStudentsBrochure.pdf*

Section Two: Doctoral Education in Nursing

For nurses looking to assume leadership positions, faculty appointments, and specialist roles, a doctorate is the appropriate credential. Today's nursing student can choose from doctoral programs focused on either research (PhD) or practice (Doctor of Nursing Practice). Given the need for more nurses to serve as Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN), assume faculty positions, embark on careers as research scientists, and pursue leadership roles, nursing schools are moving quickly to increase the number of students entering both practice- and research-focused doctoral programs.

Nursing science and nursing education are in transition. As the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree becomes the standard for specialized advanced practice roles, the unique and important roles filled by those prepared with the PhD in nursing need to be reaffirmed. PhD graduates will continue to be the scholars and investigators who develop the competencies necessary to expand the science and practice of nursing including in areas such as health policy and informatics. PhD graduates will be expected to provide leadership in the profession overall. They should be prepared to serve as scientists, role models, mentors, and teachers, although the focus and setting of their work may vary.

A strong curriculum is an essential component of doctoral education in nursing. However, it is not sufficient for ensuring that graduates achieve the desired outcomes. Research-focused doctoral programs also must include a minimum set of additional essential elements: qualified faculty with research programs that match the student's interest; infrastructure and resources to support the program; and a comprehensive evaluation program to assure attainment of goals and continuous improvement. For more information on essential components of research-focused doctoral programs, see the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's (AACN) report: *The Research-Focused Doctoral Program in Nursing Pathways to Excellence*.

PhD programs in nursing may prepare graduates through a variety of education pathways. Nurses may enter the PhD program after completing a baccalaureate in nursing, a master's in nursing, or a DNP degree. Some PhD programs admit nurses with graduate degrees in other disciplines; in addition, other programs admit individuals with no nursing background or degrees. Varied pathways provide flexibility and support graduates in achieving diverse career goals. Institutions should be clear about the education pathways offered and should assist individuals in determining pathways that best fit with their educational background and career goals.

Prospective students also should be proactive and seek guidance regarding career goals and selection of appropriate educational pathways. In the academic setting, the PhD is the highest academic degree and is required for success as a scientist in multiple disciplines. In the scientific arena within and beyond the academy, the PhD is the beginning preparation for the development of independence in scientific pursuit. Attainment of the PhD requires a strong scientific emphasis within the discipline; an understanding of the science of related disciplines and translation science; dissemination of innovations; and interdisciplinary collaboration.[2]

2 Source: *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/PhDTaskForceReport.pdf*

In providing guidance to students contemplating the pursuit of PhD study, it is very clear that students must be informed early in their undergraduate careers that only those students who are highly qualified, motivated, and committed to a research career are likely to be admitted to doctoral study. Students' past performance must demonstrate evidence of success in rigorous programs of study. Evidence can be reflected in past grades, Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, letters of recommendation, and/or past publications. The expectation is also that students can be focused and can commit a significant portion of their time to study, writing, seeking grants, and writing for publication (AACN, 2010). Providing students this type of information is not meant to discourage them but rather to provide a realistic picture of expectations related to graduate study. Once the student has a clear picture of expectations related to graduate study, motivating the student to pursue a post-baccalaureate degree may be as simple as providing facts and guidance.

Part II: Motivating Students to Pursue a Post-Baccalaureate Degree

An individual interested in pursuing graduate studies should complete a list of factors (driving and restraining) that may impact the decision to pursue an advanced degree. Making a list of these factors may help the potential student understand and seek ways to overcome the restraining forces (Cathro, 2011).

Key components for successful completion of graduate education have been identified as:

1. Determining the type of doctoral education desired (PhD or DNP);
2. Having a strategic plan for successful completion of doctoral studies; and
3. Creating a systematic plan for the completion of oral and written program requirements (Smith & Delmore, 2007).

Smith & Delmore (2007) identify specific questions for consideration when contemplating whether to pursue doctoral education:

- Why do I want a doctoral degree?
- Am I interested in a research or clinical degree? Am I interested in education?
- What are my career goals or aspirations?
- Which type of doctoral program will best meet my career goals?
- What is it like to be a doctoral student?
- Is this the right time for me to attend school?

Part III: Preparing for Successful Admission to Graduate School

Section One: Introduction

Undergraduate students with interest in pursuing graduate degrees can participate in activities that can prepare them for a successful application and admission to graduate school, while enrolled in an undergraduate program. When advising students to pursue post-baccalaureate education, faculty should inform students of the common admissions requirements such as GRE scores and the importance of undergraduate grade point averages (GPA). Most universities use these as admission requirements since they tend to be predictors of success in graduate education. Other factors that may affect the student's eventual success include the ability to study independently, work collaboratively, and persevere (Source: PhD – Promising Practices).

Section Two: Advising Students

As their advisor, you can guide them to explore websites and links that contain useful information regarding masters and doctoral programs available throughout the country, most especially the programs' areas of focus and admission criteria. This Toolkit provides a list of potential resources that can be used to identify graduate programs available in the United States. Resources such as *Peterson's Grad School Bound* website and *Peterson's Guide to Nursing Programs* (2012) provide comprehensive information on graduate nursing programs in the United States and Canada.

Advice that you can give to a student who is exploring the idea of attending graduate school includes:

- **Focus on his/her current studies.** A high GPA is a requirement for most graduate programs.
  - Concentrate on the immediate goal of graduating with a high GPA.
- **Find research opportunities on and off campus.** Participation in these research opportunities will expose the student to potential mentors who can provide the letters of recommendation required in the application process.
  - The personal statement usually required as part of the application process will be stronger as a result of this participation.
  - Involvement in research activities can be in disciplines other than nursing.
  - Paid summer research opportunities may exist elsewhere and in other educational institutions. Help the student explore these options.
- **Find a faculty mentor.** Advise students to get to know the faculty. Have the student identify one or two faculty members who might have a research focus in the area of student interest.

