

Your path to becoming a nurse educator

By Deborah Lindell, DNP, RN, CNE; Debra Hagler, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, CNE, CHSE, ANEF, FAAN; and Kathleen Poindexter, PhD, RN, CNE

LOOKING for new professional challenges? Consider teaching nursing. This country has a growing need for academic nurse educators—nurses who teach students enrolled in formal academic nursing courses. The National League for Nursing defines academic nurse educator as a “specialty area and advanced practice role within professional nursing.” In this article, we use the terms *nurse educator* and *faculty member* interchangeably.

Why should you think about making nursing education your career? First, it can be highly rewarding to educate the next generation of nurses. It’s exciting to see the nurses you’ve taught help to improve patient care and lead the profession. Secondly, the nurse educator role offers variety and flexibility, with each day bringing different activities and challenges. Other advantages include flexibility in types of positions available and the variety of education programs, roles, and settings.

Types of nursing education programs range from practical nurse to doctor of philosophy (PhD). Settings range from vocational programs to colleges to research-focused universities.

Organizations that focus on nursing education

The websites below are excellent resources for nurses considering a career as a nurse educator.

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)

www.aacn.nche.edu

www.aacn.nche.edu/faculty/faculty-link/about

National League for Nursing (NLN)

www.nln.org

www.nln.org/facultyprograms/index.htm

www.nln.org/certification/index.htm

Organization for Associate Degree Nursing (OADN)

www.oadn.org

www.oadn.org/resources/links.html



Learn about the requirements, roles, responsibilities, and rewards of teaching nursing students.

Qualifications

Educational institutions set faculty requirements based on their own expectations as well as those of regulatory agencies and accrediting organizations. However, some general qualifications exist. Nurse educators must hold a current, active nursing license and, depending on the position, may need other state credentials for advanced practice.

Academic preparation

Generally, nurse educators must have at least a master’s degree; doctoral preparation is preferred. Although most employers require a graduate degree in nursing, some schools accept a non-nursing graduate degree or major if nursing is the applicant’s first degree. Applicants with a PhD (a research-focused doctorate) are attractive to nursing schools with a research mission. Some schools accept applicants with a doctor of nursing practice (DNP) degree (a practice-focused doctorate); check with the nursing program you’re interested in to be sure. Some may accept applicants with a doctor of education (EdD) or doctor of nursing science (DNSc) degrees. Having completed academic courses in educational theory and practice is a plus.

Self-assessment quiz

Take this quiz to help define your path to becoming a nursing faculty member.

Question	If your answer is:	We recommend that you:
Do you have experience as a preceptor or working with students?	Yes	Visit a local nursing program and let them know of your interest in teaching.
	No	Offer to work as a preceptor or mentor to students and new staff.
What is your current academic degree?	Associate degree in nursing	Enroll in a BSN or an RN-MSN program.
	Bachelor of science in nursing (BSN)	Assist or teach in a nursing education program. However, opportunities are limited unless you have an advanced degree.
	Master of science in nursing (MS or MSN)	Teach in a prelicensure or an MS/MSN program. Consider obtaining a doctoral degree.
	Doctor of nursing practice (DNP) or doctor of philosophy (PhD)	Consider a career in nursing education.
Do you have certification in a clinical specialty or educational area?	Yes	Make sure you include all certifications on your résumé and application. Nursing education programs prefer candidates with specialty certifications.
	No	Review requirements to become certified in your specialty area.
Have you taken courses in teaching?	Yes	Be sure to note these courses on your résumé and application.
	No	Check local or online programs that offer courses on teaching.
Do you prefer to conduct original research or to apply research to solve problems?	Prefer to conduct research	Look into PhD programs.
	Prefer to apply research	Look into DNP programs.

Expertise

Educational programs look for faculty with expertise in a clinical specialty or content area, such as evidence-based practice, management, nursing education, health policy, ethics, pharmacology, or pathophysiology. Several years of registered nurse (RN) experience as well as specialty certification may be required. If you hold a doctoral degree, you may be expected to have research experience.

Types of positions

Nurse educators may teach full time or part time. Some positions are year-round; others are 9-month academic appointments. Many educators start as part-time clinical instructors or specialty course lecturers.

Most academic institutions appoint full-time educators to a certain rank, such as instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, or professor. The rank at hiring depends on clinical practice experience, academic preparation, and type of educational institution. Nurse educators may work toward a higher rank by achieving organizational requirements.

Educators are appointed to one of two tracks.

- Tenure-track educators are expected to meet certain academic standards within a specific number of years to achieve tenure status. Once tenured, they have more academic autonomy and greater permanency in the organization.
- Nontenured educators typically have contracts for a certain period.

Roles and responsibilities

Nurse educator roles include teaching, advising, service, practice, research, and scholarship. Within each category, performance expectations depend on the type of appointment, rank, and institution. Faculty roles may vary according to the mission of the college or university. In some institutions, faculty roles include research and scholarship.

Educators may teach in one or more settings, including classroom, distance learning (including online), laboratory or simulation settings, and healthcare organizations. As advisors, nurse educators support students' progress and may mentor other nurse educators.

Nurse educators engage in professional service by participating in programs or committees in their educa-

tional institution as well as in professional organizations or perhaps community programs. They also may serve in leadership positions to advance nursing education and practice through program management, curriculum development and evaluation, influencing policy, or consulting with external organizations.

Professional scholarship may include engaging in activities to advance educational theory and practice, translating evidence to nursing practice, conducting research to create new knowledge, and disseminating information through national presentations and publications. The focus and extent of expectations for research or scholarly work vary significantly with the type of academic institution, educational program, and specific position or appointment.

Resources

Resources for nurse educators include the websites of schools of nursing, national nursing education organizations, and journals, such as the *Journal of Nursing Education*, *Nurse Educator*, and *Nursing Education Perspectives*. (See *Organizations that focus on nursing education*.)

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Are you interested?

If you're considering becoming a nurse educator, answer the questions in *Self-assessment quiz*.

Then update your résumé or curriculum vitae and search for positions advertised in newspapers or journals or posted on Internet career websites or the websites of nursing education

programs, colleges, and universities. ★

Selected references

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Nursing Faculty Shortage. Last updated August 18, 2014. www.aacn.nche.edu/media-relations/fact-sheets/nursing-faculty-shortage.

National League for Nursing Certification Commission. *The Scope of Practice: For Academic Nurse Educators—2012 Revision*. New York: National League for Nursing; 2012.

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