

Careful Considerations for an RN Choosing to Return to School for a BSN Degree

As a branch of the Ohio Nurse's Association (ONA), Greater Cleveland Nurse's Association (GCNA) supports the U.S. Institute of Medicine's (2011) report: "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health." One section of this landmark report requests that at least 80% of Registered Nurses in the United States possess a BSN degree by the year 2020. In order to meet this goal, many hospitals in Northeastern Ohio have begun to require newly hired RNs without Bachelor's Degrees to sign contracts that they will obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing within five years of hire, while others will not even hire an RN without a Bachelor's Degree. GCNA members would like to provide support to any fellow RNs who may be faced with the decision to return to school for a BSN degree. We realize that many nurses have to juggle family, work, and school among other important obligations while trying to pursue further education. To this end, we have compiled a list of thoughtful questions and considerations that an RN returning to school should review while making the decision to return to school. If you are considering obtaining your BSN, our hope is that these questions will assist you in preparing to return to school and choosing the correct program for you. These considerations are divided into four categories and they are related to timing, finances, education, skills and personal support. You may want to print this document and use it as a guide when you are interviewing potential programs.

This document was created in May 2014. It is the goal of GCNA that this document be revised and/or updated as other considerations or information are suggested. Please email any suggestions for improvement to gcna@clevelandnurse.org

Timing

1. When would I like to begin classes?
2. When do classes or semesters begin?
3. How long is a semester or class? Is there an accelerated option?
4. How long before I'd like to start should I complete the application process?
5. How much time will pass after completing the application process before being notified of acceptance to the program?
6. How often can a student enter the program?
7. How long does the average student take to complete the program?
8. What is the shortest time a student can complete all of the requirements in?
9. How much time does the average student in your program need to devote to classes and studies per week?
10. Is there a limit on the amount of time that can be taken to complete the program?
11. What is the longest amount of time a student can take off between classes or semesters?
12. If there is a classroom option, how many hours per week are students required to actually be present in the classroom?

Finances

1. How much does a credit hour cost?
2. What is the total cost of the education with fees and books?
3. Does my place of employment offer tuition reimbursement? How much tuition assistance does my employer offer?
4. Do I need to pay up front and be reimbursed after I pass the class or does my institution have any agreements with programs where tuition is paid directly by the employer to the program?

with the expectation that the class is passed, and if not, the student will be required to repay the employer?

5. How much of my own income, if any, will I be able to afford for tuition, books, etc.?
6. Are there loans or scholarships I should consider?
7. How do I apply for financial aid? What forms do I need to fill out? Where do I access them?
8. Does my employer supply assistance with completing financial aid forms?
9. Consider consulting with a tax accountant to determine how much, if any, of the educational costs can be deducted from income taxes?

Education

1. Will all of the credits from my diploma or AD program transfer to your program?
2. Which grade transcripts have to be transferred? High school? Nursing school? How do I do that?
3. Are there any prerequisite classes I will need to take before I can be admitted? Do I need to have a previous GPA for admission? If so, what is it?
4. Will I have clinical experiences to attend in addition to my classes?
5. Do I receive any credit for work experience?
6. What kind of project work is required?
7. Can I tailor any projects to fit with my current job?
8. Do I have to maintain a certain GPA to remain in the program?
9. What is the class format? Online only? Classroom only?
10. A combination of online and classroom?
11. For online programs, are class times scheduled?
12. For classroom programs, are there any weekend or evening options?
13. Is the program accredited by the Ohio Board of Nursing?

Skills

1. Am I proficient in basic keyboard computer skills? (ie. Typing?)
2. Am I proficient in using basic Microsoft Word programs? (ie. creating/saving documents, Power point, uploading attachments)
3. Am I proficient in using Microsoft Outlook or email programs?
4. Do I know someone at home or work who can help with computer skills or should I take a class?
5. Does my job offer computer skill classes to employees? Is there any cost or fees?
6. Does the program offer support in writing papers and taking exams?

Personal Support

7. What is my plan to coordinate school and my personal responsibilities? (Ie. Children, elderly parents, housekeeping...)
8. Does the program provide any types of support such as an online counselor or “live” counselor to contact especially during the first semester?
9. How will I schedule my work hours to accommodate my schoolwork?
10. Do the professors keep office hours in case I need to talk with them between classes or on the phone with an online program?
11. When I speak with employees of the program, do I like the service I am receiving?

References

Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. National Academies Press: Washington DC, 2011.