  - Ask students not to wait until the senior year to find a faculty mentor.
  - Have them make appointments to visit faculty during their office hours. Tell the students to ask faculty about their research interests and what led them to explore graduate study.
- **Take the GRE or any other required entrance exam early.**
  - Near undergraduate completion, or shortly thereafter, register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.
- **Start thinking about what to include in a personal statement or entrance essay.**
  - Send the student to the university writing lab for tutoring if needed.
  - Have the student bring you a rough draft of what he or she intends to include in the personal statement.
- **Discuss ideas on how graduate school can be financed.**
  - Students may panic over the costly expenditures required for graduate school attendance.
  - Use the resources found in the Toolkit that describe sources of funding available.
- **Identify an appropriate graduate school preparation and application timeline.**
  - Ideally this timeline should begin no later than the student's sophomore year. [3]

Section Three: Graduate School Preparation Timeline Guide

This is a general outline of the timeframe for faculty advice to students contemplating graduate school.

During Your Undergraduate Education:

- Discuss your interests for post-baccalaureate work with your advisor and faculty members.
- Begin to define or inquire about specialties in your chosen field (science or clinical degree; what advanced practice role do you want to pursue?).
- Meet with academic or faculty advisors to discuss your interest in pursuing doctoral education.
- Become knowledgeable of the resources available to you and develop a list of schools of interest.
- Get involved in research or clinical practice to determine which doctoral degree and area of interest may be a good fit for you.
- Ask faculty members for their input and advice.
- Investigate fellowships, scholarships and financial aid.

3 Sources: Stanford University Graduate and Undergraduate Studies. (2013). G*rad school preparation.* *http://www.stanford.edu/dept/humsci*; University of California San Diego. (2013). Career *services center: Nursing.* *http://career.ucsd.edu/undergraduates/consider-grad-school/Nursing.html.*

Near undergraduate completion or shortly thereafter:

- Register and prepare for appropriate graduate admission tests.
- Have a list of 6–12 target schools. Visit as many of these campuses as possible.
- Begin to acquire letters of recommendation.
- Get started on your application essay. Set a timeline for yourself on application deadlines.

Once you are sure about pursuing doctoral education:

- Confirm and collect recommendation letters (3–5).
- Take necessary admission tests if you haven't already.[4]

Other information students should consider during this timeline:

- Are master's and DNP programs accredited by one of the two nationally recognized accrediting bodies for nursing education: the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education or the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission?
- What is the institutional reputation?
- Where is the institution located? Is it far from home? Will it be more costly living far from home?
- Is the program diverse (ethnic, geographic, etc.) Is there a specific region from which most students have come (demographics)?
- What is required in terms of undergraduate GPA, entrance testing (e.g., GRE), and prerequisites?
- Are education programs offered online, face-to-face, and/or in a hybrid format?
- How long is the program, what is the credit load and are full- and part-time study options available?
- What is the typical amount of time a student will take to graduate from the program?
- Where are graduates finding jobs and what percentage of graduates have job offers at the completion of their studies?
- Is there financial support available throughout the entire program of study?
- What is the typical amount of educational debt accrued?
- Are graduate stipends available?
- What are the expectations to receive a stipend?
- How many students drop out and what are their reasons for doing so (retention rate)?
- What percentage of those who are admitted graduate (graduation rate by cohort)?

For a complete listing of questions and answers go to: *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/brochures/GradStudentsBrochure.pdf*

4 Source: *www.gettysburg.edu/career*

Part IV: The Graduate vs. Undergraduate Experience

Section One: Introduction

Frequently, undergraduate nursing students will approach faculty for advice on how to get into graduate school and for information about the different types of graduate programs. These students appear to be quite interested in attending graduate school although they may be just beginning their undergraduate nursing education. Undergraduate nursing students may have the perception that certain career opportunities are limited or non-existent without an advanced graduate degree. Students, however, need to understand that graduating from college is not a good enough reason to go to graduate school and that graduate school is not an option for every undergraduate student (Fischer & Zigmond, 2004).

Students may not understand differences between learning experiences in graduate versus undergraduate programs. As a faculty advisor, it might be helpful to share facts that give the student a clear and realistic picture of what attending graduate school will be like and how attending a master's or doctoral program differs from the undergraduate learning experience. According to Fischer & Zigmond (2004), unlike in undergraduate school, in graduate school the student moves from being a consumer of knowledge to becoming a creator of knowledge. This will require more independent ways of thinking and development of intellectual skills such as critical analysis and higher order critical thinking.

Differences between undergraduate and graduate school experiences are stark and need to be discussed with students who are in the process of exploring graduate study. Being prepared will help students overcome barriers to success.

Some potential differences between the undergraduate and graduate school experiences are included in Table 1

TABLE 1: **Comparison of Undergraduate versus Graduate School**[5]

Differences	Undergraduate	Graduate
Years in School	4–5 years	MSN 2–3 years PhD 4–8 years
Responsibility	Meet external deadlines; teacher guided and directed assignments	Self-directed completion of deadlines; few external deadlines; thesis and dissertation work is dependent on self-direction
Coursework	Structured classes and assignments; lecture mode in large classes; multiple-choice exams; core courses outside major are required	Discussion oriented small classes; heavier workload; critical analysis papers; essays; in-depth study of one field; research projects means of evaluation
Classes/Class Size	Many general classes not in the major; classes are used as means for evaluation; large class size	In-depth classes in major area; research intensive evaluations; small class sizes
Faculty Interaction	Student initiates interaction; no further interaction with faculty once finishes class	Very involved with faculty; may work one to one; work may be judged by faculty committee
Learning	Basic educational foundations; learns what is already known	In-depth study of subject; involves creation of knowledge through research
Clinical Work	Supervised clinical work; up to 10 students per clinical faculty	Independent; works on research problems; creates knowledge
Motivation	Outside-oriented (parents, family)	Self-oriented; goal-oriented
Maturity	Usually younger; fewer responsibilities; externally motivated (parents)	Older; balancing work and school; internally motivated
Financial aid	Financial aid may be easy to attain for a first degree; parents may help student; may also owe a lot of money when student graduates	Financial aid may be difficult to get; may have to quit a job; may owe a lot of money when the student graduates
Stress	Short periods of high stress	Long periods of high stress; high achievers; successful and fear failure; juggling multiple responsibilities

It is obvious from the above table that there are differences in the undergraduate versus the graduate learning experience. These differences need to be considered by the student when deciding whether to attend graduate school. After reviewing the table, it might be worthwhile to once again ask the question "is the timing to attend graduate school right for me now?" If the answer is yes, the student should be reminded that there are different action steps to be taken when pursuing graduate education.

