

The places you can go with a BSN

Answering why, what, and where can enhance your chances for success.

By Mary E. Fortier, EdD, RN, CNL

Congratulations, you've passed the NCLEX-RN exam and can proudly include RN after your name. The education you received to earn your associate degree in nursing (ADN) prepared you to practice bedside nursing, but now you want to continue your education and get a bachelor's of science in nursing (BSN). First you need to answer some important questions: Why do you want to obtain a BSN and what will you gain? Where will you go to school?

Why and what

Nurses pursue a BSN for many reasons. What's yours? Do you want to broaden your horizons and opportunities? Are you hoping to seek other employment options?

Whatever your initial motivation, a BSN education will provide you with competencies—critical thinking, communication, and leadership—that will enhance your knowledge base, assessment skills, interdisciplinary perspective, and writing and research skills. It will build on your ADN foundation to broaden your scope of practice, deepen your understanding of issues that affect patient care and the healthcare system, and enrich your professional development.

A BSN also may open doors that currently are closed to you. Nursing administrators prefer nurses with BSNs because research shows that the care these nurses provide leads to better patient outcomes. Employers see a BSN as a stepping stone to leadership positions. Healthcare's focus on primary and preventive care means nurses with a BSN are well prepared to practice in settings outside the hospital (in schools and clinics, case management, and in community, occupational, and public health). These settings require skills—including providing evidence-based patient education and leading interdisciplinary teams—that can be acquired only with at least a BSN education. And as you look to the future, you'll need a BSN to pursue graduate nursing education.

Where

Understanding the benefits of a BSN is only one part of the equation. The other is choosing the right program for you. What do you need to consider before selecting an RN-to-BSN program? Start by finding out the entry requirements for the programs you're interested in. Many require students to have an active, unencumbered RN license, although some programs allow new graduates to take a few courses (usually health assessment or professional development) before they pass the NCLEX-RN.

You'll also want to consider whether you want to be a full-time or part-time student and how you'll balance family, career, and schooling. Depending on your previous academic record and program requirements, the length of study can be anywhere from 1 to 2 years. Many ADN programs have articulation agreements with 4-year nursing schools that provide a seamless transfer into the BSN program.

Online, in-person, or hybrid

RN-to-BSN programs can be offered in an online-only, in-person only, or a combination (hybrid) format. Some online and hybrid program classes are synchronized (they're at the same time each

Employer assistance

Does your employer have a tuition-reimbursement plan? If so, get more details and ask these questions:

- Is reimbursement full or partial?
- Does it include books and fees?
- Will reimbursement be contingent on my grades or grade point average?
- Will I have to sign an employment commitment agreement after graduation in exchange for tuition?



week) and some are asynchronous (you work at your own pace and according to your own schedule). Before choosing a program, consider:

- Are you a self-directed student?
- Do you work well independently?
- Can you navigate a web-based learning platform?
- Are you comfortable with a virtual learning experience?

If you answered yes to these questions, then you should be comfortable with an online or a hybrid program. However, if you answered no to any of them, a fully online program probably isn't for you, and a hybrid program will require additional support in your first semester.


Hybrid programs typically alternate 1 week in on-campus classes and 1 week in online classes. This format allows students to take up to three courses in a semester, so you'll need to commit to approximately 15 hours per week for a three-credit course or 45 hours of study per week for three classes.

Many RN-to-BSN programs use a hybrid format because it provides students with face-to-face interactions with faculty and mentors while allowing the convenience of attending some classes online. In the end, your educational format choice depends on your individual learning needs.

Be methodical

Take a methodical approach to making your education choice. Is the RN-to-BSN program you're interested in accredited? How long has it been in existence? What's its reputation? (Ask your colleagues if they'd recommend the program they attended.) How many of any previous credits you have earned will transfer to the program? What's the tuition? Create a budget that includes the cost of books, student and parking fees, laptop, computer programs, travel, and childcare, as needed. Speak to your employer about any financial help the organization can offer. (See *Employer assistance*.)

The places you'll go

So many questions can leave you feeling overwhelmed and insecure. Creating a pro-and-con list for each program you research can help, but you'll also need to create a support list of family, friends, and colleagues who will understand and encourage your academic adventure. (See *Decision worksheet*.) Throughout it all, keep in mind the places you'll go and the doors you'll open with your BSN. 

Decision worksheet

Use this worksheet to compare RN-to-BSN programs and help you find one that meets your learning goals and preferred learning style. You can complete this online at myamericannurse.com/?p=67430.

Affirmation/goal: I'm going to earn my bachelor of science in nursing (BSN).

My preferred learning style:

- Traditional classroom/face-to-face
 Virtual/online
 Hybrid (mix of classroom and virtual)

Universities options:

#1 university name: **St. Bonaventure University**

Contact information: Dr. Connie Perkins (cperkins@sbu.edu; (716) 375-2253)

Prerequisites:

- RN license (unencumbered)
 Prerequisite courses: Anatomy & Physiology I & II, Pharmacology/Physiology, Intro to Psychology or Sociology, Microbiology or equivalent, English I & II, Intro to Statistics, Nutrition (all can be transferred in or taken at SBU)

Up to 75: Number of transferable credits

45 Number of credits needed to complete the BSN

sbu.edu/academics/nursing Cost per credit

Yes Financial aid available

Program format:

- Traditional classroom
 Online
 Hybrid

#2 university name*: _____ Contact information: _____

Prerequisites:

- RN license (unencumbered)
 Prerequisite courses: _____, _____, _____, _____
 Number of transferable credits
 Number of credits needed to complete the BSN
 Cost per credit
 Financial aid available

Program format:

- Traditional classroom
 Online
 Hybrid

Support resources willing to assist while I pursue my BSN:

*Repeat with any additional program options you're considering.

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References

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