The following diagram demonstrates helpful action steps that students should become familiar with and follow when pursuing graduate education.

5 Sources: "North Dakota State University (n.d.). Differences between undergraduate and graduate schools. *Human Development and Family Science*; GradSchools.Com. (2013). Undergraduate vs. graduate school: A professor's perspective. *http://www.gradschool.com*"

Section Two: Action Steps for Pursuing Graduate Education

Explore Program Options

- online research
- follow-up calls/contact

⬇

Gather Information

- program requirements/selection criteria
- admission procedures (GRE scores, letters of recommendation, written essays, etc.)
- seek mentoring

⬇

Explore Financial Information

- tuition costs
- funding support (i.e., scholarships)
- assistantships
- stipends

⬇

Assess Program Environment

- orientation program
- supports (e.g., faculty research, student diversity, program handbooks, doctoral student)

⬇

Assess Administrative Policies and Procedures

- attrition
- student outcomes
- program evaluation
- etc.

⬇

Create a Database of Programs That Meet Your Needs

⬇

Apply to Three Programs

Part V: Helping the Student Decide on a DNP or PhD

Section One: Introduction

Deciding which type of doctoral degree to pursue may not be easy for an undergraduate student who has had limited exposure to faculty with nursing doctoral degrees. In fact, a student may assume faculty with the title "doctor" all have the same doctoral credentials. A resource that provides extensive information on doctoral education in nursing that the faculty advisor can recommend to the student is AACN's website *http://www.aacn.nche.edu*.

Whether the student is interested in pursuing a career focused in clinical practice or research will determine the type of doctoral degree he or she pursues. In addition, the faculty advisor can suggest the student visit the New Careers In Nursing (NCIN) website and take the self-assessment quiz entitled "Is There an Advanced Degree in Your Future?" to gain further insight into making this crucial decision. (*https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DANStudentAssessment*)

Section Two: Comparison of DNP and PhD Programs

"The DNP degree is a practice doctorate. The PhD is a research doctorate. Graduates of PhD programs are prepared to conduct independent research and disseminate their findings. The DNP will provide graduates with the skills and tools necessary to assess the evidence gained through nursing research, evaluate the impact of that research on their practice, and as necessary, make changes to enhance quality of care. Scholarship is an integral part of both doctoral degrees." (Duke University School of Nursing)

For an example of the differences between Duke's DNP and PhD programs, see Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: **DNP Compared to PhD**[6]

	Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)	PhD in Nursing
Focus	**Nursing Practice**	**Nursing Research**
Degree Objectives	To create nursing leaders in interdisciplinary health care teams by providing students with the tools and skills necessary to translate evidence gained through nursing research into practice, improve systems of care, and measure outcomes of patient groups, populations and communities.	To prepare nurse scientists to develop new knowledge for the science and practice of nursing. Graduates will lead interdisciplinary research teams, design, and conduct research studies, and disseminate knowledge for nursing and related disciplines, particularly addressing trajectories of chronic illness and care systems.
Curriculum Focus	Translation of evidence to practice, Transformation of health care, Health care leadership, and Advanced Specialty Practice	Trajectories of Chronic Illness and Care Systems
Core Courses	Evidence Based Practice and Applied Statistics Data Driven Health Care Improvement Financial Management and Budget Planning Effective Leadership Health Systems Transformation	Philosophy of Science & Theory Development Advanced Research Methods Statistics & Data Analysis Longitudinal & Qualitative Research Methods Chronic Illness & Care Systems
Mentored Teaching Experience	Optional	Minimum of 140 hours
Clinical Hours	500 minimum within capstone project	None
Capstone Project	Yes	No
Dissertation	No	Yes
Employment Opportunities Post Graduation	Health care administration, advanced practice nursing, clinical faculty or academic faculty	Nurse scientist, nursing faculty
GRE Required	Not for students who have an earned master's	Yes, but some schools waive this requirement for students who have an earned PhD

6 Source: Adapted from Duke University School of Nursing at *http://nursing.duke.edu/academics/programs/dnp/dnp-phd-comparison*

TABLE 3: **Expected Outcomes and Curricular Elements of PhD Programs in Nursing Role**[7]

	Expected Outcomes	Core Curricular Elements
Develop the Science	■ Master in-depth knowledge in a substantive area ■ Appreciate the history and philosophy of science ■ Understand the evolving nature of the nursing discipline ■ Critique and integrate different science perspectives in the conduct of research ■ Generate new ideas based on a critical evaluation of existing knowledge ■ Conduct original research ■ Utilize professional and research ethics and judgment in the conduct of research ■ Assume leadership in the conduct of culturally competent scholarship to improve nursing practice ■ Communicate research findings to lay and professional audiences and identify implications for policy, nursing practice, and the profession	■ Sufficient formal and informal learning experiences to build scientific depth in an identified area of study ■ History and philosophies of science ■ Scientific methods, including team science ■ Advanced research design and statistical methods ■ Research ethics ■ Data, information and knowledge management, processing and analysis ■ Ways of knowing and habits of the mind ■ Concepts and components of scholarship ■ Mentored research experiences, including interdisciplinary mentors ■ Preparation of research grants and manuscripts for publication ■ Structured/guided clinical or practice experiences as needed to inform one's area of science and its application
Steward the Discipline	■ Integrate the components of scholarship: research, teaching, mentoring, and service to the profession ■ Communicate scholarship including peer-refereed publications and presentations for professional interdisciplinary audiences ■ Understand the evolving roles and responsibilities of a nurse scholar	■ Theoretical/scientific underpinnings of nursing and other disciplines ■ Practice knowledge that informs nursing science and its application ■ Culture of nursing and practice environments ■ Strategies to influence

7 Source: *www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/PhDTaskForceReport.pdf*

Part VI: Applying to Graduate School Programs

Section One: Helping the Student Decide Which Graduate School(s) to Consider

As the faculty advisor, you may be in a unique position to assist students by identifying the graduate programs to which they should seek admission. There are so many choices and the undergraduate student may be overwhelmed in making a decision about where to apply.

As the student's advisor, there are several questions that can be posed to determine which university and school of nursing is right for the student. These are some of the questions students should ask:

- Which career trajectory do I see for myself in 10 years?
- Am I willing to move anywhere to obtain this degree?
- Does the school of nursing have researchers or evidence-based clinicians that are congruent with my research or clinical interests?
- Is financial aid easily available?
- What resources are available to students?
- How many students are admitted per year?
- What is the retention and graduation rate for students in doctoral programs?
- Are there job opportunities for myself and /or my significant other?
- Is housing available at a reasonable price?
- Are there good public schools in the area?
- What type of social life activities exist in the area?

Section Two: Assisting Students with the Application Process

A. INTRODUCTION

Once the student considers all aspects of the various nursing programs and decides where to apply, the next step is to help the student find the admission requirements and assist the student in the sometimes confusing application process. It typically involves completing the application form, paying a fee, submitting transcripts, taking admission tests such as the GRE, writing an admission essay or personal statement, and obtaining letters of recommendation. This next section of the Toolkit elaborates on these items.

B. PREPARING TO TAKE THE ENTRANCE EXAM(S)

1. **Entrance Exams:** Most graduate nursing programs require that applicants take some type of entrance exam(s). These may most commonly include the GRE or the Miller's Analogy Test (MAT). Some schools might even accept scores from the MCAT, GMAT, LSAT, or DAT. As a faculty advisor, it is essential to provide the potential graduate school applicant with accurate information about entrance exams. It is important to inform students that, although a number of exams might be acceptable, potential graduate students must inquire about the admission requirements of the schools of interest to them.

2. **GRE:** Most schools of nursing primarily accept scores from the GRE. The following is information to provide students you are advising about attending a graduate nursing program.

   The GRE is an admission exam commonly used to evaluate qualification for admission into a graduate program, which also will consider transcripts of undergraduate courses and letters of recommendation. The GRE has three major components: verbal reasoning; quantitative reasoning; and analytical writing. The Educational Testing Services (ETS) – GRE website describes each component as follows:

   The Verbal Reasoning section measures your ability to understand what is read and how you apply your reasoning skills. Students will be expected to:

   - analyze and draw conclusions from discourse; reason from incomplete data; identify author's assumptions and/or perspective; understand multiple levels of meaning, such as literal, figurative and author's intent
   - select important points; distinguish major from minor or relevant points; summarize text; understand the structure of a text
   - understand the meanings of words, sentences and entire texts; understand relationships among words and among concepts[8]

   The Quantitative Reasoning section measures your ability to show quantitative reasoning ability. You will be expected to:

   - understand quantitative information
   - interpret and analyze quantitative information
   - solve problems using mathematical models
   - apply basic mathematical skills and elementary mathematical concepts of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, probability and statistics

8 Source: *https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/content*

The Analytical Writing section measures your ability to provide focused responses based on specific tasks. You will be expected to:

- articulate complex ideas clearly and effectively
- support ideas with relevant reasons and examples
- examine claims and accompanying evidence
- sustain a well-focused, coherent discussion
- control the elements of standard written English

The GRE exam is taken at test centers throughout the U.S. and in other countries. On the ETS-GRE Website, students will find links for more information, testing centers, practice questions, institutions and sponsors approved to receive the test scores, and a host of other helpful information to help prepare for the exam. *https://www.ets.org/gre*.

3. Tips for Preparing To Take The GRE

Preparing for the GRE is one of the most important tasks, and potential graduate students must it take seriously. Most nursing programs require that applicants take some type of entrance exam(s). The most common graduate program entrance exam is GRE. The following are tips to share with students who are planning to take the GRE:

- Review your high school math. The GRE math section will include some basics from your algebra and geometry classes. If you feel the need for help, hire a tutor or buy math books such as *Algebra for Dummies*.
- Know the exam in terms of what will be covered. It is also important to know that the parts of the GRE have time limits for completion.
- Prepare from four to 12 weeks in advance of the test. There are various commercial programs available such as Kaplan and the Princeton Review that can be helpful in preparing.
- Expand your vocabulary and read as much as possible.
- Do practice timed tests. It is important to mimic the conditions of the exam so you feel comfortable during the actual exam.
- Make sure that you get enough sleep the night before the exam. Students who do not get enough sleep have difficulty thinking and remembering what they have learned.
- Determine areas that are weak and work on strengthening them. If math is your weakness, hire a tutor or concentrate on studying in that area.
- If you are not satisfied with the exam results, you can always take the test again. Many schools will only record the highest score achieved.[9]

9 Sources: Dove, L., & Murray, P. *Top 10 study tips for the GRE. www.howstuffworks.com*. *U.S. News and World Report*. (2012). *Test prep: 6 tips for GRE success*. *http://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/articles*.

C. WRITING THE PERSONAL STATEMENT/ADMISSION ESSAY

1. **Advising the Student:** The personal statement, also called an admission essay, provides students with the opportunity to communicate who they are to the admissions department. You should inform the student you are advising that the personal statement is an essential component of the admission packet.

   Unlike the transcript, the GRE score, or letters of recommendation, the personal statement allows the student to share with the admissions department why he or she is a good fit for that institution. It is an opportunity for the student to sell himself or herself; whereas the transcript highlights previous academic success with coursework and letters of recommendation speak to the student's past accomplishments and potential for success.

   General advice for writing the personal statement includes making sure that you inform the student that the writing should be clear and concise. Encourage the student to avoid clichés and commonly used phrases, check spelling and use correct grammar.

2. **Resources:** There are many Internet resources that provide guidance for writing the personal statement:

   a. **Berkeley University of California** indicates that the student should consider the following when writing the personal statement:

      - What is your purpose for wanting to pursue graduate study?
      - What excites you about the specific area of study?
      - What is your intended future use of your graduate degree?
      - You should describe your preparation, knowledge, and expertise to study in this field.
      - You may wish to describe any inconsistencies or problems within your application and how you overcame the circumstances to be successful.

      You can also make an appointment with a career counselor to write the outline for your letter. You should also write several drafts and have each draft reviewed by the Student Writing Center at your local college and your faculty advisor.[10]

   b. **The Purdue Online Writing Lab** provides specific tips for writing the personal statement and identifies specific questions that you should consider before writing the statement:

      - What makes you distinctive?
      - What details of your life might set you apart from other candidates?
      - What sparked your interest in the field?
      - What are your short term and long term career goals?

10 Source: *https://career.berkeley.edu/grad/gradstatement.stm*

- Are there gaps and/or discrepancies within your academic record that should be explained?
- Can you describe your personal attributes that may be viewed favorably?
- What makes you a stronger candidate than others?
- What makes your application stand out from among the others?[11]

c ***USA Today*** listed the following 10 tips for writing a graduate school personal statement:

- Get started by making an outline
- Describe the reasons for selecting your desired career path
- Be specific and include descriptions
- Do not write a "one size fits all" letter. Describe the rationale for selecting the specific program. Do your research.
- Describe the noteworthy reasons that attracted you to a particular program
- Describe your personal interests in a particular area of research or clinical practice
- Give examples of you motivation and capacity to succeed
- Be concise since personal statements are usually limited to two pages
- Proofread and refine
- Enjoy the process.[12]

d. **Additional resources for writing the personal statement are listed below:**

- Dartmouth Writing Program: Personal Statements – General Advice, *http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/tasks/graduate.shtml*
- Peterson's, Write a Graduate School Essay That Will Knock their Socks Off, *http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/write-graduate-school-essay.aspx*

D. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

1. **Accepting a Request to Write a Letter of Recommendation:** Many times the faculty advisor may also be faculty of record for the student in one or several classes. If that is the case, the student may feel comfortable enough to ask you for a letter of recommendation to include in the application packet for graduate school. As a faculty advisor, you may feel comfortable writing the letter of recommendation; it is important to note that these letters are important aspects of many admission requirements for doctoral study. There are guidelines that can guide the faculty in writing a strong letter of recommendation.

11 Source: *http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/*.

12 Source: *http://www.usatodayeducate.com/staging/index.php/blog/10-tips-for-writing-a-grad-school-personal-statement*

2. **Guidelines for Letters of Recommendation**

   a. **General Guidelines**

   In general, letters of recommendation should address the following basic components about the student:

   - academic abilities;
   - specific skill sets;
   - personal attributes;
   - past accomplishments;
   - areas for continued development;
   - future potential as a graduate student; and
   - the potential impact of the student's contribution to the major field.

   b. **Specific Guidelines**

   - **Introduction:** Introduce yourself (name and credentials, position where you work, your relationship to the student, and how long you have known the student) in your introductory paragraph.
   - **Impression of the Student:** The next paragraph should provide a general overview of your impression of the student.
   - **Student's Noteworthy Qualities:** The third paragraph should address the applicant's noteworthy qualities. You should provide an example of how you have seen these qualities manifested in the applicant. This includes the professional, academic, and personal qualities of the applicant followed by examples. For example, does the student have exceptional communication skills? Does the student demonstrate strong leadership qualities or skills? Is the student known for his or her analytical or conceptual abilities?
   - **Assessment of the Student as a Graduate Candidate:** Your next paragraph should state why you think this student is ideal or a good candidate for doctoral education and again you should support your statement with anecdotal information.
   - **Student's Potential for Contribution to the Field:** The next paragraph should state how you think the student might contribute to the program or major field of study.
   - **Statement of Support:** Lastly, you should reaffirm your confidence in the student's ability to be successful in graduate school.

   c. **Conclusion:** Conclude the letter by telling the admissions department to feel free to contact you if they would like additional information. It is important to include all of the necessary information in a concise format.

d. **Format:** Letters of recommendation should always be placed on official letterhead. The length of the letter varies but is typically a minimum of five paragraphs to include the information above and should not be longer than two to three pages.[13]

E. PREPARING FOR A GRADUATE ADMISSIONS INTERVIEW

There are many resources that will assist you in guiding students as they prepare for their graduate admission interview. The style of the interview may vary among schools and may involve being interviewed by a single person to an entire committee. In any case, below are some helpful hints to help the student make the interview a success.

1. Prior to the Interview

You should encourage students to do the following prior to the interview: Review specific information about the school by perusing their brochures and web information. Also review information specific to the doctoral program and the research expertise of the faculty with whom you want to work. Be prepared to discuss all aspects of their previous work, transcripts, and address gaps or deficiencies in the academic record. The student should be prepared to discuss career goals and how the program aligns with his or her career aspirations. Advise students to anticipate questions the interviewers may ask, be prepared to provide examples of accomplishments, skills, and experience, and prepare succinct answers. Typical interview questions may include:

Tell me your story and why you are interested in graduate school (describe how your previous academic work has prepared you for graduate school).

- What do you perceive as your strengths and areas for development? If you have specific challenges, describe plans to overcome identified challenges?
- What attracts you to this specific program?
- How would your professors describe you?
- Can you describe one of your greatest accomplishments and one of your greatest challenges and how you handled both?
- What contributions do you anticipate making to this field of study?
- What value will you bring to this program?

Encourage students to write down the questions he or she may have so as to ask them after the interview.

2. During the Interview

The student should come at least 15 minutes early for the interview. This may mean finding out the exact location of the interview prior to the scheduled time to ensure timeliness. The attire should be businesslike, neat and professional. The student should have copies of his or her resume/CV to distribute to committee members. Encourage the student to emote confidence; this only comes by preparing and practicing for the interview beforehand.

13 Source: *http://www.resume-resource.com/letterofrecommendation*

3. **After the Interview**

   The student should be prepared to ask the committee when he/she can anticipate an admission decision. Thank the committee for their time. The student should also follow up with a written thank you card to each of the committee members.[14]

F. MANAGING OUTCOMES OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

After completing the application(s), the student may become anxious awaiting the admission decision. Many programs notify applicants by email while some continue to rely on traditional mail services.

1. **Advise the student to keep the following in mind in order to stay focused on the process:**

   - If a student has applied to several programs, he/she may have formed a list of first, second, and third choices based on the research, campus visits, and interviews. It is important to remind the student to be aware of the time frame in which each of the programs will notify accepted applicants.
   - If the student has not received an admission decision from any of the programs to which he/she applied within the expected time frame, advise the student to call or email the graduate admissions office of the dean of graduate or doctoral programs.
   - Usually an acceptance notice will provide a date by which the student must accept the offered seat in the program and make a financial deposit that may be applied to the first tuition payment. If the student misses the deadline date and does not reply, by accepting the seat or declining to attend, his/her seat may be offered to another applicant on the waiting list.[15]

2. **Review the possible outcomes and actions with the student:**

   - You have been accepted into your first choice program. In this case, you should immediately respond positively and secure your seat as quickly as possible.
   - You have been accepted by your second or third choice program but have not yet heard from your first choice program. In this case, you should contact your first choice program and ask if they have made admission decisions. If not, contact your second/third choice programs and ask for an extension of the date required for response so that you can make a reasoned decision once you have all the data.
   - You have not been accepted into your first choice program. If you have been accepted into your second or third choice program, you now must decide whether to attend one of these programs or to meet with the admissions office or graduate dean to inquire about why you were not accepted and what you should do to strengthen your application and re-apply. Remind

14 Source(s): Student Academic Success Center, UC Davis, Student Affairs, *http://advisingservices.ucdavis.edu/advising/grad/handouts/graduate_school_interview_tips.html*

15 Peterson's Graduate Admission: Tips for a Great Interview, *http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/graduate-admission-tips-interview.aspx*

the student to consider all of the factors that impact the decision of which schools to consider, including academics, tuition support, health insurance, fit between student/faculty area of interest, work-life balance, housing, etc. Advise the student to take time, think things over, put emotions aside, and come to a reasoned decision.

3. **Help the student manage his/her expectations about the application process by reviewing the common reasons why applicants are not accepted into the programs that he/she has applied to:**

   - Marginal GPA and/or GRE scores
   - Weak/late/missing letters or reference
   - Failure to make an impression during the admission interview
   - Weak personal essay (lack of organization, clarity, typographical or spelling errors)
   - Lack of fit between the applicant's goals and the resources offered by the school

4. **Review with the student the following tips and strategies for remedying any identified application deficiencies:**

   - **GPA:** If the undergraduate GPA is not adequate to meet the admission requirements, some programs will allow the applicant to take one or two courses in the doctoral curriculum on a trial or non-matriculated basis. This opportunity allows the applicant to demonstrate his/her ability to succeed by obtaining a satisfactory grade in the course and impressing the professor.
   - **GRE Scores:** If GRE scores are inadequate, the applicant may enroll in a prep course and retake the GRE with the goal of improving his/her scores.
   - **Personal Essay:** If the personal essay is lacking, the applicant may ask for an opportunity to rewrite the essay and re-apply the following year. Encourage the student to seek input from a mentor or academic advisor in order to refine and strengthen the personal essay.
   - **Letters of Reference:** It is more difficult to obtain information regarding letters of reference. If the student waived the right to read the letters of reference when he/she requested the reference, then the student will not be allowed to see the letters. The best thing to do is to choose the references wisely and if the student senses a reluctance to write the letter on the part of the reference provider, the student should withdraw the request immediately and seek another reference.
   - **Fit:** If the student is informed there is not a fit between the student's interest area or career goals and the ability of the school to meet these goals, the best thing to do is to either critically review the goals and modify them to be more consistent with those of the academic institution or choose another school. It is unlikely the school will modify its program to meet the student's

needs. If a student is admitted to a school under these circumstances, the result is often a negative experience for both the student and the school. A good fit cannot be forced and if there is a mismatch between the student's needs/goals and the academic resources; it is beneficial for all if this is discovered early on before valuable time, effort and financial resources have been invested.

5. **Encourage the student to be persistent, be wise and not to get discouraged. If the student is determined to pursue doctoral study, then he/she will find a program that meets his/her needs.**

Part VII: Guiding Students on Resources for Financing Graduate School

Section One: Introduction

AACN has developed the following fact sheet to highlight funding sources available to students considering graduate study en route to nurse faculty careers.

Section Two: Funding Your Graduate Nursing Education

Advise the student you are advising that the first place to go when seeking funding for graduate nursing education is the financial aid office at her or his academic institution. Most grant and loan programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education, such as Perkins Loans, PLUS Loans, and Stafford Loans, are managed through the nursing school's financial aid office. Eligibility for some programs, including Perkins Loans, is based on financial need. In order to receive any assistance through these programs, a student must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online at *http://www.fafsa.ed.gov*.

FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID OFFERED BY YOUR SCHOOL OF NURSING

Schools of nursing manage a variety of scholarship and loan programs for students pursuing graduate nursing degrees. Some programs do not require repayment, while traditional loan programs have a payback requirement. Other programs may also require a post-graduation service commitment. Funded by the Division of Nursing at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), these programs include:

- Nurse Faculty Loan Program assists graduate students pursuing faculty careers. Students must agree to teach at a school of nursing in exchange for cancellation of up to 85 percent of their educational loans, plus interest, over a four-year period.
- Advance Nursing Education Traineeships provides financial assistance to graduate nursing students including full or partial support for the costs of tuition, books, program fees, and reasonable living expenses.
- Nursing Student Loan Program assists graduate nursing students with a maximum of $17,000 at low interest rates, with a preference for those with financial need. The repayment period is 10 years. The program provides $3,300 in non-taxable loans to students during their first two years of study and $5,200 for their last two years.
- The U.S. Department of Education administers the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program that provides fellowships, through schools of nursing, to assist graduate students with excellent records who demonstrate financial need and plan to pursue a research-focused doctoral degree. Nursing has been identified as an area of national need. See *http://www.ed.gov/programs/gaann*.

Important Note: Not all schools of nursing offer these funding opportunities, so the student should check first with the financial aid department at the schools of nursing to which he or she is applying.

FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID FOR WHICH NURSING STUDENTS CAN APPLY

The Division of Nursing at HRSA also offers loan and scholarship programs for which individual students can apply, including:

- NURSE Corps Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs support current students and new graduates. These programs include:
  - **Loan Repayment:** Repays up to 85 percent of nursing student loans in return for at least three years of practice in a designated health care facility with a critical shortage of nurses. See *http://www.hrsa.gov/loanscholarships/repayment/nursing*.
  - **Scholarship:** Offers individuals who are enrolled or accepted for enrollment as full-time nursing students the opportunity to apply for scholarship funds. Upon graduation, scholarship recipients are required to work in a health care facility with a critical shortage of nurses for at least two years. See *http://www.hrsa.gov/loanscholarships/scholarships/nursing*.
- The Bureau of Health Professions at HRSA also offers funding opportunities for graduate students. See *http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/nursing*. These programs include:
  - The **Faculty Loan Repayment Program** provides up to $40,000 in loan repayment for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who serve as faculty at eligible health professions schools for a minimum of two years. See *http://www.hrsa.gov/loanscholarships/repayment/Faculty*.
  - The **Scholarships for Disadvantaged Students Program** provides scholarships to full-time students from disadvantaged backgrounds who demonstrate financial need. See *http://www.hrsa.gov/loanscholarships/scholarships/disadvantaged.html*
- State Sponsored Scholarship and Loan Forgiveness Programs - Some states have developed programs that offer loan forgiveness for nursing faculty or have proposed legislation to provide funding assistance to nurse educators. To find out if a program is available in your state or if one is being considered, see these resources: Health Workforce Information Center: State Resources *http://www.healthworkforceinfo.org/states*
- AACN's State Advocacy Resources for Nurse Educators *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/state-advocacy/resources*. Individuals are encouraged to check with their state higher education agency or board of nursing to find out what other financial aid programs are available. To make contact with a local board, go to *https://www.ncsbn.org/contactbon.htm*.
- Private Scholarships and Specialty Area Programs - In addition to federal and state financial aid programs for graduate nursing students and nurse educators, dozens of programs are available through private organizations and specialty-focused agencies. Below is a sampling of available programs:

  - The **Johnson & Johnson Campaign for Nursing's Future-AACN Minority Nurse**
  - **Faculty Scholars Program** provides $18,000 in annual scholarship funding to individual graduate students from minority backgrounds who agree to teach after graduation. See *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/students/scholarships/minority*.
  - The **Foundation of the National Student Nurses' Association** administers the Promise of Nursing Faculty Fellowship to advance careers in nursing education. See *http://www.nsna.org/FoundationScholarships/FNSNAScholarships/PONFellowship.aspx*.
  - The **National Hartford Centers of Gerontological Nursing Excellence** offers pre- and post-doctoral scholarships for graduate students specializing in academic geriatric nursing. See *http://www.geriatricnursing.org/applications*.
  - The **American Cancer Society** offers scholarships for graduate students interested in cancer nursing. Scholarships may be renewed for up to two years for master's-degree students ($10,000/year) and four years for doctoral-degree students ($15,000/year). See *http://www.cancer.org/Research/ResearchProgramsFunding*.
  - The **Epilepsy Foundation** provides a number of research grants for individuals, including graduate students, pursuing research in the area of epilepsy. See *http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org/research/grants.cfm*.
  - The **American Nurses Association** administers the Minority Fellowship program for nursing students pursuing a doctoral degree and a career focused on the prevention and treatment of mental illness and substance abuse. See *http://www.emfp.org*.

- Finally, there are many online databases that nursing students are encouraged to search for sources of assistance:
  - The **Michigan State University Libraries** maintain an excellent resource page for nursing students seeking financial assistance, developed by the Johnson & Johnson Campaign for Nursing's Future. See *http://staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/3nursing.htm*.
  - **Discovernursing.com** features a searchable database of financial aid opportunities. See *http://www.discovernursing.com/scholarship-search*.
  - The **Health Workforce Information Center** includes a special section in funding opportunities for all health professions, including nursing. See *http://www.healthworkforceinfo.org/funding*.
  - **MinorityNurse.com** maintains a listing of scholarship and fellowship money for students from diverse backgrounds, including opportunities to fund graduate study. See *http://www.minoritynurse.com/scholarships*.
  - **ExploreHealthCareers.org** provides easy access to students seeking information about health careers, including a searchable directory of funding opportunities. See *http://www.explorehealthcareers.org//en/Field.6.aspx*.

– Several general interest **scholarship search engines** are available on the Web and may include opportunities for graduate nursing students. See *http://www.finaid.com* and *http://www.fastweb.com*.

For additional links to other financial aid resources for graduate nursing students, see AACN's Financial Aid and Scholarship Resource found at *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/financialaid.htm*.[16]

16 Source: Funding Resources for Future Nurse Educators, *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/media-relations/fact-sheets/funding-resources*

Part VIII: Helping Students Identify Variables that Impact Graduate School Success

Section One: Introduction

As a faculty advisor, you should encourage students to evaluate the level of personal support they have for pursuing graduate study. According to Smith & Delmore (2007) evaluating a personal support system includes examining the family support, peer support, and the likelihood of becoming part of a study support or a peer group.

Part of a support system assessment includes seeking answers to the following questions:

- Do I have healthy personal and professional relationships?
- Am I maintaining a healthy lifestyle (proper exercise, rest, nutrition, and sleep)?
- Am I spending an adequate amount of time on my studies to ensure academic success?
- Am I in tune with my feelings (stress, feelings of being overwhelmed)?
- Do I have a safe place or peer support group to share my concerns regarding school, family, or work/life balance?

Section Two: Variables that Impact Graduate School Success

1. **Personal Support:** It is easier to attend graduate school when the student feels supported by family and friends. When considering enrollment in graduate school, it is important for the student to evaluate the level of support he or she can expect from a personal network. Enrolling in graduate school is an enormous commitment of time and, as a result, the student may feel pressures from family or friends. Ensuring a strong support system prior to enrollment in graduate study may lessen the burden the student experiences with competing family, school, or work priorities. Students supported by friends and family have more positive feelings about entering graduate school and yield more positive outcomes during the course of study.
2. **Peer Support, Study Groups, and Student Organizations:** Once enrolled it is important that the student finds a peer or study group. Forming peer support and study groups have been found to help ease the stress associated with balancing these activities, in addition to helping keep the student on track with the graduate coursework (Smith & Delmore, 2007). Student organizations that focus on the goals that are congruent with doctoral study may help the graduate student through the highs and lows of the doctoral education process. Using the students' homes to meet for student organization activities has been found to offer a source of support for students enrolled in graduate study.

3. **Maintaining a Social and Healthy Life Balance:** The faculty advisor should assist the student in finding resources for maintaining a healthy life balance including techniques to manage stress and time. Finding time for exercise, sleeping adequate hours, and enjoying family life are all important to maintaining a healthy balance when enrolled in doctoral study. Doctoral study should not be considered a solo process. The student who is engaged with others in social activities usually does better academically. Encourage students to do something fun and rewarding without feeling guilty. Participating in social and extracurricular activities in moderation is essential to maintaining a healthy balance.
4. **Housing:** If the student is moving to a new location the faculty advisor can provide guidance regarding campus or community housing. Many universities will provide listings of housing that can be rented, leased, or subleased. Generally each campus will have a residential life office or other resources to guide students through this process.
5. **Employment Assistance for Family Members:** If the student's spouse, significant other, or family is relocating with the student, he/she should be encouraged to seek assistance from the office of graduate education regarding potential employment opportunities, if needed.
6. **School Age Children:** If school age children are moving with the graduate student, the university may be instrumental in offering information about the local school districts.

Part IX: Other Resources

There are many other resources readily available that you can recommend to students who are contemplating a doctoral degree:

- AACN Nursing Program Search
  http://www.aacn.nche.edu/students/nursing-program-search
- AACN Nursing Education Programs
  http://www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/nursing-education-programs
- AACN Your Guide To Nursing Graduate Programs
  http://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/brochures/GradStudentsBrochure.pdf
- About.com – Graduate School
  http://gradschool.about.com/od/transitions/a/Graduate-School-Vs-College-You-Ll-Need-Different-Study-Skills.htm
- ETS GRE website
  https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/content
- Five Qualities Required To Be A Scientist
  http://www.mikebrotherton.com/2007/11/05/five-qualities-required-to-be-a-scientist
- Idealist
  http://www.idealist.org/info/GradEducation/Resources/Preparing
- Peterson's Grad School Bound
  http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools.aspx
- Peterson's Guide to Nursing Programs
  https://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/peterson's-guide
- The 10 Most Important Qualities of the Ideal Graduate Research Candidate
  http://kamrul-important.blogspot.com/2010/02/10-most-important-qualities-of-ideal.html
- Three Qualities of Successful PhD Students: Perseverance, Tenacity, and Cogency
  http://matt.might.net/articles/successful-phd-students

Appendix

Applying to Graduate School (The Checklist)

Nursing students who are in the process of applying to graduate school can use the following checklist. It is a simple tool that the applicant can use to track the status of each application activity by indicating "yes" if it has been completed or "no" if the activity has not been completed. If the activity is completed, the applicant can insert the date that it was completed. A couple of rows are also included for other information that might be requested such as certifications, licensure data, immunization status, etc.

Status Yes/No	Application Activity	Date
	Completed Application Form	
	Transcripts Sent	
	Personal Essay Written	
	Admission Tests Completed	
	TOEFL Scores (if applicable)	
	Letters of Recommendation	
	List of Questions for Interview	
	Financial Aid Resources Information	
	Housing	
	Other: Public schools, employment opportunities	

References

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2013). *Funding Resources for Future Nurse Educators*. Retrieved from *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/media-relations/fact-sheets/funding-resources*
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (Rev. ed. 2012). *Nursing Faculty Shortage Fact Sheet.* Retrieved from *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/media-relations/fact-sheets/nursing-faculty-shortage*
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2010). *Your Guide to Graduate Nursing Programs*. Retrieved from *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/brochures/GradStudentsBrochure.pdf*
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2010). *The Research-Focused Doctoral Program in Nursing: Pathway to Excellence*. Retrieved from *http://www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/PhDTaskForceReport.pdf*
- Cathro, H. (2011). Pursuing Graduate Studies in Nursing Education: Driving and restraining forces*. OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing,* 16(3).
- Duke University School of Nursing. (n.d). *Comparison of DNP and PhD Programs*. Retrieved from *http://nursing.duke.edu/academics/programs/dnp/dnp-phd-comparison*
- *Educational Testing Services. (n.d.). GRE: Test Content and Structure. Retrieved from https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/content*
- Fischer, B.A., & Zigmond, M. J. (2004). Helping students get into graduate school. *The Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education,* 3(1), A4–8.
- GradSchools.Com. (2013). Undergraduate vs. graduate school: A professor's perspective. Retrieved from *http://www.gradschool.com*.
- North Dakota State University. (n.d.). *Information about graduate school applications: Differences between undergraduate and graduate schools.* Human Development and Family Science.
- Peterson's Graduate Admission: Tips for a Great Interview (2013). Retrieved from, *http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/graduate-admission-tips-interview.aspx*
- PhD Promising Practices. (2008). Retrieved from *http://www.phdcompletion.org/promising/*
- Smith, D.S. & Delmore, B. (2007). Three key components to successfully completing a nursing doctoral program. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing,* 38(2), 76–82.

Acknowledgments

Doctoral Advancement in Nursing Committee

Elias Provencio-Vasquez, PhD, RN, FAAN, *Chair*
Dean, School of Nursing
University of Texas El Paso

Wendy C. Budin, PhD, RN-BC, FAAN
Director of Nursing Research
New York University School of Medicine

Kim C. D'Abreu, MPH
Senior Vice President for Access, Diversity, and Inclusion
American Dental Education Association

Carolina G. Huerta, EdD, RN, FAAN
Nursing Department Professor & Chair
Lillian O. Slemp Endowed Professor
The University of Texas Pan American

Catherine Millett, PhD
Senior Research Scientist
Educational Testing Services
Policy Evaluation and Research Center

Teri A. Murray, PhD, APHN-BC, RN, FAAN
Dean, School of Nursing
Saint Louis University

Patricia A. Tabloski, PhD, GNP-BC, FGSA, FAAN
Associate Professor
William F. Connell School of Nursing
Boston College

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Careers in Nursing Staff

Geraldine Bednash, PhD, RN, FAAN
Executive Officer and Executive Director
American Association of Colleges of Nursing;
National Program Director
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
New Careers in Nursing
Washington, D.C.

Vernell DeWitty, PhD, MBA, MSN, RN
Program Deputy Director
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
New Careers in Nursing Scholarship Program,
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
Washington, D.C.

Matthew Harris, MSSc
Program Assistant
Doctoral Advancement in Nursing
New Careers in Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
Washington, D.C.